

# How Long, O Lord? (Experiencing a Dark Night of the Soul)



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by [Kim Butts](#)

If you are like me, there are seasons when your prayer life seems out of sorts...when it feels as if God is not speaking or leading you as He perhaps has in the past. It is during such times that I begin to question why there is a lack of the sense of God's presence. In faith, I trust that He is near,

but in my flesh I wonder whether I have either been praying with wrong motives or have begun to treat prayer as a perfunctory act instead of a relationship. Such spiritual crisis and the subsequent feelings of a lack of closeness to God causes me to recognize that perhaps I have turned away from the practice of some specific spiritual disciplines that help me to lean more intently and purposefully toward my Father's heart. These times always remind me of the importance of consistent rhythms of prayer in my everyday life.

Yet, there have been times when self-examination reveals no discernible reason for God's silence or distance, which allows doubt to creep into my soul. Saint John of the Cross, who lived in the 1500s, described such an experience as the "dark night of the soul," which can be described as a time when prayer becomes difficult or unrewarding for a period of time. It can be as if one's prayer life has virtually collapsed, sending a person into a season of doubt and confusion.

*King David, the "man after God's own heart," experienced such times; however, his experience is what always gives me hope! In Psalms such as 13 and 22, David expresses anguish over God's apparent absence or withdrawal from him: Psalm 13:1 – "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" However, he never loses his unwavering faith that God is good, trustworthy and constant. David's authentic feelings of abandonment are always tempered with phrases like this one: "But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me" (Psalm 13:5-6).*

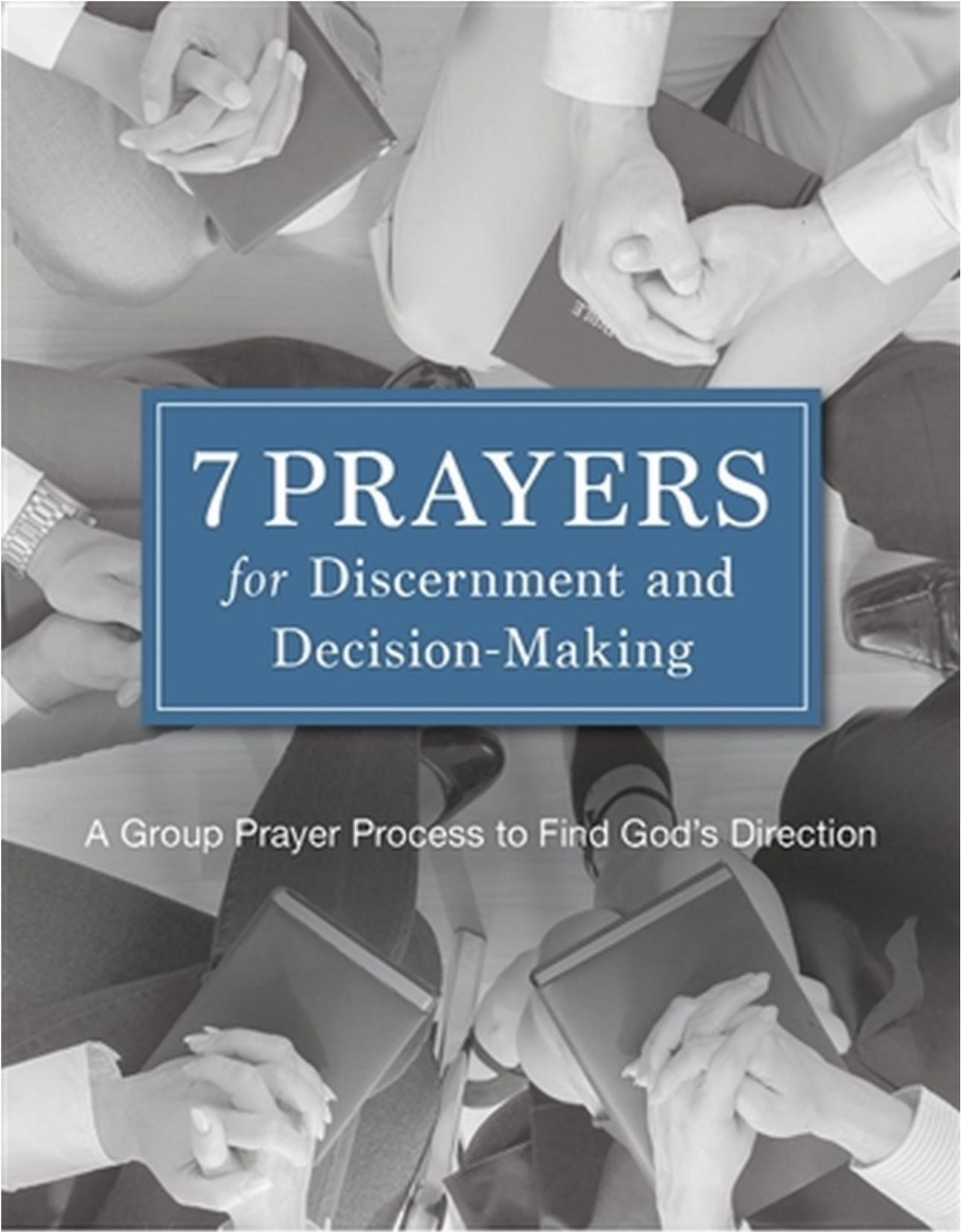
God's Word says that if we seek Him, He will be found by us. "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). There are days when my whole heart is not actively engaged with seeking God. There is a disconnect between my doing and my being and between my spiritual life and my secular life. If Jesus to be the Lord over all of my

life, I can't craft walls that allow Him entry into one area and not another. He is Lord of my everyday life...not just the parts I want Him to be involved in. There is nothing He can't see, and nothing that He is not already actively engaged in, whether I am pressing in or not. And, in the times when I feel that I am leaning into Him, even in desperation, and there is no answer...my response must always be to trust that He is at work. If I seek Him, He will be found...even though it may not be in the moment I expect or desire. I know that His love for me is constant, and that sometimes His silence and my "dark night of the soul" may be my Father's purposeful plan to build within me an even deeper trust.

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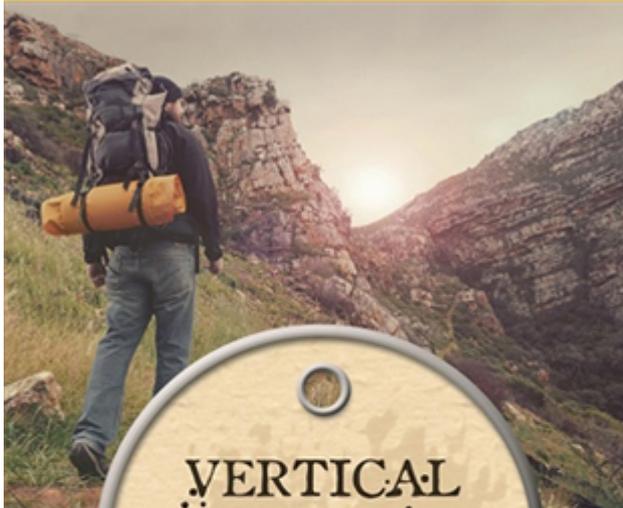
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