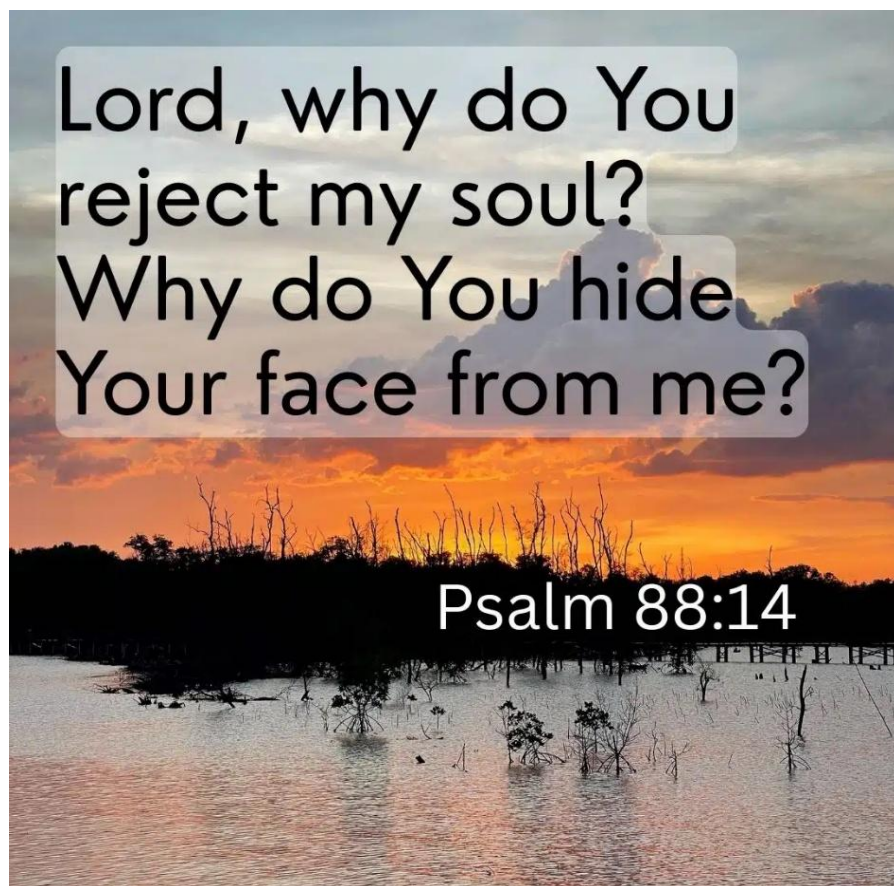


Basic Training Bible Ministries

Presents

“When God Hides His Face”

Understanding the Mystery of God’s Silence



Grace Bible Church

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When God Hides His Face **Understanding the Mystery of God's Silence**

Introduction

*“How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You **hide Your face** from Me?”*
Psalm 13:1

“LORD, why do You cast off my soul? Why do You hide your face from me?”
Psalm 88:14

“Truly You are God, who hide Yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior!” Isaiah 45:15

After the assassination of Charlie Kirk, I thought about doing a post about this topic. However, I knew the internet would be flooded with comments, so instead I decided to do this study for all those who go through “the dark night of the soul.” If you have ever asked the questions David posed above, or wondered if God heard your anguished prayers, or felt that your attempts to reach God were just groping in the dark, then this study is for you.

The Place of Peace and Blessing

*“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make **His face** to shine upon you ... the LORD lift up **His countenance** upon you, and give you peace”* (Num. 6:24–26). This is the blessing of Aaron on the children of Israel.

Point: While God may hide His face for many reasons, which we will consider, the one thing He never does is hide His voice, through His Word! The right response for any believer, when God seems to hide His face, is to seek His will through His Word and put it into practice in life.

Three realities of the soul that hungers and thirsts for God (Matthew 5:6):

1. The yearning of the Spirit-led soul.

*“Make Your face shine upon your servant ... Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men! You shall hide them in the **secret place** of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.”*

Psalm 31:16, 19–20

*“He who dwells in the **secret place** of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty ... and under His wings you shall take refuge.”* Psalm 91:1, 4

Point: If God dwells in a secret place, then only those who search for Him diligently will dwell in His presence (Matt. 7:7)

2. The promise of God to the seeking soul.

*“And you will **seek Me** and **find Me**, when you **search for Me** with all your heart.”*
Jeremiah 29:13

These actions are echoed by Jesus in Matthew 7:7–8, “Ask ... seek ... knock.”

Point: The spiritual life is an endless pursuit of a deeper intimacy with God.

3. The communion that makes the soul rich.

*“O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You;
My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have
looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory. Because Your
lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You.”* Psalm 63:1–3

*“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And He who
loves Me will be loved by My Father; and I will love him and **manifest Myself** to him.
... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and **We**
will come to him and make Our home with him.”* John 14:21, 23

Principles

1. That God often hides His face from His people is clear from Scripture.
2. The reasons for this are varied and will be seen in this study.
3. What is clear from the above verses is foundational to our study.
 - a) The ideal condition is to have the blessing and peace of living under the glory of God’s shining face.
 - b) Yet there are times, experienced by all believers, when God seems to withdraw and hide Himself from us. These times can be very perplexing and troubling, **if** the believer truly desires to live in the presence of God.
 - c) When God hides His face, for any of several reasons, the only logical and spiritual response is to seek Him with the whole heart.
 - d) He has promised that all who diligently seek Him will find Him (Jer. 29:13).
 - e) An inevitable part of seeking Him is diligent and careful self-examination, to see if we are the cause of His seeming absence (1 Cor. 11:28, 31; 1 John 1:9).
 - f) James gives us the promise (James 4:8) that if we “*draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*” In the context, he gives us several steps to do this.
4. We will study the lives of many of the great believers contained in the Bible—each of them gives us a different perspective on why God “hides,” and why He is silent.
5. In the lives of Bible characters, we can discern several different profiles of believers:
 - a) There are some who start strong and then follow through strong to the end.
 - b) There are others who start strong, then fall away toward the end.
 - c) Then there are those who start weak and finish strong.
 - d) Finally, there are some who come to faith, but never seem to grow strong.

