

Season 3 | Episode 27

Singing in the Dark

Ginny Owens

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Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating, and this is the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week we're bringing you real conversations about disability and finding hope through hardship and sharing practical ways that you can include people living with disability in your church and community. Be sure to subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts or find us at joniandfriends.org/podcast.

We all experience darkness. Perhaps the darkness has come in the form of a painful loss, a chronic or terminal illness, deep loneliness, addiction, or perpetual anxiety and sadness. Whether you resonate with one of these categories or not, because you're a human being, you know what it is to do battle with darkness. And to help us find hope and help through life's dark and challenging circumstances, I'm joined again by singer-songwriter and author, Ginny Owens. Welcome back to the podcast, Ginny.

Ginny Owens:

Oh thanks, Crystal. It's great to be back.

Crystal Keating:

It's very nice to speak with you again. In our last conversation, we focused on finding the light of Jesus through darkness. And the reason we're focusing on the concept of darkness is because Ginny, you've been blind since the age of three and the darkness you've experienced is literal, and yet you've recognized that darkness is something that all of us as human beings face. And because of that, you've written a new book called *Singing in the Dark*. I would love if you could tell us a little bit about it and talk about why it's been so significant for you to write this.

Ginny Owens:

Yes. Well, on the most basic level, I have lived most of my life in the dark as it were, as a blind person. I've also been singing for nearly all of my life. So there are a lot of stories in this book that tell the readers what it would mean to sing amidst difficult situations, rise above our pain, our suffering. But not only does this book talk about my own personal story of finding hope in my very difficult challenges in life, but most importantly, we look at 10 songs and stories from scripture and we explore just how did the Lord empower his people with song? So in some cases it's literal song, in some cases it's how did he help his people learn to trust him despite their overwhelming circumstances? And my hope and prayer is that through this book, folks will learn how to find hope and the practice of singing God's truth in their lives with whatever circumstances they're facing.



Crystal Keating:

That is so good. Well, another concept that you focus on is rest. In our last conversation, we talked about contentment, but in the book you talk about finding rest. And that's a hard one, especially with how exhausting the last year and a half has been for so many people, myself included. And so the idea of finding rest, where your soul is at peace and you feel connected with God, what does pursuing true rest look like for you?

Ginny Owens:

I feel like I have to have a date with rest every week and even every day. And I think one of the things we talked about too last time as you mentioned was just cultivating friendship with Christ, with our heavenly Father and seeing our relationship with Him as our dearest, deepest, best, most wonderful friend who empowers us and changes us and moves us to be more like him. So I do think part of the way that we grasp that friendship is to rest in it. So it means that we've got to set up time to do that. Sometimes it happens naturally, but as crazy as most of our lives are, I've found that I've got to set aside that time. So part of it is having time to be with him and meditate on his word a little bit each day.

Sundays are my rest day, and I really developed this during COVID time a lot. To me, rest is not the same as vegging out on your couch, watching Netflix. To me, that's kind of the opposite of rest. I think rest has to be planned. So one of the things I love to do is really to take a part of scripture and meditate on it. Ask what it's saying to me about who God is, about what he wants to show me about who I am, learn those things and just take that time to kind of slowly meditate on it, to think through it. I think part of rest again is giving ourselves to him and pouring out what's going on, laying that before him, because we can't carry it around. I mean, part of the way we rest is to get rid of our burdens. So that's part of it.

And then I also think a key part of that, at least for me, is to be in the space of others who help bring that rest. Being in school and then being on the road a lot, I don't have too much time during the week for things that feel restful, so on Sundays I will spend time walking in the park with a friend or having lunch or dinner and just listening and talking to them, and even just that encouragement is very restful. And even just enjoying nature, being out. So much of rest is about observing creation, marvel at what God has done and to rest and bask in it.

Crystal Keating:

That's really good. So you're saying be intentional about rest.

Ginny Owens:

Yes.

Crystal Keating:

Make your rest a time where you slow down, think about the Lord, and you spend time with people who are life-giving, who are hope-giving, who can help you reconnect with the one who promised rest.

Ginny Owens:

Yes.



Crystal Keating:

What did Jesus say? Come to me all ye who are weary and heavy-laden. Sign me up Lord. And I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. And you said something so profound, that part of rest is also getting rid of your burdens.

Ginny Owens:

Yes.

Crystal Keating:

And he says to cast our cares on the Lord for he cares for us. I can see how that is a time where you have to slow down and really give those to the Lord and trust that he is taking them on and shouldering them.

Ginny Owens:

Absolutely. I often tell people to visualize it somehow, like either that you're laying those burdens on the shoulders of Jesus who promises you that he's strong enough to carry them, or that you're laying them at the foot of the cross. You're just taking them all off your shoulders and placing them there at the foot of the cross. But yes, part of rest is releasing those burdens for sure.

Crystal Keating:

In opposition to that, you talk really openly about your journey of restlessness. You were living out your dream, but really burning out in the process. So for those of us who feel like our lives are just running too fast, how do we find rest in Christ, putting our trust in God instead of ourselves?

Ginny Owens:

You know, I think it takes practice, I think it takes cultivation, and I think, again, there's a theme here, I think part of it is about speaking his rest over us. So taking his words to us in scripture, like as you were just reading about coming to him, all who are heavy-laden and burdened and he will give us rest. So memorizing those words, and in the midst of our anxiety, in the midst of our hectic lives, speaking those words over our lives until the Holy Spirit really does a work in our hearts where we get it. And I think as we start to do that, then we start to more naturally give those burdens to him. But I think in order to fight our way through the struggle, we have to remember that the noise of the world is loud. The busy-ness of the world is so loud.

