Blessed in the Darkness
ALSO BY JOEL OSTEEN

Blessed in the Darkness Study Guide
Break Out!
Break Out! Journal
Daily Readings from Break Out!
Every Day a Friday
Every Day a Friday Journal
Daily Readings from Every Day a Friday
Fresh Start
Fresh Start Study Guide
I Declare
I Declare Personal Application Guide
The Power of I Am
The Power of I Am Journal
The Power of I Am Study Guide
Daily Readings from The Power of I Am
Think Better, Live Better
Think Better, Live Better Journal
Think Better, Live Better Study Guide
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Wake Up to Hope Devotional
(with Victoria Osteen)
You Can, You Will
You Can, You Will Journal
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Your Best Life Now
Scriptures and Meditations for Your Best Life Now
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Your Best Life Begins Each Morning
Your Best Life Now Study Guide
Your Best Life Now for Moms
Your Best Life Now Journal
Starting Your Best Life Now
Blessed in the Darkness

How All Things Are Working for Your Good

Joel Osteen
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Blessed in the Darkness
When we think about what it means to be “blessed,” most of the time we think of the good things that have happened to us. Perhaps our supervisor offered us a new position at work, and we were blessed with a promotion. We remember when our new baby was born, and how we were blessed with a child. Or we may have overcome an illness and been blessed with a return to good health. Blessings and good times go hand in hand. It’s easy to celebrate and have a grateful attitude when things are going our way.

But what about when we go through really difficult times? The company was downsizing, and we were laid off. Somebody walked out of a relationship with us, and now we have to start all over. Where are the blessings when we go through things we don’t understand?

I met a young lady who had been pregnant for five months with her first child. She had been so excited that she had already decorated the baby’s room, but something went wrong
with the pregnancy, and she had a miscarriage. She was numb with grief, expressionless, in a dark place.

In 1981 my family thought we’d be celebrating the Christmas holidays together, enjoying fun and fellowship. Instead we learned that my mother had been diagnosed with terminal liver cancer and given a few weeks to live. It was a very somber Christmas. Is it possible that we can gain blessings in these times of darkness that we cannot gain in the light?

All of us at some point will go through a dark place—a sickness, a divorce, a loss, a child who breaks our heart. It’s easy to get discouraged, give up on our dreams, and think that’s the end. But God uses the dark places. They’re a part of His divine plan. Think of a seed. As long as a seed remains in the light, it cannot germinate and will never become what it was created to be. The seed must be planted in the soil, in a dark place, so that the potential on the inside will come to life. In the same way, there are seeds of greatness in us—dreams, goals, talents, potential—that will only come to life in a dark place.

The Dark Places Bring Us Blessings

Throughout the Scripture, every person who did something great went through one of these dark places. Moses made a mistake and killed an Egyptian man. He spent forty lonely years
on the back side of the desert, feeling as though he had blown it. But in that dark place something was being shaped in his life. He was being prepared, developing patience, humility, strength, and trust. Without the dark place Moses would never have held up his rod and parted the Red Sea. He would never have led the Israelites out of slavery and toward the Promised Land. The dark place was a prerequisite for his stepping into the fullness of his destiny, and it’s a prerequisite for us as well.

Esther was an orphan, having lost both of her parents, and living in a foreign country. She felt alone, forsaken, abandoned, in a dark place. Yet God used her to help save the people of Israel. Joseph was betrayed by his own brothers, falsely accused of a crime, and put in prison, a dark place. But he ended up ruling a nation. Elijah descended from a great mountain victory into a dark place of depression so low that he wanted to die, yet he’s one of the heroes of faith. David had an affair with a married woman, and then he had her husband killed in battle. But after an extremely dark time that followed in his life, David turned his heart back to the Lord and is remembered as “the man after God’s heart.”

You may not realize it, but it’s in the dark places that you really grow. They’re where your character is developed, where you learn to trust God and to persevere, and where your spiritual muscles are made strong. In the dark places you pray more, you draw closer to God, and you take time to get quiet and listen to what He’s saying. In those dark places you reevaluate
your priorities, you slow down and take time for family, and you get a new appreciation for what God has given you.

