

SECTION 3 (DAYS 27-33)

EXPLORING HOLY SATURDAY

Where Is God When
Heaven Is Silent?



Day 27: When Hope Dies (Chapter 11) (Friday in the fourth week of Lent)

PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

I pray Psalm 57: 1, repeating the words slowly, several times:

“Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.”

REFLECT

Bible: As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. (Matt. 27: 57-60)

Book passage: No one really talks about Holy Saturday, yet if we stop and think about it, it’s where most of us live most of our lives. Holy Saturday is the no-man’s land between questions and answers, prayers uttered and miracles to come. It’s where we wait – with a peculiar mixture of faith and despair – whenever God is silent or life doesn’t make sense. (p. 1640)

ASK

Ask myself: Joseph of Arimathea’s service to the body of Christ could have seemed a bit ..pointless. Is there anything very practical that I can do to serve Jesus today, even if it is unnoticed or seems a bit unnecessary?

Ask the Lord: I take a little time now to admit any ways in which I feel that my hope has died, asking the Lord to do what seems impossible in spite of my gloom.

YIELD

A prayer of costly worship by songwriter Matt Redman:

*Blessed be Your name
on the road marked with suffering,
Though there’s pain in the offering,
blessed be Your name.
You give and take away,
You give and take away,
My heart will choose to say,
Lord, blessed be Your name.*

Amen.

Day 28: Silence without Absence (Chapter 11) (Saturday in the fourth week of Lent)

PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

I pray Psalm 42: 5, repeating the words slowly, several times:

“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”

REFLECT

Bible: God is educating you; that’s why you must never drop out. He’s treating you as dear children. This trouble you’re in isn’t punishment; it’s *training*, the normal experience of children...While we were children, our parents did what *seemed* best to them. But God is doing what *is* best for us, training us to live God’s holy best. At the time, discipline isn’t much fun. It always feels like it’s going against the grain. Later, of course, it pays off handsomely, for it’s the will-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God. (Heb 12:7, 10-11 MSG, emphasis added)

Book passage: The Bible leaves us in no doubt at all that when God is silent, He is not absent – even if that’s the way it *feels*...Martin Luther argued that God withdraws and falls silent in order to draw us into the deeper relationship with Him that is only possible when we move beyond merely outward experiences and purely rational understanding. If Luther is right, then the silence and unknowing of Holy Saturday are essential to growing deeper in our relationship with God. The silence of God is intentional. It is one of the great disciplines He puts on His children “that we may share in his holiness” (Heb. 12:10). (p. 168)

ASK

Ask myself: How can I really know that God is present, even when He is silent? Is there any evidence, visible to me or to anyone that loves me, that He may be refining and maturing me through the difficult things I’m having to endure?

Ask the Lord: Father, I want to thrive, not just survive, in this difficult season. I want to emerge from it stronger, wiser, and somehow looking a lot more like You.

YIELD

A prayer of David for God to search his heart (Psalm 139: 23-24):

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Amen.

Day 29: Rushing the Resurrection (Chapter 11) (Monday in the fifth week of Lent)

PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

I pray Psalm 40: 17, repeating the words slowly, several times:

“But as for me, I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; you are my God, do not delay.”

REFLECT

Bible: The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body as laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment. (Luke 23: 55-56)

Comment and book passage: I describe attending a funeral where everyone seemed a bit too keen to “solve” the unfathomable tragedy of our friend’s death:

I drove away later thinking how very fragile our faith must be if we can’t just remain sad, scared, confused, and doubting for a while. In our fear of unknowing, we leapfrog Holy Saturday and rush the resurrection. We race, disconcerted, to make meaning and find beauty where there simply is none. Yet. (p.172)

ASK

Ask myself: Is it possible that I am trying too hard to make sense of things, rushing to fix things, instead of just living with mess for a while? Do I ever feel pressured to tidy up my feelings, my questions, or even my theology for other people?

Ask the Lord: I take time now to ask the Lord to help me be more okay with not being okay, requesting courage to be vulnerable and grace to live with more mess...for now.

YIELD

The serenity prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr:

God, Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.

Day 30: God on the Gallows (Chapter 11) (Tuesday in the fifth week of Lent)

PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

I pray Psalm 55: 6-8, repeating the words slowly, several times:

“oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. I would flee far away and stay in the desert; I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm.”

REFLECT

Bible: With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15: 37-39)

Comment and book passage: I recount the devastating story of the hanging of a boy in Auschwitz while the other prisoners, including the author Elie Wiesel, were forced to watch:

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive as I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed. Behind me, I heard the same man asking: Where is God now? And I heard a voice within me answer him: Where is He? Here He is – He is hanging here on this gallows.* (p. 174)

*Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 62.

ASK

Ask myself: Is there any aspect of my current situation – however bleak – to which I can point and say, with a mixture of horror and hope: “There is God”? Is it possible to identify His presence within the pain of my present predicament, or only in the prospect of some future deliverance?

