7 Days of Return

A free taste of the 33-day journal from
Silence Between the Words

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Before you begin

Seven days. Honesty, Fear, Shame, Control, Comparison, Numbing and Escape, Isolation. These are the first week of surrender from Part Five of *Silence Between the Words*, which runs thirty-three days in all.

Each day has the same shape: a question to start with, a passage of Scripture, a short teaching, four movements of questions (morning, midday, evening, night), a place to write your own prayer, and one truth to carry. Read the Scripture in your Bible, in context, before you read anything of mine.

Write by hand if you can. Something happens between the pen and the honesty that does not happen on a screen.

Do not chase the streak. If you miss four days, start where you are, on the next number. Nothing is riding on your consistency.

You will not answer all sixteen questions. Answer the ones that catch.

Translate what does not apply. If you are not married, or the marriage is over, every question about a wife is a question about the person closest to you.

This is for you. It is not a tool to use on anyone else, and it is not a formula. God is not a vending machine, and a practice cannot obligate Him. It simply puts you in the room where He is already speaking.

DAY 1 — HONESTY

Where am I lying to myself?

> *"Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place."*
>
> *Psalm 51:6*

Nothing moves until something is told the truth.

David wrote that psalm after the worst thing he ever did, and after roughly a year of getting away with it. He was still king. The kingdom was still running. And underneath it he was rotting, and he says so in the psalm before this one — my bones wasted away through my groaning all the day long.

That is the cost of a well-managed lie. Not exposure. Erosion.

God desires truth in the inward parts. Not truth in your public statements. Not the version you would give a pastor. The inward parts — the place where you already know, and where you have been carefully not looking.

Today is not about confessing to anyone else. That may come, and for some things it must. Today is only about stopping the internal negotiation, the endless editing of your own account of yourself.

You are safe to do this. That is what makes Christian honesty different from every other kind. You are not exposing yourself to a judge who is deciding your case. The case is decided. If you are His, there is no condemnation waiting at the bottom of your honesty. There is only Him, already there, already knowing, waiting for you to arrive at the truth He has been holding this whole time.

So write it plainly. Not I have been struggling. Not things have been hard. The actual sentence. The one with the real verb in it.

Day 1: Honesty — your turnings

SEE — MORNING

1. What is the one thing I have been carefully not looking at?
2. If I had to say it in one plain sentence, with no softening, what is true about me right now?
3. Where have I been performing — with my spouse, at work, at church, in prayer?
4. What would today look like if I stopped defending the version of me I present?

HEAR — MIDDAY

1. What have I told myself this morning that was not true?
2. Which of my explanations for my behavior is actually a defense?
3. What am I afraid would happen if someone saw the whole thing?
4. What does God already know that I have been pretending He does not?

FEEL — EVENING

1. What came up in me when I wrote the honest sentence — relief, fear, shame, grief?
2. Where did I feel it in my body?
3. What have I been using to keep from feeling this?
4. Was there a moment today where I told the truth and survived it?

KNOW — NIGHT

1. What do I know now that I did not know this morning?
2. What one honest thing do I need to say out loud to another person this week?
3. What did God not do when I told the truth — condemn me, leave, withdraw?
4. What am I handing Him before I sleep?

YOUR PRAYER

A TRUTH TO CARRY

God desires truth in the inward parts, and He desires it because He intends to meet me there. He has seen it all already, and He has not gone anywhere.

DAY 2 — FEAR

What am I protecting that God is asking me to hand over?

> *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*
> *Isaiah 41:10*

Almost everything destructive I have ever done was fear wearing something else's clothes.

The anger was fear with a weapon. The control was fear with a system. The isolation was fear with a good excuse. And every one of them presented to me as a personality trait rather than a fear, which is exactly how they survived so long.

Notice what God does not say in Isaiah 41. He does not say there is nothing to be afraid of. The people He is talking to had real enemies and real reasons. He says do not fear, for I am with you — and then gives four things He will do, all of them active, all of them His.