Beginning to understand that when God hides His face/is silent, it is:

1. To rebuke us for sin.
2. To correct our conduct.
3. To teach us humility.
4. To make us useful vessels.
5. To equip us for greater service.
6. To drive us deeper into His Word.
7. To call us into greater ministry.

EXHIBIT ONE: JOB THE SUFFERER

“My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed, we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”

James 5:10–11

“Look, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; when He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; when He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him.” Job 23:8–9

“When He hides His face, who then can see Him, whether it is against a nation or a man alone?” Job 34:29b

Background

The Book of Job reveals that much of our sufferings are part of a greater spiritual conflict going on behind the scenes. Satan blasphemes God by suggesting that Job’s faithfulness is in fact selfish, and that the only reason Job is upright is because God blesses him for it. Satan reveals that God has put a three-fold hedge about Job, his family, and all that he has (1:10). The Devil wagers that if God removes Job’s blessings, Job will curse God (Chapter 1).

The narrative reveals that Satan cannot touch the believer without God’s permission (1:12; 2:6). Initially, after the loss of his children and his wealth, Job responds rightly, with praise to God (1:20–22). Only after the loss of health was added to this, plus his wife provoking him to do the devil’s bidding (2:9–10), and his three “friends” showing up to further accuse him (2:11–13), is Job’s great patience exhausted and his faith shaken.

1. God allowed Job’s suffering to reveal a deficiency in Job’s faith—a hidden fear.

Interestingly, Job feared his children might casually curse God (1:4–5)—the very thing the Devil was trying to provoke him to do. When all his troubles reached their climax, Job feared that this was true and the basis for his affliction (3:25–26).

2. God allowed Job’s suffering as a test of his faith, and of that of his wife, and friends.

The counsel of Job’s wife (2:6), and of his friends (Chapters 5–25) is shown by God to be faulty (42:7–9), for which they must repent, and Job must intercede for them.

3. **His deep affliction caused Job to ask God to reveal any hidden sins, to expose them.**
In 13:23–24, Job asks to know if there were hidden sins in his life. God not only revealed his baseless **fear** (3:25–26) but also his hidden **pride** (27:6; 31:5–6; 32:1) and, in the end, he had to repent of his self-righteousness (42:1–6).
4. **The greatest insight to come out of Job’s refining was the need for a mediator.**
Job knew that God was refining his faith (23:10; see 1 Pet. 1:6–9). The greatest treasure to come from his trials was his recognition of the need for a **mediator** and a **redeemer** (9:32–33; 19:25–27).

“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”

1 Timothy 2:5

Summary

1. God permits suffering—hides His face—to reveal deficiencies in our faith, hidden sin.
2. God allows us to be afflicted to test the genuineness of our faith.
3. God takes us into the dark, so that we might come to greater light.
4. Just as sufferings reveal “*the hidden person of the heart*” (1 Pet. 3:4), they also reveal to us, if we patiently wait, “*the deep things of God*” (1 Cor. 2:9–10).

EXHIBIT TWO: ABRAHAM THE FRIEND OF GOD

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.” Hebrews 11:17–19

*“Was not Abraham our father justified [vindicated] by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called **the friend of God**.”*

James 2:21–23

Background

Abraham holds the place in Scripture of being *the quintessential believer*. He is held forth as the model or type of what God desires every believer to be. His faith in the promise of God (Gen. 15:1) became the foundation of Paul’s doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone (Rom. 4:1–5; Gal. 3:6–9; Heb. 11:8–10). All those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ are called Abraham’s children (Gal. 3:7, 29). We who believe are challenged in the Scriptures to “*walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had ...*” (Rom. 4:12). And yet, as we will see, Abraham also had times when it seemed God was hidden, silent.

1. **His story begins with faith in the promises of God.**

“And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6). The tense of the word “*believed*” here is perfect, which would include the original call and promise (Gen. 12:1–3).

2. **God's promise to Abraham, based on Genesis 3:15, included land, seed, and blessing (Gen. 12:1–3).**

The promise of the land and the blessing was dependent on the promise of the Seed, from which would come the nation, which would then claim the land. It was in this critical part of the promise that God chose to hide his face from Abraham.

3. **God's original promise was probably given to Abram around the age of 70 years old, since he was 75 when he departed from Haran, after a prolonged stay (Gen. 12:4).**

At this time, Abraham was still able to produce children, though Sarah was barren. He no doubt believed that God would open Sarah's womb and give them a child.

4. **After several victories and failures, we come to Genesis 15, where Abram comes up with the first human solution to his lack of a child (Gen. 15:1–6).**

Consider that he has now waited for many years. This is one of the great tests of God's silence, or hiding His face: Will we seek a human solution to a spiritual problem?

5. **Then, sometime later, Sarai comes up with the second human solution—Hagar, which Abram accepts, and Ishmael is born (Gen. 16:1–5).**

Just think of the centuries of problems, reaching a climax in our time, that this "solution" has caused. The point: Human solutions to spiritual problems always create more and greater problems!

6. **Yet, even after these failures, God is faithful to His promises!**

As confirmation of His promise, He changes Abram's name to Abraham (Gen. 17:2, 5), and Sarai's name to Sarah (Gen. 17:15–16).

Abram is now 99 years old (17:1). God reminds him that He is "*Almighty God*," and changes his name from "exalted father," a reference to his past royal lineage, to "*father of many nations*," looking far into the future. Also, Sarah's name change signified a new identity as a "Princess" of God, and a new beginning within the covenant plan.

Note: After God reaffirmed His promise, Abraham laughed (17:17). The thought of a 90-year-old barren woman bearing a child seemed like a great joke! Later, Sarah would laugh at the same promise (18:13). Therefore, the child was named Isaac, meaning, "laughter" (21:6).

7. **During the long time of trials and testing, both Abraham and Sarah had times of doubt and failure.** But graciously, in God's eternal record, it is our faith and obedience that counts and is recorded forever.

Read Romans 4:1–5, 13–25. Especially note v. 22, where the same thing is said of his faith at the end as was said at the beginning (v. 3). The first refers to imputed righteousness at the moment of salvation; the second, of imparted righteousness through his deeds, which will bring everlasting reward in God's kingdom. See also Hebrews 11:8–13, 17–19.

