

Learning to Walk in the Dark Self Study

Introduction Through Chapter Three

Please ponder and reflect on the following questions. Remember, you set your own pace and you do not have to agree with what you read. If your views don't correspond with Barbara Brown Taylor's, that is okay! Ask yourself why that is and establish your own position. For any questions, or to discuss what you have read, please contact Pastor Bryson or anyone else doing this self-study. ENJOY!

Introduction

- Do you settle on a quick fix when it comes to avoiding fear (pg. 3)? What are some examples from your life? Can you think of any social examples of the desire for the quick fix? Is leaving the light on artificially really the answer?

- What do you mean when you think of darkness (pg.4)? Be specific. What are the color are your monster's eyes, so to speak?

- What do you think of Taylor's comparison of Lunar Spirituality vs. Solar Spirituality (pgs. 9-13)? Where do you align? Are there things in the dark that we can only learn in the light?

Chapter One

- How do you think Barbara's lack of religious exposure as a child affected her understanding of the dark (pg. 29)? How did your childhood experience of religion affect your adult views?

- After Taylor's experience with Anna (pg. 35), she suggests that sometimes adults should let kids walk in the dark rather than bask in a false light. Do you think God operates that way with us?

- Would you agree that “courage is the management of fear (pg. 37)?” What circumstances are the greatest challenge to your courage?

Chapter Two

- Is there any virtue to “full solar Christianity” that emphasizes being scared straight (pg. 41-42)?

- What did you think of the concept of *araphel* (pg. 47-48)? How do you respond to the idea behind “the fear of God”? Do you think most people can handle this nuanced picture of God that includes both darkness and light?

- Taylor unexpectedly finds a bar named Dante’s to be a place of solace (pg. 50-53). What are some of the places in our lives, where we pause long enough to recognize one another ask kin?

Chapter Three

- Do you believe we lose something, when we cannot experience the night? Do you believe, as Taylor does, that the way you light the night is a reflection of your relationship to your own inner darkness?

- Do you think humans “need the dark” as Taylor believes (pg. 58-61)?

- After reading about Taylor’s experience with the stranded turtle, have you ever wondered whether you were being killed or saved by the hands that were turning your life upside down?

What other thoughts do you have after finishing these chapters? Please feel free to journal them below:

Chapters Four through Seven

Chapter Four

- How do you handle the “Dark Emotions” (pg. 77-78) of grief, fear, despair, etc.? Have you been forced to “spiritually bypass” them? What “artificial lights” have you had to endure?

- According to Brown-Taylor on pgs. 84-85, “Night taught me the importance of letting emotions flow.” Do dark times allow you this ability? What could you do to better explore and allow yourself to feel what you are feeling?

- (Pg. 86) Carl Jung told us that in order to become integrated we must embrace our shadow side. What are the dangers and difficulties of accessing your dark side? What experiences might help you become more “integrated” (In other words, able to experience the best of the dark and the light)?

Chapter Five

- After Brown-Taylor begins the “Dialogue with the Dark” experience, she learns the difficulty of filtering her sensory feedback. In a world of a countless images and so many sounds, how do you filter out things in order to be able to focus on what is important?

- On pg. 93, Brown-Taylor says, “With the day’s barrage of sights and sounds toned down, it is possible to savor things that slip right past me in the light” Could eating in the dark teach us a similar

lesson? Are there other “dark” experiences that might also teach us? What about worshipping in the dark?

- How much is our ability to make judgments related to our visual perception? Are other forms of perception more important to judgement than sight?

Chapter Six

- Have you ever spent any time in caves? What about a cave might conducive to a spiritual experience?
- On pg. 126, Brown-Taylor says, “As long as you stay on the path you cannot get lost — in time, maybe, but not in space. The path is circular. The way out is the way in. The path, like the cave, never changes. It is literally set in stone. Only the walker changes, not by looking back but by moving ahead, trusting the path to teach her what she needs to know.” How is this like your spiritual journey with Christ?
- On pg. 129, Brown-Taylor says, “new life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark.” Have you ever thought of the resurrection occurring in the dark? What other new life starts in the dark?

Chapter Seven

- “Like darkness itself, the dark night of the soul means different things to different people” (pg. 134-135). What does this mean to you? Have you ever experienced a dark night of the soul? What circumstances seemed to trigger it? How did you get through it?
- What do you make of St. John of the Cross’s assertion that God is *nada*, or “no thing” (pg. 137-138)?
- Have you experienced the “sacrament of defeat” (pg. 144) Where are you on your spiritual journey?

What other thoughts do you have after finishing these chapters? Please feel free to journal them below

Chapters Eight through Epilogue

Chapter Eight

- On pgs. 150-152, Brown-Taylor discusses researchers looking into humanity's original sleep patterns. They determined, without artificial light, many people slept longer hours and spent much more time "neither actively awake nor soundly asleep. Their body chemistry hovered somewhere in between, just like their brain waves did." This leads to profound dreaming. Does your dream life play any role in your spiritual life? What might be the link between altered states of consciousness and the experience of the divine?

- Sabbath (pgs. 168-169) is a notion that has all but disappeared in our modern culture. What wisdom do you think there was in starting the Sabbath at Sundown? What if we prepared for our day of rest like we prepare for a holiday or special event? How has the "separating of things" resulted in judgments about good and bad?

- How does nature figure into your spirituality? Is loving creation the same as loving God? What special significance does the moon have for women's spirituality?

Chapter Nine

- Are there any things, like watching a moonrise, that you have been too busy to do for twenty years? When our lives get off track, how do we set them right?

- For you, what is the most frightening part of “nothing?” How might your life be different if you had more time to rest? What do you still need to do? What would happen, if it didn’t get done?

- How much of your own spirituality is seasonal movement? Is it a literal movement with nature? A spiritual ebb and flow? What affect does the light and dark, and change of seasons have on you? What is your favorite image from nature? How does this link to your spiritual life?

Epilogue

- On pg. 185, Brown-Taylor says “This is not a how-to book, but if it were, the only instructions would be to become more curious about your own darkness.” Has this book made you curious about your own darkness? What have you learned from this experience? Please reflect.