A friend of mine was given the devastating news that because of an infection he was going to lose his eyesight. He had surgery and wasn’t supposed to be able to see afterward. But the doctors were able to correct the problem. Amazingly, he came out of the surgery with his vision perfectly fine. Now every morning when he gets up, he takes fifteen minutes and just stares at the trees and the flowers, and he gazes in wonder at his children. He didn’t realize it at the time, but in that dark place he was being blessed. Something was happening on the inside. He was experiencing new growth, a greater confidence, endurance, and resolve.

Iron Will Enter Your Soul

When you go through enough dark places, you don’t complain about life’s little inconveniences. You don’t get upset because you didn’t get a parking spot. You don’t lose your joy when you get stuck in traffic. You don’t get offended if a coworker was rude to you. You’ve been through too much to let that sour you. Your backbone has been made into steel.

One day a well-meaning person said to me, “Joel, I heard a guy talking negatively about you, and I was so sorry he said that.” The person was being kind and encouraging. But I thought to myself, You don’t have to feel sorry for me. I buried my father. I saw my mother come through cancer. I learned
how to minister when every voice told me I couldn't do it. I believed we could get the Compaq Center when all the odds were against us. If I made it through all that, I can make it through somebody not liking me. That's like a little gnat that you just have to flick away.

When you go through a few dark places, it toughens you up. The dark places are what have made me into who I am today. I like the good times better. I prefer everything going my way. I'm not believing for any dark times, but it wasn't the good times that brought out the best in me. It was the lonely nights, the times I didn't think I could do it on my own, the times I didn't see a way—that's when I learned how to really pray, that's when I developed an unshakable confidence in God, that's when my faith was stretched. Don't complain about the dark times; there's a blessing in the dark places. God is working something in your life that can only be worked in the fire of affliction.

When my father died and I was first trying to learn how to minister, I was so afraid to get up in front of people. There were nights after dinner when I would go to my closet to pray. Victoria would come looking for me, asking the kids, “Where’s your dad?” She would find me in my closet praying. The truth is, I never prayed like that in the good times. I didn’t go out of my way to draw closer to God when everything was going my way. It was the dark places that helped me to develop my spiritual muscles. Even though I didn’t like what I was going through, being so uncomfortable forced me to stretch and grow. I wouldn’t change it for anything. It’s made me better.
God uses the dark places. When Joseph was falsely accused and put in prison for thirteen years, the Scripture says, “He was laid in chains of iron, and his soul entered into that iron.” In that prison Joseph developed strength, a perseverance that he could not have gotten any other way. There are some lessons you can only learn in the dark places. Quit complaining about what you’re going through, about how unfair it is, about who did you wrong. It may be uncomfortable, you may not like it, but it’s working for your good. You’re getting stronger; it’s developing something in you that you can only get in the dark. You can’t reach your highest potential being in the light all the time. To have no opposition, no problems, and nobody coming against you may sound good, but it will stunt your growth.

Enlarged in Times of Distress

King David said, “God enlarged me in my time of distress.” He didn’t get enlarged in the good times; he was enlarged when things weren’t going his way. As a teenager he wanted to be out having fun with friends, but he got stuck taking care of his father’s sheep. Day after day, while he was out there alone in the shepherds’ fields with nobody to talk to, it looked as though he would never accomplish his dreams. But those years in the lonely fields were what helped prepare him
to become a champion. When he killed Goliath, the people called him an overnight success. But the truth is, it didn’t happen overnight. It happened because he went through the dark places with a good attitude. When he wasn’t getting his way, when he was lonely and felt as though God had forgotten about him, he just kept doing the right thing. He understood this principle. His attitude was, *God, this is a dark place. I may not see it now, but I believe it’s working for me. I’m getting stronger. I’m developing patience and perseverance and learning to trust You.* At the right time he not only came out of that dark place, but came out increased, promoted, and better off than he had been before.

