

Out of the Darkness

My name is Guan, and for most of my life, I have wrestled with depression. That might seem a strange way to start a series of Bible studies, but when you're in the darkness—of physical or mental anguish, of relationship breakdown, of loneliness or grief—it can be hard to see what God is saying to you in his Word. Can he speak to us in when our joy is overshadowed by our suffering? Can the God of light lend us a lantern to lead us out of the darkness?

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**BIBLE
SOCIETY**

Live light

Scripture taken from *The Holy Bible: ESV*

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
1	<p>Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”</p> <p>So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.</p> <p>And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”</p>	Gen 1:26-28	<p>You are made in the image of God. It is a phrase that we hear over and over again, and so we might lose the wonder of that statement. It's saying that the God of creation, who was there at the start of all things and will be there at the end, the God of infinite knowledge and power, reached down to shape you in a womb. He cared enough about you that he <i>made</i> you, and made you to bear his image. In the darkness, our grip can loosen on the pieces of our purpose, or our value, or our identity. We might ask the big, deep questions, wondering whether we truly matter. And whatever other answers come from the love around us, it might start with this: “You are loved, valued, precious—for you are made in the image of God.”</p> <p>How has God made you to be?</p>	<p>Dear God, you made me and you love me. Help me to rest in the abundance of that love.</p> <p>In the name of my Lord Jesus, Amen.</p>

Out of the Darkness (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
2	The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”	Exodus 34:6-7	<p>Sometimes when we lose sight of our identity, chasing who we are, or who we were, can feel like chasing a shadow. The world would then say that you need to spend time ‘finding yourself’, to retreat from the world, or to go experience new things. Some of those things may help, for a while, but the counter-cultural truth of Scripture says that we find ourselves when we truly know God. Here we see the heart of who God is, in the name he told to Moses. Here we can meet God, and find ourselves.</p> <p>How does God help you to see yourself?</p>	<p>Dear Lord,</p> <p>You are gracious and slow to anger. You abound in love and faithfulness, with a steadfast love, and with a forgiveness unbounded. And yet you are just in your mercy, and merciful in your justice. Help me find rest in all of who you are.</p> <p>In the name of the Lord Jesus, Amen.</p>
3	Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.	Proverbs 12:25	<p>One of the beautiful facets of God’s Word is that it reflects the reality of this mundane, often messy life. The world of the Bible—our world—is far from the world of advertising that makes us desire hospital-grade clean houses and ultra-attractive bodies and expensive things to fill our clean houses. This is just one example that the world of the Bible—our world—is a world where things like anxiety happen. And when it does, it is not usually relieved by ‘snapping yourself out of it’, or a snap prayer. But there is a reality too, that words, especially from a friend, can help, and heal, and provide a bit of light in the darkness.</p> <p>What is a good word that has made you glad in the past? Who can you thank for it? Who can you share it with?</p>	<p>Dear Lord,</p> <p>In the darkness, help me to remember that you are my Father, and that you love me. Remind me of your goodness in your word, in the people you’ve put around me, in the Lord Jesus Christ.</p> <p>Amen.</p>

Out of the Darkness (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
4	<p>O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O Lord—how long?</p> <p>Turn, O Lord, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love.</p>	Psalm 6:1-4	<p>“How long?” is the cry of the Psalmist. It is also our cry in those times of trouble. How long until I make it out of this valley? How long until I see light at the end of this darkness? This Psalm teaches us that we do not need to be afraid to bring our worst fears and anxieties before the Lord in prayer. The reality of suffering is not helped by denial. For the reality is that His love is not changed by our circumstance, His listening ear is still bent towards our trouble. His ‘steadfast love’ remains true, for as long as Jesus Christ is Lord.</p> <p>What do you need to cry out to God?</p>	<p>Dear Lord,</p> <p>You know my suffering and you know my trouble. Give me grace enough for today, patience to see beyond this darkness, and hope—always hope—for your love remains ever new.</p> <p>In the name of Jesus, Amen.</p>
5	<p>I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.</p>	Psalm 40:1-3	<p>This is the other side of our cry for help. In hindsight, it is often easier to see how he answered prayer, how he drew us back up from the pit, how he set our feet upon the rock. This does not mean that all suffering will be solved in this life—but it is still right to look towards the new song that he is writing within us. How can we transmute suffering into praise, so that others might see, fear and trust in Him?</p> <p>Even in suffering, what can you praise God for? Who can you share this with today?</p>	<p>Dear Lord,</p> <p>Thank you for your everyday mercies, for your Word which is life, for breath with which to praise you. Help me renew my praise of you, and do so in others.</p> <p>In the name of Jesus, Amen.</p>

