



# The Healing of the Heart

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*An Orthodox Bible Study for a Season of Loss — Walking with Christ and the Fathers  
through the End of a Long Love*

*The Lord is near to those who are broken in heart, and He will save the humble in spirit.*

Psalm 33:18 (LXX) · [34:18]

Six Sessions

Scripture from the Orthodox Study Bible • Old Testament: St. Athanasius Academy Septuagint • New Testament: New King James  
Version

# Before You Begin

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The ending of a love you carried for many years is a real grief, and the Church has never asked her children to pretend otherwise. Something that grew over so long a season does not close like a door; it heals like a wound. This study is not written to hurry you past the pain, nor to explain it away. It is written to keep you company in it — and to place that company where it truly belongs: beside Christ, who wept at a grave, and beside the Fathers, who knew sorrow and were not ashamed of it.

There are six sessions, each meant for one sitting a week, though you may go slower. The path they trace is deliberate: first we learn to *grieve honestly* before God; then to *cast the weight* on Him rather than carry it alone; to see how affliction can *refine* rather than only wound; to *guard the heart* against the despair that stalks the lonely; to *forgive* and be set free; and at last to let desire be *rightly re-ordered* toward the One in whom the heart finally rests.

Keep a journal beside this book. Read slowly. Pray the prayers aloud — the mouth often leads the heart. And do not walk this alone: bring what surfaces here to your spiritual father, and to the Mysteries of Confession and the Eucharist, where the real healing is given.

## PRAY BEFORE EACH READING

*O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who art everywhere present and fillest all things, Treasury of good things and Giver of life: come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O Good One.*

*The Fathers teach us never to open the Scriptures as we would open any other book. We ask the same Spirit who inspired the words to open our hearts to receive them. Begin each session with this ancient prayer to the Holy Spirit, then be still a moment before you read.*



Session One

# Out of the Depths

*Permission to grieve — and the God who draws near to the broken*

OPENING PRAYER (FROM PSALM 129 / 130 LXX)

*Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice. Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication. Be near to me, O God of my salvation, and do not forsake me. Amen.*

## The Scriptures

**Psalm 129:1–2 (LXX) • [130:1–2]**

Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice. Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.

**Psalm 33:18 (LXX) • [34:18]**

The Lord is near to those who are broken in heart, and He will save the humble in spirit.

**John 11:33, 35**

When Jesus saw her weeping... He groaned in the spirit and was troubled... Jesus wept.

**2 Corinthians 1:3–4**

Blessed be... the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation.

## Voices of the Fathers

*“Only one thing, Olympias, is truly to be feared — only one real trial — and that is sin.”*

St. John Chrysostom, Letters to Olympias

*“Greater than baptism itself is the fountain of tears that flows after baptism.”*

St. John Climacus, The Ladder, Step 7

## Reflection

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Notice what the Psalm does not do. It does not begin with an apology for feeling too much. It cries *out of the depths* — and God calls that cry prayer. The whole Psalter, the prayer-book of the Church, hands you words for sorrow you might think are unholy to say aloud. They are not. To grieve is not to doubt God; it is to tell Him the truth.

And the truth is answered by a nearness: *the Lord is near to those who are broken in heart*. Not near to the composed, the recovered, the ‘fine.’ Near to the broken. Your Lord is not waiting on the far side of your healing. He is closest now, in the depths, before anything is fixed.

See, too, that at the grave of His friend, God incarnate wept. Christ did not weep because He lacked faith in the resurrection He was minutes from working — He wept because love and loss are real, and He entered them fully rather than floating above them. St. John Climacus calls the tears that follow baptism a second washing, a grace. Your tears, offered to God, are not weakness leaking out. They are the heart being cleansed.

## For Your Heart — Questions

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1. Where in your body and your days do you most feel this loss? Name it plainly to God, as the Psalmist does.
2. What have you been afraid to say to God about this ending? Write it as your own psalm — unedited.
3. Chrysostom says only sin is truly to be feared. What here is grief (to be carried to God) and what, if anything, is sin (to be confessed and released)?