It’s not a coincidence that David says in Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters…. And though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” He was saying, in effect, *The same God who leads me to the green pastures, the same God who leads me to the still waters, is the same God who will lead me through the valley of the shadow of death.*

We can all trust God when we’re resting in the green pastures, and we can trust Him when we’re beside the still waters—that’s easy. But He is asking you to trust Him when you’re in the dark valley. He hasn’t left you. You may feel alone, abandoned, and mistreated, and think that life hasn’t been fair, but God is still leading you. That dark place is a part of the plan to make you into who you were created to be. It may not be easy, you may not understand it, but faith is
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trusting in God when life doesn’t make sense. Dare to believe that He’s blessing you even in the dark places. Believe that what’s meant for your harm is going to work to your advantage.

David went on to say, “After you go through the dark place in the valley, God will anoint your head with oil, He’ll prepare a table before you in the presence of your enemies, and your cup will run over.” Notice that you have to go through the valley to enjoy the table set before you. You have to go through the loneliness, through the sickness, through the betrayal before you get that fresh anointing, that new beginning. You have to go through the shepherds’ fields, doing the right thing when the wrong thing is happening. You have to go through the job where you’re not being treated right, through the struggle, the lack, the debt, before you make it to where your cup runs over.

Too often we want the overflow but not the valley. Our prayer is, “God, give me more favor, more influence, a greater anointing.” God says, “Okay, but you have to be willing to go with Me through the valley.”

In the dark places is where we prove to God what we’re really made of. Can God trust you with more of His favor, with greater influence and more resources? You have to be faithful in the shepherds’ field, where it’s lonely and where you’re not getting your way. “Well, Joel, I don’t like my boss. That’s why I slack off at work, and that’s why I come in late. They don’t treat me right.” If you don’t have a good attitude in the dark places, you’ll get stuck there. If you’re not faithful in the wilderness, how can God trust you to be faithful in the Promised Land?
Question Marks Changed to Exclamation Points

Have a new perspective: the dark places are opportunities to grow. You're not in a dark place by accident. If God weren't going to use it for your good, He wouldn't have allowed it. You may not understand it, it may not make sense, but God knows what He's doing. Pass the test.

When my father went to be with the Lord in 1999, that was the greatest challenge I had ever faced—a dark place. When you go through a loss, it's easy to get discouraged and feel as though God let you down and there will never be any more good days. But I've learned that every time something dies in my life, something else is coming to life. It looks like an end, but God has a new beginning. A friend betrays you and walks away, and your relationship dies, but at the same time God is birthing a new relationship. He's already lined up another friend who is destined to cross your path. You lost a job, a position, or a major client, but God has a new position, new opportunities, and new levels for you. If you'll go through the valley trusting, believing, knowing that God is in control, you'll come to the table prepared for you, into the fresh anointing, and increase to where your cup is running over.

I have a friend I played baseball with years ago. He was the star player, always the best one on the field. He led the league in hitting and fielding. His dream was to play professional baseball. During one summer he was invited to play on a highly competitive amateur team that traveled around the country. Only extremely
talented players got the opportunity to play on this very prestigious team. He played that summer and did exceptionally well, but some of the other players were jealous of him. They began to spread lies about him and stir up trouble. The next year the coach, even though he liked my friend very much, believed the rumors and didn’t invite him back to play. My friend was very discouraged. He tried to get on several other teams, but it was too late. They were already full. For the first time he didn’t have a summer team to play on. He missed the whole season—no games, no opportunities, a dark place. He didn’t understand it, and it wasn’t fair, but he didn’t get bitter. He knew the same God Who had led him to the quiet waters and green pastures was leading him through the valley.

Every night he would go to the batting cages and keep improving his skills. He’d have friends hit him balls so he could stay sharp in his fielding. He kept lifting weights, running, staying in shape. He had no team to play for, and he had not been treated right, but he knew that on the other side of the valley was the table already prepared for him. You have to go through the valley to get to the table. Don’t get stuck in the dark valley. Don’t lose your passion and have a sour attitude that says, “I don’t understand why this happened. After all these years, they laid me off.” “How could I get this bad medical report?” “Why did this person break my heart?” If you’re always trying to figure out why, you’re going to get stuck.