Five things to do when God hides His face:

1. Examine your life for subtle/hidden sin (doubt/fear) (Psalm 66:18).
2. Trust in God's wisdom, power, and faithfulness to His promises, (Job 13:15).
3. Believe that God is always working for you (Rom. 8:28, 31; Gen. 50:20).
4. Dig deeper into God's Word and let it drive deeper into your soul (Psalm 119:11; Luke 9:44).
5. Never forget that the key that unlocks both the Word and the will of God is obedience (John 7:17; 15:14, 16; Luke 6:46).

EXHIBIT THREE: JACOB THE WRESTLER

"Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him ... and He said, 'Let Me go, for the day breaks.' But he said, 'I will not let You go unless You bless me!' So He said to Him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Jacob.' And He said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.' ... So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: 'For I have seen God face to face.'" Genesis 32:24–30

Introduction

In the Bible story, Jacob reveals and represents the Jekyll and Hyde that makes up the duality of the believers' nature. As Paul states in Romans Chapters 7–8, and Galatians 5:16–21, there is an inner war going on between the flesh and the Spirit, between the old and the new nature.

In Jacob's story, we see the grace of God in action, often using bad decisions, evil actions, and flawed character, to bring about His perfect plan and purpose in the life of this troubled man. And we discover that God is often closest to us when we think he is far away!

We also see how God takes a self-centered and duplicitous man and uses his own flawed decisions to bring him to the end of himself, and in brokenness, to humble him and to mold him into a new man—not perfect, but being perfected!

As a side note, when I was teaching at the *Evangelical Seminary* in Almaty, Kazakhstan, I was at the time crippled in my left hip joint. I used a walking stick, and the students there jokingly called me "Jacob." I told them, you have no idea how right you are!

1. The character and destiny of Jacob was revealed when he was in the womb.

- A. Jacob wrestled in the womb (Gen. 25:21–23). This was the basis for his name, "*Ya-aqob*," meaning "heal-grabber, supplanter, usurper." Interestingly, an alternative translation means "God will protect him."
- B. Jacob wrestled with his brother, Esau (Gen. 25:29–34; 27:1–40).
- C. Jacob wrestled with the Lord (Gen. 32:24–31).

2. All of his wrestling brought him to three meetings:

- A. He met the angels of God (Gen. 32:1–2), "*Mahanaim*" (Two camps: visible/invisible). This should have reminded him of his earlier vision and vow (Gen. 28:10–22). How could he have known that the God who appeared to him above "Jacob's ladder" would appear around 1800 years later as the Messiah of Israel (John 1:50–51)?

- B. He met the Lord Himself (Gen. 32:24–26, 29–31). In his previous vision (Gen. 28:12–17), he had seen the Lord of promise. Now he is confronted by the Lord of power. The former led him to make a vow. Now he is forced to live up to it. The combined revelation of himself and of the Lord with whom he had been wrestling for some time, brought him to humility, and a change of name and character.
- C. He met himself (Gen. 32:27–28). When the Lord asked his name, Jacob had to confess his true identity as a schemer and a con man. Remember that his name “*Ya-aqob*” can be translated “Supplanter/Usurper,” but also, “May God protect” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*). The word for the “heel”, can also be a verb, meaning, “to watch from behind” —the idea of sneaking up on someone. Remember that, previously, when Jacob was asked his name by his dying father (Gen. 27:18–19), he lied and claimed to be Esau, so as to steal the birthright. Here, he is forced to remember his duplicity and acknowledge his true identity and character.

Five things not to do when God hides His face (James 1:13–15; 4:1–6):

1. Do not blame God for the difficulty or the darkness (James 1:13).
2. Do not reject the exposure of the evil within you (James 1:14).
3. Do not seek comfort or relief by giving in to entangling sin (James 1:15–16).
4. Do not allow your inner turmoil to created division, strife (James 4:1–3).
5. Do not allow this world to rob you of being a “*friend of God*” (James 4:4–6; 2:23–24).

EXHIBIT FOUR: JOSEPH THE DREAMER (THE SON, THE SERVANT, THE SOVEREIGN)

Joseph is one of the most complete types of Jesus Christ in the Bible. Many Bible students have written on this topic, identifying over 30 parallels between the life of Joseph and the Savior. This being the case, it is not surprising that Joseph, one of the most faithful men of the biblical record, would go through many times of sorrow and darkness, when it seemed that God was hidden and silent. We can only look at a few examples in this study.

1. Joseph, the beloved son.

In Genesis 37:1–11, we see the marks of fatherly love toward Joseph, both from his earthly, and even more, from his heavenly Father. Jacob loved him above all his other sons (v. 3). Even at the age of seventeen, Joseph exposed his brothers’ poor stewardship (v. 2). Jacob gave to this favored son a “*tunic of many colors*,” literally, a “long-sleeved” coat—a symbol of authority over the other brothers.

But the gifts of the heavenly Father came in the form of dreams, which were a mode of revelation in ancient times (1 Sam. 28:15; 1 Kings 3:5, 15; Joel 2:28; Heb. 1:1). These dreams revealed the plan of God to exalt Joseph over his family. Knowing full well his brothers’ enmity (vv. 4, 8, 11), Joseph might have been better off not to share the dreams with them.

In Psalm 69: 7–21, very prophetically, David anticipates Jesus’ home life (vv. 7–11), His rejection by the rulers, and the mockery of the drunkards (v. 12). His life was lonely and pain-filled (vv. 13–21); he went friendless and alone through life, truly “*despised and rejected ... a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*” (Isa. 53:3).

Application: Whenever you find yourself mocked, scorned, slandered, misjudged, then remember that you are sharing, in a very small way, in the sufferings which were the daily fare of your Savior. Remember also that *“If we endure [suffer with Him], we shall also reign with Him”* (2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 4:13). Use your rejection by men to draw nearer to Him who will never reject you!

2. Joseph, the betrayed servant.

The antipathy of Joseph’s brothers soon turned to murderous hatred (Gen. 37:12–36). This is where his long, dark night began. He went from prominence to the pit, from the pit to the house of Potiphar, and ultimately into the prison, being falsely accused (Gen. 39–40). It is important for us to see that all of this came upon him, not due to any failure in his life, but rather because of his unyielding faithfulness to God.