### FOR THIS WEEK

Set a simple daily rule: morning and evening, light a candle and pray Psalm 129/130 and Psalm 33/34 slowly.

Keep a ‘book of the depths’ — each night write one honest sentence to God about the day.

Let yourself weep when tears come. Offer them, silently: *Lord, receive even this*.

## Closing Prayer

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PRAY SLOWLY, ALOUD

*Lord Jesus Christ, who wept at the grave of Your friend, You know the weight in my chest and the ache of a love now ended. Do not ask me to feel nothing; teach me to bring everything to You. Be near me in the depths, O God of all comfort, and let even my tears become a cleansing. Amen.*



Session Two

# Cast Your Care

*Laying the whole weight on Christ, and learning to pray it*

## OPENING PRAYER (THE JESUS PRAYER)

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Into Your hands I commend my heaviness, my fear, and all that I cannot carry. Amen.*

## The Scriptures

### **Psalm 54:23 (LXX) • [55:22]**

Cast your care upon the Lord, and He shall nourish you; He shall never permit the righteous to be shaken.

### **Matthew 11:28–30**

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

### **1 Peter 5:6–7**

Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God... casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

## Voices of the Fathers

*“It is possible to pray continually, even while walking in public or sitting at your work.”*

St. John Chrysostom, On Prayer

*“Blessed is the man who knows his own weakness, for this knowledge becomes for him the foundation of all good.”*

St. Isaac the Syrian, Ascetical Homilies

## Reflection

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The verb is *cast* — a decisive throw, not a timid setting-down you can snatch back an hour later. Grief has a gravity; it pulls the same thoughts around the same grooves at three in the morning. Scripture's remedy is not to think harder but to *hand it over: casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*.

But how, when the mind will not stop circling? Here the Church gives a gift perfectly suited to a heart that cannot settle: the Jesus Prayer. *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me*. Short enough to breathe, it can be prayed while walking, driving, lying awake — exactly where Chrysostom says prayer belongs, in the ordinary hours, not only in church. When the ache returns, you do not argue with it; you answer it with the Name.

St. Isaac calls the knowledge of one's own weakness the foundation of all good. A breakup strips the illusion that we hold our lives together by our own strength. That is painful — and it is the doorway to real prayer, because now you are no longer managing your life before God but leaning your whole weight on Him.

## For Your Heart – Questions

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1. What are you still trying to carry yourself that this week you could deliberately *cast* on the Lord? Name it in prayer.
2. Christ calls the heavy-laden and offers rest. What would it look like to actually come — today, not once you feel ready?
3. Where has this loss shown you your own weakness? How might that become, as St. Isaac says, a foundation rather than a defeat?

### FOR THIS WEEK

Pray the Jesus Prayer through the day — a prayer rope helps. When the ache returns, let it be the bell that calls you to the Name.

Once this week, name the loss aloud to God and physically open your hands as you say, *I cast this on You*.

Speak with your priest about Confession. Some weights are meant to be laid down there, not carried privately.

## Closing Prayer

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PRAY SLOWLY, ALOUD

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, I am heavy-laden and I come to You. I cannot quiet my own mind or mend my own heart. I cast this whole burden upon You, for You care for me. Give me Your rest, and teach my restless heart to pray. Amen.*



Session Three

# The Furnace of Affliction

*How suffering, offered to God, refines rather than only wounds*

## OPENING PRAYER

*O God, You test the hearts of men not to destroy but to purify. Bring me through the fire and the water into the place of refreshment, and let nothing in me be lost but what must be burned away. Amen.*

## The Scriptures

### **Psalms 65:11–12 (LXX) • [66:11–12]**

You brought us into the net... we went through fire and water, and You brought us out into refreshment.

### **Romans 5:3–5**

tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint.

### **James 1:2–4**

count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

### **2 Corinthians 4:8–9**

We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed... struck down, but not destroyed.