Think about this: an exclamation point is simply a question mark straightened out. If you want God to turn your question marks, the things you don’t understand, into exclamation points, you have to trust Him. In those dark places where it isn’t fair,
instead of wondering why something happened, dare to say, “God, I know You’re still on the throne. I may not understand this valley I’m in, but I know that on the other side is my exclamation point. The table is already prepared, the right people are waiting, a fresh anointing is coming with increase, promotion, and a new level.” If you go through the dark places like that, you’ll see that question mark turned into an exclamation point. God will amaze you with His goodness.

That’s what happened to us. When my father died, I had a lot of question marks. “Will the church make it? Can I really minister? Will anyone listen to me?” As I stayed in faith and went through the dark places with the right attitude, one by one God turned the question marks into exclamation points. “Will the church make it?” Yes, and here’s a Compaq Center to hold all the people—exclamation point. “Can I really minister? Will anyone listen to me?” Yes, and here are some TV networks that will carry your program, here are some number one books, and here is a SiriusXM satellite radio channel—exclamation point.

Blessings through Breakings

You may be in a dark place right now. You went through a breakup, and you’re hurt, lonely, wondering if you’ll ever be happy again. I can tell you firsthand—I’m a living witness—that if
you’ll keep moving forward, honoring God, He’ll bring somebody into your life who is better than you ever imagined—somebody kinder, friendlier, more loving, who’ll treat you like a king, a queen. The latter part of your life will be better than the first part. God has an exclamation point waiting for you.

Maybe you’re dealing with a sickness. You’ve been told that it doesn’t look good. Stay in faith—the exclamation point is coming. My mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and thirty-six years later, she’s still healthy and strong. That’s good, but here’s the exclamation point. Every week she goes to the hospital to pray for other sick people. That’s God making the enemy pay.

Perhaps you’re in a dark place in your finances. You had a setback or lost a client, and you’re wondering, Is it ever going to get better? Yes, on the other side of that valley you’re going to find your cup that runs over—increase, abundance, a new level of your destiny. You may have been in that valley for a long time, but you need to get ready. You’re about to see the breakthrough, and the problem is about to turn around. Don’t stop believing. Get your fire back, because God did not bring you this far to leave you. He has an exclamation point coming your way.

That’s what happened to my friend the baseball player. One day he was out practicing, minding his own business and improving his skills. What he didn’t know was that there was a scout for a professional team up in the stands. This scout was there to watch another player. But when he saw how talented my friend was, he called him over and said, “I’d like you to come try out for our team.” That was God putting him at
the right place at the right time. God knows how to get you
to your destiny. My friend went and tried out. He made the
team, played a few years in the minor leagues, kept moving
up, and went on to play in the big leagues. He had a long,
successful career.

People don’t determine your destiny, but God does. A bad
break can’t stop you, sickness can’t stop you, injustice can’t
stop you. God has the final say. If you’ll go through the dark
places with a good attitude and keep doing the right thing,
you will come into your exclamation point. You will see the
goodness of God.

When Jesus was about to feed a multitude of thousands
of people, He had a little boy’s lunch, just five loaves of bread
and two fish. He held the loaves up and gave thanks, and
then, the Scripture says, “He broke the loaves,” and the bread
was multiplied. Notice the blessing was in the breaking. The
more He broke it, the more it multiplied.

There are times in life when we feel broken: we have broken
dreams, a broken heart. When the young lady told me that
she had had a miscarriage, big tears ran down her beautiful
face. She said, “This baby is what I wanted more than any-
thing else.” She was broken. When I lost my father, I felt as
though a part of me had died. When you feel broken, don’t
get bitter, don’t give up on your dreams. That brokenness is
not the end; it’s a sign that God is about to multiply. That’s
what David said: “God enlarged me in my time of distress.”
That brokenness may have been meant to stop you, but if
you’ll stay in faith, God is going to use it to increase you.
The loss, the disappointment, the person who didn’t keep their
word—you feel the hurt, but the truth is that these were setting you up for God to increase you.