The antidote to fear in Scripture is never a technique for calming yourself. It is a Person's presence. Even the twenty-third psalm gets this exactly right: even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Not because the valley is safe. Because He is in it.

So today, do not try to stop being afraid. Try to name what you are afraid of, out loud, and then put it next to the fact that He is with you.

And watch for the disguises. If you flared up today, something underneath got frightened. Go find it.

Day 2: Fear — your turnings

SEE — MORNING

1. What am I actually afraid of today — not in general, specifically?
2. What have I built to keep that fear from touching me?
3. What would I do differently today if I believed He was with me in it?
4. What is one thing I can hand over before I leave the house?

HEAR — MIDDAY

1. Where did fear show up in the last few hours, and what costume was it wearing?
2. Did I control something today that I could have released?
3. What is the worst outcome I keep rehearsing?
4. What does God say about that outcome?

FEEL — EVENING

1. When I named the fear, what happened in me?
2. What am I still gripping?
3. Who did my fear cost something today?
4. Where did I experience His presence, even briefly?

KNOW — NIGHT

1. What did fear promise to protect me from, and has it ever actually delivered?
2. What did God do today that I did not do?
3. What am I laying down before sleep?
4. What is one fear I want to hand over again tomorrow, because I will take it back?

YOUR PRAYER

A TRUTH TO CARRY

He does not promise the valley will be short. He promises to be in it. Do not fear, for I am with you — that is the whole answer, and it is enough.

DAY 3 — SHAME

What do I believe I am, underneath what I have done?

> *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus…"*
>
> *Romans 8:1*

Guilt says I did something bad. Shame says I am something bad. They feel similar and they do completely different things to a man.

Guilt is useful. It is an alarm, it points at a specific act, and it has an exit — you confess it, you make it right where you can, and it is finished. Godly sorrow works repentance, and Paul says nobody regrets that.

Shame has no exit, because it is not about an act. It is a verdict on your whole self, and there is nothing to confess and nothing to repair. It just sits there. And here is what it does: it drives you away from the only place help is. Adam's first instinct after the fall was to hide from God, and every man since has inherited the reflex.

I have carried things I could not say for years, and the carrying did far more damage than the original event.

Romans 8:1 is a legal sentence and it is worth reading as one. There is therefore now no condemnation. Not less condemnation. Not condemnation deferred pending good behavior. None. Not because the charges were dropped, but because they were paid.

If what you are hearing about yourself has no door in it — no way forward, no specific thing to do, just a verdict on the whole of you — that is not God. Conviction from Him names one thing and points at a way out. Condemnation indicts everything and offers nothing. Learn the difference and you will save yourself years.

Day 3: Shame — your turnings

SEE — MORNING

1. What do I believe about myself that I have never said out loud?
2. How old is that belief — when did I first learn it?
3. Is that a verdict from God, or one I inherited?
4. What would today look like if there were genuinely no condemnation?

HEAR — MIDDAY

1. What voice have I been hearing about myself today?
2. Is it naming one thing with a way forward, or indicting all of me with no exit?
3. What am I still trying to earn back?
4. What has already been paid for that I keep making payments on?

FEEL — EVENING

1. Where did shame show up today, and what did I do to escape it?
2. Who do I avoid because of what they might see?
3. What did it feel like to read that there is no condemnation?
4. What part of me does not believe that yet?

KNOW — NIGHT

1. What is the difference between what I did and who I am?
2. What has God already said about who I am?
3. What one thing do I need to confess and be done with?
4. What am I refusing to receive as forgiven?

YOUR PRAYER

A TRUTH TO CARRY

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Not because the charge was false, but because it was paid in full by Someone else.

DAY 4 — CONTROL

What am I holding that was never mine to hold?

> *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."*
>
> *Proverbs 3:5–6*

Control is the most respectable addiction available to a man. Nobody stages an intervention for it. It looks like responsibility.

Mine did not feel like fear. It felt like competence. I had systems. I knew what was going to happen and I made sure of it, and when I could not make sure of it I got tight and cold and hard to be around, and I told myself that was just the pressure I was under.