While God had formerly given him dreams of promotion and blessing, he now experienced only loneliness, humiliation, servitude, and shame. During this long and pain-filled time, we have no record of God speaking to him at all, but we do read that *“The Lord was with Joseph”* (Gen. 39:2).

To us, it often seems that God is hiding from us or has gone silent, but we have His promises, to which He is ever faithful.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear; even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling ... Selah.”

Psalm 46:1–3

“The LORD, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.” Deuteronomy 31:8 (Heb. 13:5–6)

Note: You will often hear pastors/Christians say, when someone for example quotes passages like Jeremiah 29:11, *“For I know the plans I have for you ...,”* or other Old Testament promises, the response is often, “You can’t claim that promise, that was given to the Jews” and so on. But, in Hebrews 13:5, the author quotes Deuteronomy 31:8, which Moses wrote to the Exodus generation and applies it to all Christians. My conclusion is that God’s promise to His people is a promise to all His people, if we take the general essence of the promise, and not the time, place, geography, etc.

Applications

1. When you pass through dark and difficult times, remember the truth and faithfulness God has shown you in the past.
2. The promises of God are sure and steadfast, and He is faithful. Yet, while the timing and manner of their fulfillment are unknown to us, our duty is to trust and obey.
3. Never doubt in the dark what God revealed to you in the light.

3. Joseph, the bold sovereign.

Finally, after many years of abuse and sorrow, God fulfilled His promise and raised Joseph up, both for the deliverance of Egypt, and for that of his family. (Gen. 41–47). It is most interesting to read in Genesis 42:9, *“Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed”* Apparently, during all of his long servitude, he had forgotten the dreams, possibly believing he had misunderstood their meaning, giving up any hope of a life of power and blessing.

4. Joseph, the savior of his people.

Just as God used the coming famine of Egypt to exalt Joseph to the position of power, so he used it to bring his family under his care and provision. While Joseph, who had been humbled for years, was lifted up, so his brothers, who had arrogantly usurped his place in the family, now came to him in humility and need. There is no deliverance until first there is a humbling of the soul!

Seven more things to do when God hides His face:

1. Remember His past faithfulness (Psalm 103:2).
2. Pray for His inner searching of our soul, for any wrongdoing (Psalm 139:23–24).
3. Dig deeper into His Word; let His Word go deeper into you (Psalm 119:105).

*“Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls;
All Your waves and billows have gone over me.”* Psalm 42:7

4. Increase your prayers, supplications, and thanksgivings (Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:16–18).
5. Trust that God is working His good plan for you (Jer. 29:11; Psalm 121:4; Rom. 8:28).
6. Increase your time of fellowship with other believers (Eccl. 4:9–10).
7. Worship, sing, praise, and believe in the dark what you learned in the light (Hab. 3:17–19).

Above all, let your trials teach you true humility and meekness.

“Now, I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.” Daniel 4:37

“Though the LORD is on high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar.” Psalm 138:6

“And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Matthew 23:12

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” James 4:10

Joseph’s life illustrates one of the greatest promises in all the Bible, when Joseph said to his brothers,

“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” Genesis 50:20

Which promise the Apostle Paul adapts to us in this way,

*“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God,
to those who are called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28*

Application:

You will come through every test and trial of life to victory and honor if, in the darkest hour, you rest your soul on the solid rock of the sure promises of God.

*“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines
in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts ...”*

2 Peter 1:19

To which promise, the Lord Jesus Christ gives affirmation to us,

*“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the root
and offspring of David, the Bright and Morning star.” Revelation 22:16*

“Joseph, a Type of Christ”

From Dr. Warren Wiersbe—*Old Testament Notes*

While nowhere in the New Testament is Joseph specifically named as a type of Jesus Christ, the parallels are too obvious and too numerous to question. Many have written on this topic, especially Arthur Pink (*Gleanings in Genesis*) and Adda R. Habershon (*The Study of the Types*). Dr. T. W. Callaway has an interesting chapter on Joseph in his fine book, *Christ in the Old Testament*. We gladly acknowledge our indebtedness to these students for some of the comparisons and contrasts given here in the book of Genesis:

I. The Son

1. Beloved of father – 37:3 (Matthew 3:17)
2. Shepherd – 37:2 (John 10:11–14)
3. Hated by brethren – 37:4–5 (John 15:25)
HATED for words (Matthew 26:64; John 8:40)
4. They would not believe – 37:5 (John 7:5)
“Reign over us” – 37:8 (Luke 19:14)
5. A true witness – 37:3 (John 7:7)
6. Envied – 37:11 (Mark 15:10; Matthew 27:17–18)
7. Sent to brethren – 37:13 (Luke 20:13; Hebrews 10:7)
to seek their welfare – 37:14 (John 3:17)
8. From Hebron (fellowship) – 37:14 (John 17:5, 24)
9. Conspired – 37:18 (Matthew 27:1; John 11:53)
“Not our hand” 37:27 (John 18:28)– Gentiles
10. Judah bargained – 37:26–27 (Judas – Mark 14:10)
11. Stripped him – 37:23 (Matthew 27:28; John 19:23)
12. Sat and watched – 37:25 (Matthew 27:36)
“What will happen to his dreams?” 37:19–20 (Matthew 27:39–44)

13. Sold for a slave – 37:28 (Matthew 26:15)
14. Taken to Egypt – 37:26 (Matthew 2:14–15)

II. The Servant – 39:1 (Luke 22:27)

1. God with him – 39:2, 21, 23 (John 16:32)
2. Prospered – 39:2-3 (Isaiah 53:10)
3. All in his hand – 39:4, 8 (John 3:35)
4. Pleased Potiphar – 39:4 (John 8:29)
5. Tempted – 39:7ff (Matthew 4)
6. Falsely accused – 39:16–18 (Matthew 26:59–60)
7. Bound – 39:20 (Matthew 27:2)
8. Offered no defense – 39:20 (Isaiah 53:7)
9. Two other prisoners 40:2-3 (Luke 23:32)
10. Suffered under Gentiles (Acts 4:26–27)
11. Respected by jailer – 39:21 (Luke 23:47)