If you have gone through more than your share of bad breaks, take heart. The more broken you are, the more God is going to increase you. The bigger the disappointment, the bigger the blessing. The more they hurt you, the more He’s going to reward you. He has beauty for your ashes, joy for your mourning. The brokenness is only temporary. Don’t settle in the valley, don’t even get comfortable in the valley, for the valley is not your home. The Shepherd is leading you through the valley. On the other side is abundance, fullness of joy, great relationships, health and wholeness, and dreams coming to pass.

Bring Out the Greatness on the Inside

Jesus said, “Unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it will produce much fruit.” You can have a seed on your desk for a lifetime, but it will never become what it was created to be until you put it in the ground. Its potential will never be released until it’s been planted. As long as it’s on the desk where it’s comfortable and it doesn’t have to stretch or deal with any adversity, the seed’s potential will stay locked up on the inside. Only after it’s planted and goes through the process of germination—when the outer
shell breaks off and the new growth begins—will it blossom and bring forth much fruit. The problem with many people is that they want the fruit, but they don’t want to go through the process. They don’t want to be uncomfortable. They don’t want to have to stretch or deal with adversity, opposition, or betrayal. But without the dark place, your potential will stay locked on the inside. The seed cannot germinate in the light.

If you were to ask the seed, I’m sure it would say, “I don’t want to go into the dirt. It’s dark, it’s lonely, and it’s uncomfortable when people walk on top of me.” The seed feels as though it’s been buried, as though it’s the end, but what the seed doesn’t realize is that it’s not buried; it’s planted. It has the life of Almighty God on the inside. That dark place, even though it’s uncomfortable, is a critical part of the process. Over a period of time, once it germinates and grows, instead of being one little buried seed, it ends up being a beautiful flower, blossoming and bearing much fruit. If you were to ask the flower when it was fully in blossom, it would say, “I didn’t like the dark place, but I realize now it was a blessing. Look what it brought out of me. Look what I’ve become!”

There will be times in life when it feels as though you’re buried, and thoughts will tell you, *You’ve seen your best days.* That layoff ruined your career. That divorce tainted your future. This sickness is going to be the end of you. Have a new perspective. You’re not buried; you’re planted. If you never went through the dark place—the loneliness, the disappointment, the loss—you would
never discover what’s on the inside. Like that seed’s, your potential is about to be released. You’re not only going to come out of the darkness, you’re going to come out better, stronger, fully in blossom, and bearing much fruit. When you feel as if something is dying, it’s dark, you feel the pressure of the dirt, you don’t see a way out, that’s a sign that something new is about to come to life—new growth, new talent, new opportunities.

When my father went to be with the Lord, I felt as though I were buried. I could feel the pressure, but in that dark time, when something was dying, God was birthing something new. That’s when I discovered gifts and talents that I hadn’t known I had. I didn’t like the process, but that’s what caused me to blossom. None of us like to be planted; it’s uncomfortable, it’s lonely, but in those dark places you have to remind yourself that new growth is on the way. Even though it feels as if something is dying, something else is coming to life. You’re not buried; you’re planted. When you come out, you’re going to bear much fruit.

My challenge is for you to be willing to go through the process. Too many people get bitter, lose their passion, and get stuck with the unanswered question, “Why is this happening? I thought God was for me.” Dare to trust Him. He knows what He’s doing. He doesn’t send the difficulty, but He will use it. Don’t fight the dark places. There may be dirt all around you, it’s uncomfortable, but that dirt is not there to stop you. It’s there to bring out the greatness on the inside. If you’ll go through the dark places with a good attitude, God is going to take your question marks and turn them into exclamation
points. You will go through every valley and find a table that’s already set for you, a fresh anointing, and you’ll increase to where your cup runs over. You’re not buried; you’re planted. It’s just a matter of time before you break out and blossom into who you were created to be.