

Before becoming a pastor, I was a chaplain at  
Our Lady of Good Counsel High School.  
One of my duties was teaching religion.

**SCREEN: Night book image**

And every year, students read this book by Elie Wiesel: *Night*.  
Maybe you've heard of it or read it yourself.  
*Night* describes what the author went through as a young boy  
when he and his family were sent to the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz.  
Elie entered the camp as a devout Jew,  
but the atrocities he witnessed led him to question everything  
he believed.  
In one particularly moving section,  
he describes being forced to watch the hanging of two  
prisoners, a man and a child.  
The child's body was so light that  
his death was slow and agonizing.  
When a man standing near Elie asked,  
*"where is God, where is God?"*  
Wiesel answered, *"there, there is God, hanging on the gallows."*  
At that moment, the darkness of night overcame Elie Wiesel.  
He decided he could no longer believe in God.  
So what did he do with the rest of his life?  
He kept on living and shared his story with the world.  
In 1986 he was awarded the Nobel Prize.  
Elie Wiesel suffered in ways few of us can imagine.  
He lost his entire family at Auschwitz, he lost his faith,  
lost all hope and was overcome by darkness.  
Yet, he kept going even writing a follow up book to *Night*, titled *Dawn*.  
Any time we struggle with pain or tragedy or suffering,

we can feel like we are in darkness.

Like Elie Wiesel, we can start to doubt everything we believe in.

## **SCREEN: Hope in the Dark main screen**

Today we are beginning a new message series titled, Hope in the Dark.

This graphic and some of the key ideas came from another church, but we are making it our own.

If you are sitting there and wondering if this series is really for you, I'd say that Hope in the Dark is aimed at two specific types of people.

The first is someone who is struggling with something big right now.

Something like a family crisis, a rocky relationship, a job or a money worry, or a health problem.

Things that cause doubt or fear or even despair.

The things that raise big questions like,

*"Where are you God?*

*Why is this happening to me?*

*Will it ever get better?"*

If I just described you, Hope in the Dark is your series.

And this series is aimed at a second type of person; someone who will one day face a difficulty, a struggle or trial.

So, if you add all those people together, this series is for everyone.

A preacher once said to his congregation,

*you're either coming out of a trial, are in the middle of a trial*

*or you're going into a trial because life can be difficult for everyone.*

Over the next four weeks, we're going to honestly talk about the darkness that can surround us.

But we won't leave anyone stuck in the darkness.

We will offer the hope that comes from Jesus Christ.

He is the source of all hope.

He's source; not me, not you, not anyone else.

When we're hurting, we need help, we need a fix, a remedy.

And in today's readings God reaches out his hand.

The first reading today was from the prophet Habakkuk.

He wrote about 6 centuries before Jesus;

that's 2600 years ago for us.

Habakkuk looked around his world and saw only darkness

and it caused him to flounder and flail.

He couldn't understand why things were so bad.

Here's what he said:

**SCREEN: How long, O Lord?**

**I cry for help but you do not listen!**

**I cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not intervene.**

**Why do you let me see ruin; why must I look at misery?**

**Destruction and violence are before me;**

**there is strife, and clamorous discord.**

Now, the job of a prophet is to speak for God.

Habakkuk took a different approach,

directing his message to God;

accusing him of being uncaring.

Habakkuk unleashed, crying out:

*God, why don't you do something?*

*Why don't you fix things?*

*Where are you God?*

When times are tough, anybody can feel like Habakkuk;

can have doubts and questions and even anger.

I've been there, maybe you have too.

*God, why don't you heal my family member?*

*Why don't you find me a job?*

*Why don't you take away my doubts, my fear, my dread?*

If those are questions you've asked,  
there are some important things I want you to know.

**SCREEN: It's okay to question God**

The first is, it is okay to question God.

It really is.

If the prophet could do it, so can you.

