WEEK 4

For outlandish creatures like us, on our way to a heart, a brain, and courage, Bethlehem is not the end of our journey but only the beginning—not home but the place through which we must pass if ever we are to reach home at last.

FREDERICK BUECHNER

AGAIN JESUS SPOKE to THEM, SAYING,

"I AM the LIGHT of the WORLD. WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME WILL NOT WALK in DARKNESS, BUT WILL HAVE the LIGHT of LIFE"

JOHN 8:12

ESV

W4 | D1

NIGHT SKIES AND DARK PATHS

SCOTT JAMES

is an elder at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama, and the author of children's books and family devotionals, including *The Sower*, *The Expected One*, and, releasing in early 2026, *Deep Breath, Little Whisper*. He is also a pediatric doctor.

When I stepped from my tent into total darkness, the night was a void that felt expansive and oppressive all at once. Toeing my way forward, I sensed a canopy of trees above—an imagined imprint of the forest I knew to be there. Before the sun had given way to a lightless crescent moon, I had taken a mental snapshot of my surroundings, and it was with this vague and unfounded sense of direction that I stepped carefully ahead, slow and patient, hands outstretched.

I had the odd realization that it didn't matter where I looked. Eyes forward gave no benefit in this darkness, so I let my purblind gaze wander. As I did, I caught the briefest flicker of light. Somewhere up and far. Angling my head skyward, I caught another pinprick. Stars, here and there, peeking through sprawling tree boughs. Now more appeared, and with increasing regularity the closer I drew to the edge of the woods.

Finally, I shuffled into an open field, and the sky exploded in celestial glory. I was not prepared for the vast greatness of this, the unsullied beauty of a wilderness nightscape. The heavens declared, and I heard it loud and clear.

The eerie thing was, as I gazed upward at the brilliant spectacle, the immediate darkness in which I stood was just as absolute as it had been in the forest. Up there, the stars in their courses lit the sky in galactic explosions.

Down here, I still couldn't see past the end of my nose. I stood in that strange discordance—immersed in the dark yet basking in heavenly light.

I thought of Abraham, the spiritual father of stargazers everywhere. When he stood in the wilderness and tilted his face skyward, surely his nights were darker and his constellations brighter than any we see today. I imagined God calling Abraham, scattering visible signs of kingdom promise across the blue-black sky. *Look to the heavens. Count the stars, if you can; that's how generously I will bless you.* I imagined Abraham's stunned face.

Abraham held a promise as clear as the night sky, but his immediate path still led through dark terrain. He stepped forward in faith, hands outstretched, trusting God to steady his steps when he couldn't see the way. Awash in starlight, Abraham believed God even as he fumbled through the dark. Each flickering star pierced the night, reminding him of the comforting voice that said, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield" (Gen. 15:1).

Looking to God, trusting him to keep his promises in his own perfect time, Abraham toed his way forward in the darkness of a fallen world, eyes fixed on the inbreaking of God's light. And "Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise" (Heb. 6:15, ESV). Ultimately, all of Abraham's faithful stargazing was fulfilled in Jesus, the Light of the World—the one in whom "all the promises of God find their Yes" (John 8:12; 2 Cor. 1:20, ESV).

This is how we wait too. We stand in the night, gazing up at stars of unfailing promise. Sometimes the darkness

SOMETIMES THE DARKNESS OF OUR PATHS IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE, BUT THE FAITHFULNESS OF OUR GUIDE IS UNWAVERING.

of our paths is incomprehensible, but the faithfulness of our Guide is unwavering. And as we look to Jesus and await his glorious return, we can always trust him to steady our steps and to lead us "out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9).