Lean not on your own understanding is not an instruction to stop thinking. It is an instruction to stop treating your own analysis as the final authority — which is a different and much harder thing, because your analysis is usually pretty good, and that is exactly the problem.

Here is the test I use. Not what do I want to happen — everybody wants things. The test is: what am I unwilling to release even to God? Where does my prayer become a set of instructions?

Proverbs says in all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight. He makes them. Which means the path may go somewhere you would not have chosen, and the promise is not that you will approve of the route.

You cannot be led and be in charge at the same time. That is the entire choice, and you make it again every morning.

Day 4: Control — your turnings

SEE — MORNING

1. What am I trying to control today?
2. What outcome have I already decided on?
3. Where has my prayer become a set of instructions for God?
4. What is one thing I can genuinely release before noon?

HEAR — MIDDAY

1. Where did I tighten up today, and what triggered it?
2. What did I manage that I could have trusted Him with?
3. Who felt my control today?
4. What am I afraid would happen if I let go of this?

FEEL — EVENING

1. What does it feel like in my body when I am in control?
2. What does it feel like when I am not?
3. Where have I mistaken control for love?
4. What did I actually accomplish today by gripping?

KNOW — NIGHT

1. What did God handle today without my involvement?
2. What has He carried this year that I did not know about?
3. What am I handing back before sleep?
4. Where do I need to be led rather than in charge tomorrow?

YOUR PRAYER

A TRUTH TO CARRY

In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. He makes them. I walk them. I cannot be led and be in charge at the same time.

DAY 5 — COMPARISON

Whose life am I measuring mine against?

> *“Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load.”*
>
> *Galatians 6:4–5*

Comparison is theft that leaves the goods in place. Nothing is taken from you. You just stop being able to see what you have.

I have sat in a room containing everything I nearly lost forever — my wife, my children, a life I had no right to expect — and felt poor, because of something on a screen.

Paul's instruction is oddly practical. Prove your own work. Examine what is actually in front of you, on its own terms, without reference to anyone else's. And then the strange promise: then you will have rejoicing. Joy is available in your own life, but only when you stop grading it on a curve.

Comparison also lies about the data. You are comparing your interior to someone else's exterior. You know what your marriage is like at eleven at night. You are looking at their photograph.

And it aims at the wrong thing entirely. God is not conforming you to the image of a man you admire. He is conforming you to Christ, and your route there is yours, and it includes things that happened to you that did not happen to anyone else.

Today, look at what is actually in the room.

Day 5: Comparison — your turnings

SEE — MORNING

1. Who am I comparing myself to right now?
2. What am I comparing — my inside to their outside?
3. What is actually in my life today that I have stopped seeing?
4. What would it look like to prove my own work today?

HEAR — MIDDAY

1. What did I scroll past that took something from me?
2. What did I want because someone else had it?
3. Whose approval am I actually chasing?
4. What has God given me that I have not thanked Him for?

FEEL — EVENING

1. What does comparison feel like when it lands?
2. What do I feel toward the person I compare myself to?
3. What did I miss today because I was measuring?
4. What in my own life did I see clearly today?

KNOW — NIGHT

1. What is God actually doing in my life that is not happening in anyone else's?
2. What burden is mine to bear that no one else can?
3. What am I grateful for that is specifically mine?
4. What comparison do I need to stop tomorrow — and what will I stop looking at to do it?

YOUR PRAYER

A TRUTH TO CARRY

Every man shall bear his own burden. My route is mine. God is not making me into someone I admire; He is making me like His Son, and He is using the exact life I have.

DAY 6 — NUMBING AND ESCAPE

Where do I go when I do not want to feel this?

> *"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."*
>
> *1 Corinthians 10:13*

Everyone has an exit. Some are illegal, some are respectable, and they perform the same function.

Mine was chemical for a long time. It has also been work, and a screen, and food, and a productive-looking busyness that nobody would have questioned. The substance is not the issue. The issue is the moment just before — the second when something surfaces that you do not want to feel, and you reach.