## Voices of the Fathers

*“Love is a holy state of the soul, disposing it to value the knowledge of God above all created things.”*

St. Maximus the Confessor, *Four Centuries on Love*, I.1

## Reflection

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The Psalm does not say God spared His people the fire and the water. It says He led them *through* them — and out the far side into refreshment. This is the Orthodox shape of suffering: not a meaningless accident to be merely survived, nor a punishment to be dreaded, but a passage. The furnace is real. So is the door on its other side.

St. Paul dares to trace the chain: tribulation, then perseverance, then character, then a hope that *does not disappoint*. Nothing in that chain skips the tribulation. The character is forged *in* it. What feels now like only loss is, in God’s hands, also a refining — the silversmith holds the metal in the flame precisely long enough to see his own face in it, and no longer.

St. Basil the Great teaches that the very trials we bear with thanksgiving are turned by God into occasions of blessing rather than defeat. And St. Maximus locates the whole purpose of this refining: a soul re-ordered to value the knowledge of God above every created thing — even a beloved person. That is not coldness toward what you have lost. It is the healing of a love that had, perhaps, come to rest too much of its weight on something that could be taken away.

## For Your Heart – Questions

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1. Can you name one thing this fire may be burning away in you — a fear, an illusion, a disordered attachment — that needed to go?
2. What is one grace or strength you can already see being forged, even faintly, through this trial?
3. St. Maximus speaks of valuing the knowledge of God above all created things. Where had your heart’s weight rested? What would it mean to let God hold that weight instead?

### FOR THIS WEEK

Each evening, write one thing you can give thanks for — not despite the pain, but within it. Begin small.

When bitterness at the ‘waste’ of these years rises, pray: *Lord, You are leading me through, not abandoning me in.*

Read Romans 5:1–5 slowly three times this week, pausing on the word that most resists you.

## Closing Prayer

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PRAY SLOWLY, ALOUD

*O God who tries the heart as silver in the fire, I do not understand all that I am passing through, but I trust the hand that holds me in it. Burn away what is false, temper what is weak, and bring me out into Your refreshment with a heart that treasures You above all. Amen.*



Session Four

# The Noonday Demon

*Guarding the lonely heart against despondency and despair*

## OPENING PRAYER

*Lord, when my soul is cast down within me and the hours grow heavy, do not let me sink. Set my hope again in You, and keep my mind in the light of Your mercy. Amen.*

## The Scriptures

### **Psalm 41:6 (LXX) • [42:5]**

Why are you so sad, O my soul? And why do you trouble me? Hope in God, for I will give thanks to Him.

### **Psalm 90:5–6 (LXX) • [91:5–6]**

You shall not be afraid... of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.

### **Lamentations 3:22–23**

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning.

## Voices of the Fathers

*"Keep your mind in hell, and despair not."*

St. Silouan the Athonite

## Reflection

The desert Fathers gave a name to the heaviness that settles over a soul left alone with its loss: *acedia* — listlessness, a leaden despondency, the temptation to let everything slide. From Psalm 90/91 they called it *the noonday demon*: it strikes not in dramatic darkness but in the flat, empty

middle of an ordinary day, whispering that nothing matters, that you may as well not pray, not rise, not try. Anyone walking out of a long relationship is exactly its target.

St. John Cassian, who mapped this temptation with unusual precision, gives a remedy that sounds almost too plain: do not flee. The tempted soul dreams of escape — a new city, a new distraction, a numbing habit — but Cassian says the one who flees the struggle only carries it with him. The cure is to *stay*: keep your prayer rule, do the next small task with your hands, remain in your place and let the wave break over you without obeying it. (The vivid analysis of acedia comes to us through Evagrius as well, whom the Church reads with discernment; Cassian is his surer, received voice.)