Ask the Lord: I take a little time now to thank Jesus for coming close to me in my doubt and despair. For suffering *with me* and *for me* as He hung there on that cross.

YIELD

From Paul’s letter to the Galatians (2:20 MSG):

I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before [others]...and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life [I am] living is not “mine,” but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that.

Amen.

Day 31: God's Presence in God's Word (Chapter 12) (Wednesday in the fifth week of Lent)

PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

I pray Psalm 69: 16-18, repeating the words slowly, several times:

“Answer me, Lord, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me. Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble. Come near and rescue me.”

REFLECT

Bible: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? ...A pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. (Ps. 22:1, 16-18)

Book passage: This psalm depicts Christ's crucifixion so accurately that He himself quoted it from the cross. “Far from abandoning the Word of God when He felt abandoned by God, Jesus found the Scriptures more poignant and pertinent than ever...When God is silent, the galvanizing revelations that formerly came to our life through the Bible and through the ‘still small voice’ may seem little more than a distant memory, but this does not make them any less true. In fact, when God is silent, it becomes especially important to feed vicariously on the words He spoke back in the day when life was an easy conversation of two-way prayer; when the sermon seemed to be aimed directly at our heart, and the Bible really was the book we wanted by our bed.” (p. 181)

ASK

Ask myself: Is there a particular Bible verse that has been meaningful to me for a long time?

Ask the Lord: I spend a little time exploring each word of that favorite Bible verse now, turning it into a prayer.

YIELD

A fourteenth century prayer of trust from Thomas a Kempis:

*O Lord my God, do not be far from Me.
My God, have regard to help me.
I have many thoughts and great fears afflicting my soul.
How will I pass through unhurt?
How will I break them to pieces?
This is my hope, my one only consolation,
to flee to you in every tribulation, to trust in you,
to call on you from my inmost heart,
and to wait patiently for your consolation.**

*Freely modified from *Prayers of the Middle Ages*, ed. J. Manning Potts (1954).

Amen.

Day 32: God's Presence in God's People (Chapter 12) (Thursday in the fifth week of Lent)

PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

I pray Psalm 80: 3, repeating the words slowly, several times:

“Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.”

REFLECT

Bible: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Cor. 1: 3-4)

Book passage: The University of Wisconsin's *Center for the Study of Pain* conducted an experiment in which researchers timed how long volunteers could keep their feet in buckets of freezing water. They discovered something very remarkable: whenever a companion was allowed in the room with the person whose feet were being frozen, he or she could endure the cold for twice as long as those who suffered alone. “The presence of another caring person doubles the amount of pain a person can endure,” the researchers said.* The same is undoubtedly true of emotional pain. (p.188)

*Kushner, cited in Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday), xiv.

ASK

Ask myself: Who reveals God's loving presence to me? Do I spend enough time with them? Do they know how deeply I value the comfort their presence brings?

Ask the Lord: The apostle Paul says that we can pass on to others “the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” I take a few moments now to ask the Lord to show me someone who needs to know His comfort (from the Latin *con fortare*, meaning “with strength and support”) expressed through me this week.

YIELD

A prayer attributed to Francis of Assisi:

*O Master, let me not seek as much
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.*

Amen.

Day 33: God's Presence in Silence (Chapter 12) (Friday in the fifth week of Lent)

PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

I pray Psalm 83: 1, repeating the words slowly, several times:

“O God, do not remain silent; do not turn a deaf ear, do not stand aloof, O God.”

REFLECT

Bible: The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Ps23: 1-4)

Book passage: Holy Saturday is the day on which we wonder, *Where is God?* Yet the answer may be that He is here with us in the muck. When we are present in a situation – no matter how terrible it may be – He cannot be absent. Whenever life gets tough and we cry out to God for help, our desire is always to be airlifted out of the theater of war. But more often than not, instead of *airlifting* us to safety, God *parachutes* down to join us in the muck and chaos of our situation. (p.191)

ASK

Ask myself: It's only natural to want God to airlift me out of “the darkest valley” with a miracle, but are there any signs that He has actually parachuted in to join me here instead?

Ask the Lord: I take time now to thank You Lord that “even though I walk through the darkest valley...you are with me,” and for the signs of Your goodness at work in my life.

YIELD

A prayer of surrender by Richard Foster:

*Today, O Lord, I yield myself to You. May Your will be my delight today. May You have perfect sway in me. May your love be the pattern of my living. I surrender to You my hopes, my dreams, my ambitions. Do with them what You will, when You will, as You will. I place into Your loving care my family, my friends, my future. Care for them with a care that I can never give. I release into Your hands my need to control, my craving for status, my fear of obscurity. Eradicate the evil, purify the good, and establish Your kingdom on earth. For Jesus' sake, Amen.**

*Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 24.