Even Jesus, hanging on the cross, in his hour of greatest need cried out,

*"My God, why have you abandoned me?"*

It's okay to question, it's okay to doubt. Doubt is not a sin.

**SCREEN: God is not trying to hurt you**

Here's another important point:

your struggles, your crosses are not punishments from God.

God is not trying to hurt you.

God is always for you, always loves you and is always good.

God's greatest desire when you are struggling,

is that you turn to him and others for support.

That you find strength in your faith.

I don't know if you've ever had this happen to you.

I've seen it happen to others.

A person at church is going through something big,

a huge crisis, and a very well-meaning parishioner comes up and says:

*"Just trust in the Lord. Let go and let God.*

*Just have more faith!"*

They mean well.

They're trying to help.

But if you are in the middle of a crisis and are hurting so bad;

when you feel like Habakkuk, all you want is for God to fix it.

And about this statement, *you just need MORE faith...*

when Jesus's apostles said to him,  
*increase our faith*, here was his response:  
*If you have faith the size of a mustard seed,*  
*you would say to this mulberry tree,*  
*'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.*

**SCREEN: You already have enough faith, even when it doesn't feel that way**

Which brings me to my next point.

Just like Jesus told his apostles, he wants you to know that  
you have all the faith you need for what you're going through.

You don't need 'more' faith.

See, faith isn't like gas in a car.

You look at the gage and say,

*Uh oh, almost on empty, I better fill er up!*

No.

With faith, it's not the amount, but what you do with it.

I'm going to repeat that:

*With faith, it's not the amount, but what you do with it.*

So why are there trials in life, why do we struggle?

Sometimes it's because of the randomness of nature -

a hurricane, a fire, a tsunami or a medical diagnosis changes everything in an instant.

Sometimes we struggle because of the sins and poor judgment of others.

Sometimes we struggle because of poor choices we've made.

And sometimes.....we don't know why we struggle.

**SCREEN: You are not alone**

But no matter what, please know that you are not alone in your struggle;  
none of us are.

Our God is always with us no matter how dark things get,  
walking with us through our struggles.

Our God knows suffering, personally, intimately.

Jesus is the God of the Gallows who hung upon the cross for us.

And he comes to us in dark times to help us carry our cross.

I don't know about you, but when I look back at things I've struggled with in my life,  
dark times I thought might never end,

I can see now that God strengthened and supported me,  
sometimes in unexpected ways.

I know in my heart of hearts that God doesn't make bad things happen.

No, God has a remarkable way of bringing light and hope  
to what can seem to be only darkness and despair.

And God can come to you through other people and wants you to turn to others  
to experience hope in the dark.

Faith is not a solitary pursuit.

Jesus teaches this.

It's why Jesus had Twelve Apostles to follow him to Calvary;  
they were there to support him and each other.

It's why he formed a community of believers called the Church.

It's why his Church is organized into parishes.

To get through life, and find your way through the darkness,  
you need others.

Over the four weeks of this series, we are going to offer you  
some ways to connect with others.

One of those ways will happen today and next week.

Right after Mass in the entranceway,  
you can sign up for an adult small group.

We introduced small groups five years ago and new groups will be  
starting this Fall.

I've been in a men's small group for several years now and it has  
helped my faith enormously.

Small groups are 8-12 parishioners who meet weekly in a member's home.

They discuss the weekend readings and message, pray together and encourage each other grow in faith.

We have new groups starting just for men, just for women, for men and women together and for young adults.

Why should you consider this opportunity?

When we're together we grow stronger.

Together people can strengthen one another and encourage one another.

It's living one's faith as Christ intends.

**SCREEN: Great relationships magnify the good things to happen to us and make the unpleasant things bearable. -Matthew Kelly**

Matthew Kelly wrote this:

*Great relationships magnify the good things to happen to us and make the unpleasant things bearable.*

If you are struggling or just feel like there is something missing in your life; if you feel alone or disconnected, turn to God and turn to others.

When you do, you'll find the hope in the dark that God wants for you.

Amen. +