And the Psalmist models the inner argument itself: *Why are you so sad, O my soul?... Hope in God*. He does not deny the sadness — he speaks *to* it, refusing to let it have the last word. St. Silouan's hard, luminous counsel belongs here: *keep your mind in hell, and despair not*. Do not pretend the descent isn't real. But do not despair, for the mercies of God are new every single morning — including tomorrow's.

### For Your Heart – Questions

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1. When does the 'noonday' heaviness hit you hardest — which hours, which situations? Name the pattern.
2. What escape does despondency tempt you toward? What would it look like, instead, to *stay* and keep the next small duty?
3. Speak to your own soul on paper as the Psalmist does: name the sadness, then preach hope back to it.

#### FOR THIS WEEK

Guard a structure: fixed times for prayer, work, food, sleep, and church. Despondency feeds on formlessness.

Do not isolate. Reach one person in your parish or family this week, even when you least feel like it — especially then.

Keep your hands busy: honest work, a walk, an act of service. Cassian's ancient prescription still holds.

Each morning, before anything else, say aloud: *His mercies are new this morning*.

### Closing Prayer

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PRAY SLOWLY, ALOUD

*Lord, when the noonday heaviness comes and my soul is cast down, hold me in my place. Let me not flee into what would only deepen the wound. Keep me at my prayers, at my work, and near Your people. I will not despair, for Your compassions fail not and are new every morning. Amen.*



Session Five

# Forgive, and Be Free

*Releasing bitterness — toward them, and toward yourself*

OPENING PRAYER (FROM PSALM 50 / 51 LXX)

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Take from me all bitterness, and give me the freedom of those who have forgiven. Amen.*

## The Scriptures

**Psalms 50:12 (LXX) • [51:10]**

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

**Matthew 6:14–15**

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

**Ephesians 4:31–32**

Let all bitterness... be put away from you... And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.

**Colossians 3:13–14**

bearing with one another, and forgiving one another... But above all these things put on love.

## Voices of the Fathers

*“Nothing makes us so like God as our readiness to forgive.”*

St. John Chrysostom

*“He who loves God cannot fail to love every man as himself.”*

St. Maximus the Confessor, *Four Centuries on Love*

## Reflection

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Bitterness feels like justice and works like poison. Held long enough, resentment does nothing to the one who wronged you and slowly reshapes the one who holds it. This is why the Lord binds our forgiveness so tightly to our own: *if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you*. Forgiveness is not a verdict that what happened was fine. It is the decision to stop drinking the poison — to hand the whole account, theirs and yours, to God.

St. Maximus is relentless here: to nurse the memory of an injury is to remain ruled by the passion, not freed from it. He does not mean you must feel warmth you do not feel; he means you must refuse to *rehearse* the wound, refuse to let the mind return again and again to build its case. Each time it returns, you set it down again. Chrysostom promises that in exactly this you become most like God, whose readiness to forgive is His glory.

And there is the forgiveness owed *inward*. A long relationship ends and the heart arraigns itself: *what did I fail to do, who was I, how did I let this happen?* The Orthodox answer is neither denial nor self-condemnation but *metanoia* — a clear-eyed, humble turning. Look honestly at your part; confess it; and then, having confessed, refuse to keep flogging a soul God has already received. Psalm 50/51 is the prayer for this: not *condemn me*, but *create in me a clean heart*. Repentance opens toward a new beginning, never toward despair.

## For Your Heart – Questions

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1. What resentment are you still rehearsing? Can you name it, and begin — even without the feeling — to hand it to God?
2. Where are you condemning yourself rather than repenting? What is the difference, for you, between honest *metanoia* and self-punishment?
3. What one true thing about your own part can you bring to Confession — and then leave there?

#### FOR THIS WEEK

Once this week, pray by name for their good. It may feel hollow at first; pray it anyway. The feeling follows the act.

When the mind starts building its case, gently stop and say the Jesus Prayer instead. Refuse the rehearsal.

Bring your own part to Confession — specifically, not vaguely — and then receive absolution as truly final.