III. The Sovereign

1. Taken from dungeon – 41:14 (resurrection)
2. Loosed bonds – Psalm 105:20 (Acts 2:24)
3. Changed clothes – 41:14 (John 20:6–7)
4. Spirit in him – 41:38 (Acts 10:38)
5. Had God’s wisdom – 41:39 (John 5:20; Matthew 13:54)
6. Ruled over the house – 41:40 (Hebrews 3:6)
7. Ruled all the people – 41:40 (Acts 15:31)
8. Shared Pharaoh’s throne (Revelation 3:21)
9. Pharaoh did nothing without him – 41:44 (John 15:5)
10. Men bow to him – 41:43 (Philippians 2:10)
11. Given new name – 41:45 (Philippians 2:9-10)
Joseph = “added” – 30:24
Zaphnath – *paaneah* = “revealer of secrets” (Luke 2:43–35)
12. Thirty years old – 41:46 (Luke 3:23)
13. Gentile bride – 41:45 (the Church)
14. Do what he says – 41:55 (John 2:5)
15. All nations come – 41:57 (Isaiah 49:6)
16. Dual sovereignty – (Matthew 28:19–20)
Earth: 37:5–7 Heaven: 37:9–10

IV. The Savior of His People

1. They knew him not – 42:8 (John 1:10–11; Acts 3:17)
2. Guilty of his blood – 42:22 (Matthew 27:25)
3. Joseph wept – 42:24 (Luke 19:41)
4. Punished them – 42:7, 17 (Hosea 9:17)
5. Confessed guilt – 44:16 (Hosea 5:15)
6. Revealed the second time – 45:1 (Acts 7:13; Zechariah 12:10)
7. They were troubled – 45:3 (Zechariah 12:10)
8. God did it – 45:8 (Acts 2:23)

9. “Behold me,” – 45:12 (Luke 24:29)
10. Showed them grace – 45:4-15 (Isaiah 54:7-8)
11. His glory revealed – 45:13 (Luke 24:26)
12. Brethren carried the message – 45:9–10 (144,000)
13. Invited to come 45:18–19 (Matthew 11:28–30)
14. Comforted them – 50:21 (Isaiah. 40:1–2)
15. Supplied their need – 45:20 (Isaiah 2:1–5)

EXHIBIT FIVE: MOSES THE MEEK

Moses holds the place of one of the greatest characters in all of Scripture. He is the foundational figure of the Old Testament, just as Paul is of the New Testament (obviously excepting the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the foundation of all of Scripture, 1 Cor. 3:11).

“Now the man Moses was very humble [meek], more than all men who were on the face of the earth ... My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face ...”
Numbers 12:3, 7–8

In spite of this statement, Moses’ desire to see God in His full glory was denied.

The Life of Moses in Three Phases:

1. Moses, the Prince of Egypt.

Here, we see Moses in the place of privilege and prosperity.

“At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God ... Pharaoh’s daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.” Acts 7:20–22

2. Moses, the Shepherd in the Desert.

In this phase of his life, we see Moses in the place of privation and solitude. Moses, at this point, may have believed his dream of delivering Israel was a lost hope. But from the palace in Egypt to the solitude of the desert, God was preparing Moses to be a polished shaft in His hand for His purpose (Isa. 49:2b, as a “type” of Jesus Christ, *“And He made Me a polished shaft; in His quiver He has hidden Me.”*)

3. Moses, the Deliverer of Israel.

In the final phase of his life, we see Moses in the wisdom and power of God. It took 80 years of training to prepare him for the final 40 years of service. And, after all this time, Moses was denied his deepest desire.

Exodus 33:12–23: God’s Presence vs. God’s Face

After the golden calf incident (Exodus 32), Moses prays for his peoples’ forgiveness and offers himself to be judged in their place (Exod. 32:32).

He then meets with the Lord “*far from the camp*” (Exod. 33:7). In the following section, Moses pleads for two things: one of which is granted, the other denied. First, he asks that the Lord will go with them in their journey (Exod. 33:12–14); this request is granted.

Secondly, Moses requests to see God’s glory (Exod. 33:18–23). This request is denied (vv. 20, 23, “*you cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live ... My face shall not be seen.*”) In vv. 21–23a, God offers to hide Moses under His hand, and when He removes His hand, Moses will see His fading glory.

Question: How blessed are we to have seen what Moses was not allowed to?

“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared [revealed] Him.” John 1:18

“Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father and it is sufficient for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father.’” John 14:8–9

“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who 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

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds [ages]; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”
Hebrews 1:1–4

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” Hebrews 2:9

As the words of the old Hymn say:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the cares of Earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

Point: When life is dark and painful, it seems God is hidden from us. But it is **His hand** that makes it seem this way. **His hand is over us, hiding His face**, but securing us by His presence. While He seems far away, **He is really very near**, guarding and protecting us. This gives special meaning to the words of both Paul and Peter:

*“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should **seek the Lord**, in the hope that they might **grope for Him** and **find Him**, though **He is not far from each one of us.**” Acts 17:26–27*

Critical Highlights, Acts 17: 27

1. God brings each of us into this world at the time and place that is most advantageous for us to come to know Him.
2. It is His desire that every person should seek Him (*zeteo*: present active infinitive expresses the divine purpose for pre-determining our time and place).
3. The phrase “*in the hope that they might grope for Him*” has God as its subject. It is His hope; the phrase “*might grope*” in the Greek is *psulaphao*, a word that means “to grope after, or feel for.” It pictures one in the dark, seeking for something by sensory perception. An untranslated Greek phrase, “*ei ara ge*,” would be translated, “if at the very least,” indicating very minimal effort.
4. Finally, the word “*grope*” (*psulaphao*) is an aorist (point of time) optative (expressing wish, hope, or desire). This is where the hope, in our English text, comes from. This perfectly matches Peter’s affirmation, “*The Lord ... is not willing. that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*” (2 Pet. 3:9).

Then we also have the words of Peter in 1 Peter 5:6),

*“Therefore humble yourselves **under the mighty hand of God**, that He may exalt you in due time.”*

Point: Every time you feel that God is hiding His face, that He is far off and silent, know that if you respond with humility, trust in Him and obey His Word—you are being purified and prepared and equipped for greater things.

*“Therefore if anyone **cleanses himself** from the latter [dishonor], **he will be** a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master; prepared for every good work.” 2 Timothy 2:21*

As surely as we respond to trials and testings in humility, we have His assurance that we will be prepared and promoted to greater service!

