

40 Days of Prayer and Fasting

October 29th

Daily Devotional #29

We Are in the Season of Listening

As We Ask, “What Is GOD Preparing Us/for Us to Do?”

As we approach the end of our Season of Listening, I want to challenge you with something that has challenged me – and haunted me (in a good way) – for years. My first semester at ACU (keep in mind, I was thirty), I took Early British Literature in order to complete my degree requirements in that area. What I discovered was quite fascinating: a great deal of literature in this time period was purposefully and deeply spiritual. One of the writers I grew increasingly aware of and impressed by was John Milton (writer of *Paradise Lost*). I have never been one for poetry (aside from “Casey at the Bat”), but the depth and dedication of Milton (along with Donne, and a couple of others) challenged my preconceived ideas of the “frailty” of poetry. These works were challenging my faith (to grow stronger) and revealing things about GOD and believing in Him I had never before considered.

So, as my Family, I sincerely ask you to read the following introduction and background to John Milton (1608-1674) and then to read and meditate on his powerful observations in his work, “When I Consider How My Light Is Spent” which was a reflection on his struggle after going blind as an adult.

As you read and consider his struggle (as writer in the 1600’s going blind, Milton had to rely on others to accurately perform the physical act of writing as he dictated to them and had them read back and correct/edit/rewrite for him), remember that Milton’s “claim to fame”, “*Paradise Lost*” (1667) did not come for many years after falling blind (1652), struggling to understand and be useful his GOD, and finally accepting his blindness and understanding his continuing duty to GOD which is powerfully presented in this piece (written sometime around 1655). Milton’s insight illuminates one of the greatest blessings and purposes of Listening.

Read, contemplate, and be blessed! *Danny*

(the following is from “Shadow & Light: Literature and the Life of Faith”, Tippens, Weathers & Walker, eds., pages 417-419)

Introduction to John Milton:

Milton, who has been called “the Last Renaissance Man,” was born into a well-to-do middle class Protestant home. After earning the M.A. at Christ’s College, Cambridge, Milton entered the intense religious and political conflicts of the English Civil War. Siding with Cromwell and the Independents, who defeated the Royalists, Milton was rewarded with an office in Cromwell’s Council

of State. A series of misfortunes soon followed: abandonment by his first wife soon after their wedding in 1642; blindness in 1652; death of his wife and son in 1652; death of second wife and daughter in 1658; and the dissolution of the Commonwealth and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, which led to the burning of Milton's books and the writer's temporary imprisonment (two months). Despite these fluctuations of fortune, throughout his life Milton wrote prolifically – a variety of lyric poems in his youth; extensive treatises on religion and politics in the middle years; and his great epics *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* in his later years.... Milton used (poetry to write about) a variety of subjects including (love, friendship) marriage, duty to God, and contemporary political and religious issues. Milton is one of England's greatest writers – second only to Shakespeare in influence – and perhaps England's greatest Christian poet.

When I Consider How My Light Is Spent

John Milton, circa 1655

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent¹ which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide;
"Doth God exact day-labor², light denied?"
I fondly³ ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best
Bear His mild yoke⁴, they serve Him best. His state
Is kingly: thousands at His bidding⁵ speed,
And post⁶ o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait."

1. **one Talent.** See the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30.

2. **day labour.** See the parable of the bridegroom in Matthew 25:1-13 and also John 9:4.

3. **fondly.** Foolishly. See Oxford English Dictionary for meaning in 1600's

4. **mild yoke.** Jesus states "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" in Matthew 11:30.

5. **Thousands at his bidding.** Psalm 68:17 and Zechariah 1:7ff

6. **Post.** to travel swiftly