#### Closing Prayer

##### PRAY SLOWLY, ALOUD

*Lord, I have carried this grievance long enough, and it is heavier than the wrong itself. I forgive as I have been forgiven; take the bitterness from my heart. Where I have sinned, I repent — and I refuse to condemn what You have absolved. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and set me free to love again. Amen.*



Session Six

# Desire Rightly Ordered

*The love that does not fail, and the heart's true rest*

OPENING PRAYER (FROM PSALM 62 / 63 LXX)

*O God, my God, my soul thirsts for You. Gather my scattered desires into one, and let them rest at last in You, from whom no loss can part me. Amen.*

## The Scriptures

**Psalm 62:1 (LXX) • [63:1]**

O God, my God, I rise early to be with You; my soul thirsts for You... in a desolate, impassable, and waterless land.

**1 Corinthians 13:7–8**

[love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

**John 16:20, 22**

your sorrow will be turned into joy... and your joy no one will take from you.

**Revelation 21:4**

And God will wipe away every tear... there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying.

## Voices of the Fathers

*“You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You.”*

St. Augustine of Hippo, Confessions 1.1

*“This is the true vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see Him.”*

St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*

## Reflection

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This whole study has been leading here. Grief, cast on Christ and refined in the fire, is meant to end not in numbness but in *rightly ordered desire*. The Fathers understood that the human heart is a great capacity for love that must be aimed rightly. When we ask any created person to be the ground of our whole meaning, we ask of them what only God can be — and their loss then feels like the loss of everything. Healing is not learning to desire less; it is learning to desire in the right order, so that every love finds its place within the love of God.

St. Augustine — received in the Church as a saint whose devotional witness we treasure — names it once for all: *You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You*. The restlessness you feel is not only wound; it is also the soul remembering what it was made for. And St. Gregory of Nyssa turns even that longing into hope: the desire for God is never a hunger that ends in disappointment but one that opens forever into more — the soul straining ahead, from glory to glory, world without end.

So the study closes at Pascha. Christ descended into Hades and shattered its gates from within — the icon shows Him pulling Adam and Eve up by the wrist from their tombs. There is no depth you can fall to that He has not already gone lower to fill; no ending He cannot make the ground of a beginning. Your sorrow, He promises, will be turned into a joy no one can take. And on the last day He Himself will wipe away every tear. The love that failed you was never the last word. *Love never fails* — because Love has a name, and He has already conquered death.

## For Your Heart – Questions

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1. Looking back over these six sessions, where has your heart begun to move — even slightly — from despair toward hope?
2. What would it mean, concretely, for God to become the ground of your life again, so that future loves rest within His love rather than in place of it?
3. The Harrowing of Hades says no depth is beyond Christ’s reach. What in you still needs to hear that it can be raised?

#### FOR THIS WEEK

Set a lasting rule of life — daily prayer, Scripture, the Liturgy, Confession, and the Eucharist — and, if you have not, speak with your priest about it.

Write a short letter to God commending the relationship, the years, and the one you loved, into His hands — then let it rest.

Name one good work or service you can turn toward now. Rightly ordered love always overflows outward.

This Pascha, hear the words made personal: *Christ is risen* — and therefore so, in time, will you be.

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#### Closing Prayer

##### PRAY SLOWLY, ALOUD

*O God, my God, my soul thirsts for You. You have made me for Yourself, and I have sought my rest in what could not hold it. Gather my scattered loves into Your love; raise up in me what has died, as You raised Adam from the tomb; and turn my sorrow into the joy that no one can take away. For You are the love that never fails, and to You I entrust all that I have lost and all that is yet to come. Amen.*



## Glory to God for All Things

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*May the God of all comfort, who leads His people through fire and water into refreshment, heal your heart, order your loves aright, and turn your sorrow into the joy that no one can take away.*

Do not walk this road alone. Bring what has surfaced here to your spiritual father, and to the Mysteries of Confession and the Holy Eucharist, where the true healing is given.