Watch that second today. That is the entire assignment. Not the reaching. The second before.

Paul says two things that took me years to hold together. First, the temptation is common — you are not uniquely broken, and the shame you feel about it is doing you no good at all. Second, there is always a way out, and God is faithful to make one.

But read the last clause carefully, because I misread it for years. That you may be able to bear it. The way of escape is not always the removal of the feeling. Sometimes it is the capacity to stay in the feeling without reaching. That is what bearing it means.

So today: notice the reach, and stay one minute longer than is comfortable. One minute. Then tell God what you found underneath.

Day 6: Numbing and Escape — your turnings

SEE — MORNING

1. What do I reach for when I do not want to feel something?
2. What am I usually avoiding in that moment?
3. What time of day is my reach strongest?
4. What could I do instead in the ten seconds before?

HEAR — MIDDAY

1. What have I already reached for today?
2. What surfaced just before I reached?
3. What would it cost me to feel that thing for sixty seconds?
4. Who could I text right now instead?

FEEL — EVENING

1. What did I feel today that I did not escape?
2. What was underneath it?
3. What did the escape actually give me — and for how long?
4. What is the feeling I am most unwilling to have?

KNOW — NIGHT

1. What have I learned about my own pattern today?
2. What way out did God make that I did not take?
3. Who is the one person I need to tell about this?
4. What am I asking Him to carry tonight instead of numbing?

YOUR PRAYER

A TRUTH TO CARRY

The way of escape is not always the removal of the feeling. Sometimes it is the strength to bear it. God is faithful, and He makes one.

DAY 7 — ISOLATION

Who actually knows the whole thing?

> *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”*
>
> *James 5:16*

I did the entire collapse alone. That is not incidental. It is most of the explanation.

Isolation is not the same as solitude. Solitude is being alone with God and it is good for you. Isolation is being alone with yourself and it is where every bad thing I have ever done was planned.

And it does not look like isolation from the outside. I had people around constantly. What I did not have was a single person who knew the whole thing, and a man surrounded by people who know eighty percent of him is alone in the only sense that matters.

James says confess to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. Note the connection: healing is in the sentence with the confessing. Not forgiveness — you get that from God directly. Healing. Some things do not heal in private. They stay sealed and they get worse under the seal.

Solomon says two are better than one, because if either of them falls down, one can help the other up — but pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.

So the question today is not do I have friends. It is: is there one person who knows the whole thing? If the answer is no, that is the most urgent item in your life, more urgent than anything else in this journal.

Day 7: Isolation — your turnings

SEE — MORNING

1. Who knows the whole thing about me?
2. If the answer is no one, who is the most likely candidate?
3. What specifically am I keeping sealed?
4. What is the smallest true thing I could tell someone today?

HEAR — MIDDAY

1. Have I isolated today — physically, or by going quiet inside a crowd?
2. What did I decide not to say?
3. Who reached out to me recently that I did not answer?
4. What am I afraid they would think?

FEEL — EVENING

1. What does it feel like to be known partially?
2. When was the last time I felt genuinely known?
3. What did I do today that I would not want anyone to see?
4. Who did I let in, even slightly?

KNOW — NIGHT

1. What has isolation cost me over the years?
2. What did God do through another person today?
3. What one call or message am I making this week?
4. What am I asking Him to give me the courage to say?

YOUR PRAYER

A TRUTH TO CARRY

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed. Some things do not heal in private. That is the design, not a weakness in me.

Where this goes next

Days one through eight are surrender. Nine through sixteen are the renewing of the mind. Seventeen through twenty-four are obedience, where it reaches your hands. Twenty-five through thirty-two are what emerges. Day thirty-three is the return.

Tomorrow's day is the one you are on. If you want to keep going, the full thirty-three days live in *Silence Between the Words*, the memoir this journal comes from, along with the story of how I nearly traded my Redeemer for a method.

Find it on Amazon: **Silence Between the Words** by Dylan L. Gordon. If it helps you, an honest review helps someone else find it. Whatever you honestly think is welcome.

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