So there's something about just learning how to hand those things over, it's slowly at first. But I always like to encourage people, anything that is good that we want to do is hard at first. It requires some effort, it requires some trainings, some discipline. And I do think the Holy Spirit will do mighty work in our lives as we are learning again and again to lay those burdens at Jesus' feet. So yeah, I think there's something about just cultivating that practice of memorizing what does he say to us about his place in our lives, his power in our lives, and his ability to give us rest? And then as we speak those words over our lives, we change.



Crystal Keating:

Well, and you bring up the power of the Spirit. It's so comforting to know we're not alone in this process, we don't have to just gut it out, that he has sent his Spirit to live within us, to encourage us, to help us. And I find a lot of rest even just in that.

Well, Ginny, you are a worshiper of God, not just in song, but in heart. And so I think for you worship even in the hard times has really given you like a renewed hope and perspective. How does that work for you? How do you kind of press into the Lord through worship?

Ginny Owens:

You know, I think for me it's so much about creating space to meet with God and that has to happen... In order to worship him, I have to know who he is, I have to hear from him. For me, that is first thing in the morning, there's a time for worship. There's a quiet time of reading and of worshiping and of thanking him for the big and the small ways that he's been part of my life.

This week I have just also seen the power of the musical aspect, the song aspect of worship in not only my own life as I've written some songs about God's faithfulness, but also in the lives of others as I've seen people who have been carrying around some very heavy burdens be able to release those as they sing God's truth over their lives. I've heard people say that songs are our portable theology. So when you think about just singing truth over ourselves, whether it's a Psalm that is lifted from scripture or whether it's a song that we're singing at church on Sunday and then carrying with us through the week, I think just as those songs become more on repeat, our natural response to those words is worship to God.

Crystal Keating:

You know, I used to live with a dear, dear roommate for many years and she is a lovely Christian, and one of the disciplines for her in the morning was she would get out of bed and grab her hymnal and read a couple of hymns. She wouldn't sing it. She probably would say she didn't have a great voice, but as you're saying songs are a portable theology, she would read it to remind herself the great truths of God and how much more powerful when we're listening to it and we're singing it ourselves. It's almost like we're proclaiming, this is true about you, this is true about life, this is true about us. It's like that song, I'm going to raise a hallelujah in the face of hard circumstances and the face of my enemies. You talked a little bit about that in our last conversation, just how praise is... how God has sort of entered victory throughout scripture, that people worshiping Him actually has a spiritual power to it.

Ginny Owens:

Yes, yes. And I think that is why singing and the idea of singing is so prominent in scripture because there's something about, even for those of us who would say we can't carry a tune, there's something about music and the way that it gets something into our hearts and minds that is different than all other mediums of communication. Just to think about the fact that when you sing something, your mind sort of resonates with the melody and maybe you're kind of trying to sing along and your body moves with the rhythm and your heart keeps turning the lyrics over and over as you sing. It's a full body experience when we sing, and so I think that is why singing is such a part of worship.



Crystal Keating:

Well, in our last conversation you talked about the joyful discipline of gratitude, of at the end of the day reflecting upon all God has done. And at the end of every chapter of your book, *Singing in the Dark*, there's actually space for reflection and journaling. For you, how has that act of meditation, reflection, and journaling been a part of your life and how can folks take steps to start journaling, even if it feels hard or maybe a little awkward, or maybe not something that's quite natural for them?

Ginny Owens:

Yes. You know, it's not really natural for me.

Crystal Keating:

Okay.

Ginny Owens:

Even now. I feel like I'm always a little impatient or ready to get onto the next thing, but I think it goes back to, as we've been talking about the idea of practicing rest, of practicing gratitude, of even trusting that Jesus is our best and dearest friend, we have to sort of reflect on those things to get them into our hearts. So what I always tell people is maybe your first few days of journaling are going to be kind of just empty words. I had steak for dinner last night, or thank you, Lord, for another day. But what I find is that as you show up for that practice each day, the words begin to write themselves. And a lot of times I do journaling in the context of my prayer time. So as I'm reading through scripture, I'll write a sentence about, okay, what is this chapter saying to me about who God is and about how he spoke to his people then and how he's speaking to me now?

So that way it doesn't have to be a free write. I can ask myself some questions, have some prompts as I'm going. But I do find that as I write, I feel like God is speaking to me. He's showing me what he's saying in that scripture. Or he's showing me some words from a song or some words to add into a song. So I think journaling is a wonderful way to reflect, whether you write one line or 20 pages. So I would just say, just having that as a part of your morning routine can just be a beautiful way to begin your worship at the beginning of the day.

Crystal Keating:

That's so good. Well, as we close our time together, if listeners want to learn more about your story, listen to your fabulous music, and purchase a copy of your book, *Singing in the Dark*, where should they go?

Ginny Owens:

They can go to ginnyowens.com. That is G-I-N-N-Y-O-W-E-N-S dot com and we are also on all the places like Instagram @GinnyOwensOfficial and Facebook @GinnyOwensMusic. So very findable everywhere.

Crystal Keating:

Good. Well, I encourage our listeners if you've been moved by Ginny's story and her encouragement just as I have, you'll be able to find her and enjoy some of her music and get a

copy of the book, *Singing in the Dark*. You will be deeply inspired and encouraged. Ginny, thanks so much for joining us on the podcast today.

Ginny Owens:

Thank you so much for having me.

Crystal Keating:

Thank you for listening today. If you've been inspired, please send me a message or leave a five-star review on your favorite app. That's a great way to help other people find encouragement from these conversations. And to get our next episode automatically, subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts. I'm Crystal Keating and thank you for listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast.

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