Moses: Seven Decisions that Changed the Course of History (Hebrews 11:23–29)

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”
Hebrews 11:6

1. By his parents—to act in faith rather than fear (v. 23).
2. By Moses—refusing the title “Prince of Egypt” (v. 24).
3. To identify with the people of God—to suffer in faith, not prosper in sin (v. 25).
4. To value eternal reward over earthly riches (v. 26).
5. To serve the invisible Savior, not the visible, earthly king (v. 27).

6. To keep the Passover, and trust in the blood of the Lamb (v. 28).
7. To pass through the Red Sea—to believe that God would hold back the sea (v. 29).

EXHIBIT SIX: ISRAEL THE FAITHLESS

In stark contrast to Moses the faithful, we have Israel, the faithless. Moses was told to warn Israel of their future apostasy, and to explain that this would result in God hiding His face from them, as opposed to shining upon them (Num. 6:24–26).

We will only hit a couple of examples in this section, as the historical spiritual decline of Israel is well known. As with a nation, so with any individual, to depart from the Lord is a long and disastrous decline.

*“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, the days approach when you must die ... Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land ... and **I will hide My face** from them ... so that they will say in that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us because our **God is not among us?**’ And I will surely **hide My face** in that day **because of the evil** which they have done ...”* Deuteronomy 31:14–18

*“Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten the God who fathered you. And when the LORD saw it, He spurned them ... And He said, ‘**I will hide My face** from them, **I will see what their end will be.**”* Deuteronomy 32:18–20

The Five Cycles of Discipline on Israel

In Leviticus 26, Moses outlined five cycles of divine discipline that Israel would go through if they departed from faith and obedience to the Lord. He begins by warning them to beware of idols and to honor the Sabbath (vv. 1–2). Then, in vv. 3–13, He promises them protection and blessing if they remain faithful to Him.

The five cycles of discipline are contained in vv. 14–39, each beginning with the words, *“If you do not obey Me,”* or *“If you walk contrary to Me.”* Each successive judgment becomes more painful, as rejected correction demands more intense discipline. In the end, the last cycle (vv. 27–39) is national destruction. Verses 27–35 are prophetic, as this is exactly what happened to the Northern Kingdom under Assyria (721–22 BC), and to the Southern Kingdom (Judah) under Babylon (605–586 BC).

Finally, the chapter ends with vv. 40–45, where the possibility of confession, repentance, and obedience will restore them into the favor and blessings of God.

For further warnings and prophecies to Israel, examine the following passages:

Isaiah 30:20–21; 45:15–17; 54:5–8; 57:17–18; 64:6–7; Ezekiel 39:25–29; Hosea 5:4–6; and Micah 3:4.

Israel's Fall—A Warning to the Church

In Hebrews 3:7–15, the author of Hebrews uses Israel as a timely warning to early Church-Age Jews, who were in danger of repeating the same pattern of apostasy. In this section, we find warnings/lessons that we all need to be alert to:

1. *“Today,”* reminds us that past failures cannot defeat us, nor can future aspirations carry us. It is what we do *“today”*—the only time that we can actually utilize.
2. *“If,”* reminds us that we must make wise choices for the use of our time. Remember that each cycle in Leviticus 26 begins with the little word *“If.”* The little word *“if”* reminds us that our decisions/actions today will determine either blessing or cursing in the future (Heb. 6:7–8).
3. The most crucial decision each day is to *“Hear His voice,”* and to *“not harden your hearts.”* This includes both the voice of the Word of God, and the voice of the indwelling Spirit of God.
4. The phrase, *“Beware, brethren”* (v. 12), indicates that this is addressed to genuine believers, who are in danger of drifting off course in their spiritual lives.
5. The people of the Exodus generation are an example of those who were once delivered from bondage yet failed to go on to victory. The *“rest”* of the promised land (vv. 16–19) is a picture of the life of faith, growth, and increasing maturity (Heb. 4:1–13).

EXHIBIT SEVEN: DAVID, THE MAN AFTER GOD'S HEART

Does it seem strange to you that David, the man after God's heart, would ever experience the silence of God, or have the sense that God was hiding His face from him? And yet, it seems from his Psalms that he may have experienced this more than anyone else.

When it seems that God hides His face from us, the best response is to hide His Word in our hearts (Psalm 119:11), and to hide ourselves, by faith, in Him (Psalm 46:1–2; 91:1).

1. To purify our lives—in times of trial and deep testing for refining our faith.

A. To compel us to effective prayer (Psalm 10:1; see v. 17).

Earnest and effective prayer comes from deep exercise of the soul (James 5:16–18). The heart *“prepared”* (v. 17) through deep trial learns how to fight through the resistance of the Enemy (Daniel 9 and 10; Eph. 6:10–18).

Point: It is when your prayers seem not to go past the ceiling that it is most crucial for you to intensify your prayer efforts.

God allows evil to run its course, but sin and evil carry their own judgment. Note that God's hiddenness is to the believer a cause of grief; yet to the wicked, it is a hope, and cause of greater evil-doing (Rom. 1:28–32).

B. To teach us spiritual tenacity and invincibility (Heb. 13:1).

When the *“dark night of the soul”* seems to be never-ending, it is crucial to remember that all trials have an expiration date. The believer who endures trials in faith (James 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:6–9) can be assured that the trial will end in rejoicing (vv. 5–6).

Point: Without a battle there can be no victory!

“It is a dishonor to the calling with which God has called me if I complain of my lot.”
—Epictetus

“A God who will not be mocked [Gal. 6:7] will neither mock those who call on Him.”
—George MacDonald

C. “*Why are you cast down, O my soul?*” (See also 42:5, 11; 43:5)

2. To identify us with our suffering Savior (Psalm 22:24; 55:1, 12; 69:17)

Note that in Philippians 4:11–12, Paul says: “*I have learned ... I know how ... I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” He learned this in the school of suffering!

In Galatians 2:20, he says, “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*”

- A. Here we see the relinquished life— “I am crucified with Christ.”
- B. We see the extinguished life— “I live, yet not I.”
- C. We see the distinguished life— “I now live by faith in the Son of God.”

3. To equip us for greater service for others blessing (Psalms 88; 89—Heman and Ethan).

Both of these men are mentioned in 1 Kings 4:31 as being ancient wise men surpassed only by Solomon. Both of them were probably older than Solomon and had lived during the reign of King David.