Out of the Darkness (continued)

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6	<p>As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me continually, “Where is your God?”</p>	Psalm 42:1-3	<p>“Where is God in your suffering?” is the question asked of the Psalmist by his enemies, and it is the question asked today by those who doubt Christianity. But notice the sharp contrast between their mocking and the Psalmist’s spiritual reality—even in his darkness, even in their mocking—still, his ‘soul thirsts for God’. Doubt can lead us two ways: we can either dive deeper into doubt, or we can bring our selves and our questions, undivided, before the Lord.</p> <p>What is the fear or doubt that is in your heart?</p>	<p>Dear Lord, I am afraid and I doubt. Sometimes I do not know how to keep on going. Help me today, for I need your help. In the name of Jesus, Amen.</p>
7	<p>My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!</p>	Psalm 119:25	<p>Why would you bother to read the Word of God when you are in the darkness? It can seem like the reasons not to are arrayed against you: ‘it’s just words’, ‘did God really say ...’, ‘does the Bible really speak into what you’re going through?’ However this deceptively simple verse answers those questions—when your soul is clinging to the dust, it is God’s word that gives life, in a true way. It may be difficult in the dark to cling to that truth, and yet, in the dark it is even more important to know the Word that is true light, and true life.</p> <p>What is a verse you can store in your heart today, that will bring you light in the darkness?</p>	<p>Dear Lord, Help me and give me life according to your word. Thank you that in your word lies the way of life. Please speak to me in the way that I need most. Through Jesus Christ, the living Word, Amen.</p>

Out of the Darkness (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
8	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.	John 1:1-5	<p>It is no accident that Jesus Christ, Lord of creation is Word, life, and light. He is the Word for through him, God has spoken truly. Jesus is the truest expression of God, because he is God. In the person, works, and words of Jesus, we see God. He is life, for in him, we see life and can have life as it was meant to be—eternal life in the presence of the living God. And he is the light, for in our darkness of sin and rebellion, in our shame and fear, he came to bring us home: from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.</p> <p>Pause to meditate on this truth: that Jesus Christ is Word, is life, and is light.</p>	<p>Dear Lord,</p> <p>Thank you for Jesus. Thank you that he is your Word to us, through him we can have life, through him, we see the light that shines in the darkness, the light that the darkness cannot overcome.</p> <p>Help me to rest in him, my Lord Jesus.</p> <p>Amen.</p>
9	“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”	Matt 11:28-30	<p>Jesus’ prayer and invitation to us is remarkable for many reasons: that the invitation to take his yoke is based on nothing else but grace, no price but the one Jesus has paid for us; that what we learn at the heart of the Lord of Creation we find him to be ‘gentle and lowly in heart’; that it continues to be true, day after day; that he wants to give us rest from our labour and our burdens. Today—he wants you to find rest in him.</p> <p>What burdens are you carrying that you can lay at Jesus’ feet today?</p>	<p>Dear Lord,</p> <p>Help us to find rest in your son, to take his yoke and learn from him, to find grace to forgive ourselves, as you forgive us, to find release from our burdens because Jesus has lifted them from us.</p> <p>In his name,</p> <p>Amen.</p>