A. Psalm 88, by Heman (When life seems to be an endless series of sufferings).

The tune, “*Mahalath Leannoth*” may mean “A Dance of Affliction” (*The New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, Earl Radmacher). “One of the saddest psalms in the Psalter” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*):

- 1. When our prayers seem powerless, and life is one long death-march (vv. 1–5).
- 2. When God seems to be our afflicter, rather than our deliverer (vv. 6–9).
- 3. When we cry out to God constantly, but He seems to hide His face (vv. 9, 15).

Heman is all alone in his sufferings (vv. 8, 18). His only hope is in the Lord, and he holds fast to Him, though He seems so far away.

Note: If you have ever felt this way, do you not find comfort in knowing that one of the wisest, most faithful men of the Old Testament times also faced what you are facing? His sufferings, like those of Job, were not in vain, but become to us a challenge, in spite of our sufferings, to cling to the Lord, and continue to call out to Him without ceasing. Consider this: that God inspired his words, and honored him by preserving them in the Scriptures, for our comfort and edification (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11).

B. Psalm 89, by Ethan (When praise is turned to weeping, when it seems that all of God’s promises have been broken, and there seems to be no future hope).

The first 18 verses of this Psalm are a song of praise to God for His mercies (vv. 1–2), His promises (vv. 3–4), and His majesty, righteousness and justice (vv. 5–18).

EXHIBIT EIGHT: THE RELUCTANT LOVER (SONG OF SOLOMON 5:1–8)

I will spend only a brief time on this exhibit. In the Song of Songs, or Song of Solomon, we have a beautiful love story between the Shepherd and the Shulamite woman. It is written as a song, but also as a play, with various scenes depicting the deepening romance of its main two characters. This book, from ancient times, has been viewed in different ways:

1. As a **historical account** of the romance of Solomon and his first bride, the Shulamite woman. In this view, Solomon first disguises himself as a simple shepherd, until he has won the heart of the Shulamite, only then appearing in his power and glory (3:6–11, which compares to Isaiah 63:1–6, a picture of the Second Coming of Christ).
2. As a **spiritual analogy** of the love of *Yahweh* for His people, Israel. Even the Book of Hosea shows the faithful love of God for unfaithful Israel.
3. In the Church Age, it has been natural to see the story as a **prophetic picture** of the love of Jesus Christ for His Church, and a promise of the future when the Bride is claimed by the Bridegroom (Rev. 21:1–5, 9–13).

To which of the above do I hold? Actually, all three, for I believe that the story encompasses all of them. By the way, the ancient Rabbis used to use the Song of Solomon for preparing young couples for marriage. Think of it as a marriage counselling book!

The rift created when ardent love is met with complacent response (Song of Solomon 5:1–8)

1. In v. 1, we have the approach of the Shepherd-lover to his bride's chamber. He has been celebrating with the friends of the groom (v. 2). Actually, the marriage consummation can be seen from 4:1 to 5:1. For the sake of continuity, we'll look at 5:1 as the approach of the Shepherd, with his groomsmen/witnesses giving their best wishes.
2. In vv. 2–5, the Shulamite, while she is dreaming, hears his knocking at her door, calling to her. He is wet with dew; maybe he needs a shower.
3. Her response (vv. 3–5) is complacent, making excuses, lacking in interest. This is a picture of the carnal, complacent, comfort-seeking believer—reluctant to open the door to the Shepherd Lover. What happens when we do this? The Shepherd withdraws (vv. 6–8). Now she is frantic and eagerly searching for him but cannot find him. This is how God deals with the complacent, self-satisfied believer. He will withdraw until we lay aside our distractions and truly seek Him.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Hebrews 11:6

4. The search of the Shulamite for her lover results in her being both beaten and having her veil removed. These are symbolic of discipline and shame, for neglecting the presence and protection of her beloved.
5. The complacency of the Bride here is analogous to the condition of Laodicea—the lukewarm church (Rev. 3:14–22). To this church, Jesus gives the warning in v. 16,

*“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot,
I will vomit you out of My mouth ...”*

6. However, that recovery is possible, He also adds in vv. 20–22,

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door,
I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will
grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father
on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

Application:

Earlier in the story, before the wedding, we find a curious test that is full of great instruction for us.

*“Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines
have tender grapes.”* Song of Solomon 2:15

This curious little verse is rich in spiritual significance. So often, our chance of true spiritual greatness is destroyed by the small, little details of life. In much the same way that “many hands make light work,” so also it is true that “many sands sink great ships.”

Here, in the story of the Shulamite and the Shepherd, her complacency toward his advances, the little details of having to put on her robe, and getting her feet dirty, are more important to her than responding to his love for her. This is a perfect picture of Israel in her complacency toward God (see Isa. 32:9–11, complacency is mentioned 3 times).

Lessons from James

James, the Lord’s half-brother, was a master of identifying the little things that blunt our spiritual devotion and hinder us from achieving the spiritual greatness for which we were created in Christ.

1. It is how we respond to the various little trials in life that add up to receiving the Crown of Life for eternity (James 1:2, 12).
2. Responding to temptations or trials by blaming God (James 1:13), or even asking, “Why does God allow this to happen to me?” or “Why does the washing machine break down just when I got a little bonus money?” are ways that we malign the Lord, our Shepherd, who loves us infinitely.
3. How we treat others on a daily basis can hinder us from the greatness that our Lord desires for us, such as slighting those we consider unworthy (James 2:1–4), or failing to give aid to a brother in need (James 2:14–17), whether that aid be financial help, or counsel, comfort, encouragement—just because we are too busy!
4. How small a member is our tongue, with such great impact (James 3:1–12)! It is like a small match to a forest, or the small rudder of a ship. Yet, how harmful can little comments—a little laugh at the wrong time, even a raised eyebrow—communicate contempt for a fellow believer?

5. These “*little foxes*” lead to big divisions and strife among believers (James 4:1–5). Little comments, expressing scorn or contempt (James 5:9) can do great harm to fellow believers.
6. Just as small words and deeds can do great damage, so the solution to these evils comes in a series of small, spiritual decisions and steps (James 4:7–10):
 - a) Surrender to God, instead of to your inner lusts (v. 7a).
 - b) Resist the devil, instead of serving his agenda (v. 7b).
 - c) Draw near to God, in His Word and in prayer, with a true desire to obey (v. 8a).
 - d) Cleanse your hands by purifying your heart (v. 8b). Cease being double-minded.
 - e) Let your laughter over evil turn into mourning for your compromised spiritual life (v. 9). See yourself as God sees you, and experience deep repentance.
 - f) Humble yourself before Him and experience His restoration power (v. 10).

Nothing will do in our relationship with Christ except earnest, steadfast devotion. We all need to beware of complacency and distraction, and a willingness to settle for less than complete surrender to the white-hot love of the Lord Jesus Christ!

*“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of Hosts ...
For who has despised the day of small things?” Zechariah 4:6, 10*

“For the love of Christ compels us ...” 2 Corinthians 5:14

May it be so for each and every one of us, who claim to love our Savior!

Challenge:

There is not a single believer who would not benefit, not a marriage that would not be blessed, nor a church that would not gain, from a careful study and application of the spiritual truths revealed in the Song of Solomon—if only we would identify and apply the great lessons contained in it.

EXHIBIT NINE: THE DISCIPLES WITH HARDENED HEARTS

If ever there were examples of those who “*out of weakness were made strong*” (Heb. 11:34b), it is found in the eleven disciples. Jesus did not choose them because they were qualified. He chose them to show the world what He could do with weak and failing men. Humanly speaking, we say that we all have our strengths and weaknesses. However, God does not need our strengths, though He will certainly use them, as part of who we are. What He is looking for are men and women who will surrender their weaknesses to Him, that we might demonstrate His power to overcome them (2 Cor. 12:6–10).

The disciples struggled to fully understand Jesus’ identity, and the purpose of His coming. Along the way, they often hardened their hearts, resisting the implications and demands of His teaching. For three long years, Jesus worked patiently with them, often having to rebuke them for the hardness of their hearts.

In the end, when He was nearest to them, He seemed to be “hidden” from them. In their experience, we can all find encouragement and instruction for our own times when we go through the “valley of shadow,” and find ourselves in the “dark night of the soul.”

1. During Jesus’ ministry

A. On the Sea

After the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus sent His disciples to cross over to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitudes away. Then, He came to them walking on the water, and they were terrified. The next verse explains the reason for their fear:

“For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.”

Mark 6:52

Point: Sometimes, the problem is not that the Lord is hiding, rather it’s that our hardened heart sees Him as the thing we fear. Though He is drawing near to us, we fear His approach as a cause for fear rather than comfort.

B. On His teaching about leaven (Mark 8:13–21)

“Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened?” Mark 8:17

In this instance, Jesus again refers them back to the feeding of the multitude. The point is that, having hardened their hearts at that initial point, they had not yet recovered. His warning about the leaven of the Pharisees went right over their heads, a warning that could have spared them much anguish later on.

2. After the resurrection

A. On the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13–35)

“But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.” Luke 24:16

Though Jesus had forewarned them—at least three times—of His coming crucifixion and resurrection, on the very day He told them He would rise from the dead, they did not expect to see Him, and so they did not.

It was this unbelief and hardening that led to His rebuke of the two in Luke 24:25, *“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!”* He then taught what must have been one of the greatest Bible classes ever given (Luke 24:26–27).

The amazing thing here, and a great lesson to us, is that though they did not know Him, still His word “burned” within their hearts (v. 32). The lesson, I believe, is that when God seems far off, we need to dig into His Word and let the fire of it enlighten our souls.

B. In the Upper Room

I assume that this gathering took place in the same place where Jesus had unfolded to them His plan for the coming Church Age. It is interesting that every truth unveiled to us in all the epistles can trace its genesis to this wonderful message.

“Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you.’ But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.” Luke 24:36–37

As we saw earlier (Mark 6:45–52), the Lord often comes to us in an unfamiliar way. This is especially true in times of deep trial. We think He is not near, only because we cannot see His hand in what is happening to us. If we truly believe His promises (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28; Heb. 13:5–6), we should be secure that, even in the midst of the storm, He is present and working His good plan for us. Jesus looks most strange to us when we get our eyes on our trials instead of beholding *“the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Cor. 4:6).

C. At the Empty Tomb (John 20:11–18)

Mary Magdalene was convinced that Jesus was dead and gone. Still, she loved Him, and went to the tomb, expecting to find His body there.

“She, supposing Him to be the gardener ...” John 20:15

We might say the lesson here is not to expect to find Him where He is not. He is not the Lord of the dead, but of the living (Luke 20:38). When Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick (John 11:1–44), they expected Him to come immediately. When He delayed His coming and Lazarus died, they assumed, *“if You had been here, my brother would not have died”* (John 11:21, 32). What they did not know, and we must learn, is that in the plan of God, every trial is for a greater eternal purpose—to reveal the glory of God (John 11:40).

Point: The disciples had a problem with hardened hearts (Mark 6:52)! And so do we. How often do we believe the stories in the Bible of God’s great mercy and deliverance *within their context*, but doubt when we are in need of the same mercy and deliverance? We believe it happened for them but doubt that it can or will happen for us!

Three times Jesus predicted His death/resurrection:

1. The first time (Matt. 16:21–23; Mark 8:32–32; Luke 9:21–23)
On this occasion, Peter resolutely rejected the truth.
2. The second time (Matt. 17:22–23; Mark 9:30–32; Luke 9:43–45, just after the Transfiguration)
On this occasion they did not understand but were afraid to ask
3. The third time (Matt. 20:17–19; Mark 10:32–34; Luke 18:31–34)
On this occasion, the truth was hidden from them.

There are many other allusions in John, such as John 2:19; 12:7–8; 14:25; and 16:5–7.

Conclusion

Testing and trial are all part and parcel of learning and growing in the life of faith. All of us will go through the “dark valley of doubt and fear” (Psalm 23:4). There will be times, in the dark night of the soul, that will try us to the uttermost. It is my prayer that this study will bring lessons to us all to ponder and apply, that will make us stronger in faith, in whatever tests and trials may lie ahead for us in this life.

May God grant us grace to see “*Him who is invisible*” (Heb. 11:27). We must never forget His promise, “*Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning*” (Psalm 30:5)!