Out of the Darkness (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
10	For I am sure that 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	<p>The latter verses in Romans 8 are infamous for being misused when people are suffering, trotted out as a proof-text to prove the goodness within the evil of this world. However, while these verses do not nullify suffering, they do reshape the picture of bleakness. For Jesus Christ put himself into the arms of death and suffering, and in doing so, reshaped life itself. And he did that as a promise—a promise of his love for you.</p> <p>What do you believe can separate you from the love of God? What can actually separate you from the love of God?</p>	<p>Dear Lord,</p> <p>Neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither suffering now or suffering to come, not anything in creation can wrest me from your love. Help me to know that today.</p> <p>In the name of Jesus,</p> <p>Amen.</p>
11	Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.	Philippians 4:8	<p>Sometimes it feels like there's a television station inside my head. And especially in depression, that station is running a channel that likes to remind me of my uselessness, my lack of worth, my incompetence. This verse is a gentle reminder that I can introduce a new program on that channel, that those thoughts—that dark self-talk—is not all there is to me. That I can introduce thoughts of goodness: of how God sees in me the image of his Son, of how God, the Spirit is working inside me, of his love that has come down to me through the ages. And I can remind myself to think about these things, and praise his name.</p> <p>What is worthy of excellence and praise, that you can remind yourself today?</p>	<p>Dear Lord,</p> <p>Protect me from those thoughts that would chip away at your goodness, or make me doubt your love. Remind me of your love, that you love me always, no matter what I've done.</p> <p>Because of Jesus,</p> <p>Amen.</p>

Out of the Darkness (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
12	Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.	1 Peter 5:6-7	<p>Sometimes in the darkness, we can be caught up into the pride of thoughts of what we 'should be' or what I 'need to do'. And the gap between those expectations of ourselves and the reality can be crushing. That is why this verse begins with "humble yourselves", for as we release those thoughts of what 'should be', then we will be in the proper mindset to cast our anxieties onto him. The only real 'should be' of the Christian life is that we 'should be' resting in the sovereign grace of God, under his mighty hand, for in Christ, he has done all that we could not.</p> <p>What do you believe you 'should be'? How can you release this anxiety into the Lord's strength?</p>	<p>Lord,</p> <p>Remind me not of what I should be, or what I need to do, but what you have done, and what I could not do in my own strength.</p> <p>Lift my anxieties Lord, and give me grace enough for this day.</p> <p>In the name of Jesus,</p> <p>Amen.</p>
13	Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.	2 Corinthians 1:3-4	<p>God has many names, but one we don't hear as often is this: "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort". The context goes on to show that this comfort is not poolside deckchairs and cocktails, but the comfort of sharing the suffering of Christ. <i>What kind of comfort is that?</i> And yet it is: for as we suffer with Christ, we know that we are becoming like him. And if we are becoming like him, we know that we are with him. And if we are with him, we know that we are going where he has gone: out of the darkness and into the kingdom of light. And that is great comfort indeed.</p> <p>What do you turn to for comfort? What comfort does the God of all comfort provide?</p>	<p>Dear Lord,</p> <p>Help me to be comforted—not with the trivial things of this world—but in my identity in Christ, in the all-encompassing grace of your mercy, in the knowledge that even this suffering is comfort, because of your love.</p> <p>Thank you Lord, for Jesus.</p> <p>Amen.</p>

Out of the Darkness (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
14	And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."	Revelation 21:3-4	<p>We end our series with this reminder: this is not all that there is. But a reality is coming—a reality has come!—when we will see God face to face. When death will have been defeated, and mourning, suffering, and pain will lay in their graves. When we will stand with throngs of believers singing of how good our God is. And when the dawn of the new creation will break the darkness. And Jesus Christ will be there with us and for us, always, for us.</p> <p>What is your hope?</p>	<p>Dear Lord,</p> <p>Help me to face this world knowing this is not all there is, that this suffering will one day pass, knowing that you have written the story, that you are bringing me home, that Jesus came to bring me out of darkness.</p> <p>Lord, please write the story in me, always, until I see you face to face.</p> <p>In the name of Jesus,</p> <p>Amen.</p>