

Learning To Walk In The Dark

What if it is while we are in the dark, that we grow the most?



I knew that Jesus had spent significant time in caves, along with Saint Patrick and Saint Francis. What drew them to those dark places, which others worked so hard to stay out of, and what did they find there that made them go back?

Welcome and Opening:



To Know The Dark
by Wendell Berry

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

Covenant:

- I will be open to hearing new truths and new possibilities.
- I will actively listen, even if I do not share the same perspective, in case God is opening me to a new revelation.
- I will pass if I am uncomfortable with sharing and will allow others to do the same without judgement.
- I will use I statements, as I can only speak for myself.
- I will not interrupt when someone else is speaking.
- I will not interpret what someone else is speaking.
- I will be brief when sharing to allow others an opportunity to share.
- I agree to keep confidential others stories, as they are not mine but theirs to share
- I agree that two opposing viewpoints can both be true

Guided Meditation:

Close your eyes and settle into a quiet, interior, space within ...

Now, take a moment to note anything you felt, heard, sensed, or saw that brought you insight, clarity, or peace ...

Introspection



In the Buddhist view, even panic can be instructive. Wasn't that what I taught students in my world religious class? Learn to watch your thoughts; I coached those who wanted to meditate. Notice how your mind leaps from thought to thought, creating emotions as it goes. Pay attention to which thoughts give rise to these feelings, and what causes them to recede again. Do not judge yourself, and do not forget to breathe. Rehearsing all this in my mind, I realized how entirely theoretical it was. There was no telling whether it would work if I got stuck in an actual squeeze.

In caving a "squeeze" is a tight place. When you are stuck in one, the best thing to do is to study the rock. Since it is not letting you go anywhere, you might as well pay attention to where you are. How tight is the squeeze, exactly? Where on your body do you feel it most acutely?

⊕ How might these instructions help us deal with the "squeezes" in our personal lives?

The Path

Since my lamp is off, I think about how many hours I have spent in therapy instead, doing more or less the same thing: walking around the boulders of my childhood to see how they look from every angle, peering down into the holes where I spent months in the dark, wondering why the handholds I can see from the top were invisible from the bottom. The difference between the therapy and the cave is that the therapy wants me to look back so I can find another way out, not so I can return the same way I came. Maybe that makes the cave more like a labyrinth. 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 them what they need to know.

THE RUBEN L. F. HABITO LABYRINTH
A PATH TO THE SACRED

LABYRINTHS are ancient human symbols that date back more than 4,000 years. For many Christians, labyrinths held a specific purpose: they served as a way to make a sacred pilgrimage even if one could not undertake an actual journey to a holy place (the shrine of a saint) or to the Holy Land. They engaged the body, the soul, and the mind—focusing upon movement along a defined path toward the center, and back again. Today, labyrinths are used for prayer, introspection, meditation, centering, or relaxation.

HOW TO WALK THE LABYRINTH:

1. **Preparation:** Take a deep breath or pause for a moment of silence, clearing your body and mind, as you approach the entrance to the labyrinth.
2. **The Journey Inwards:** As you follow the path toward the center, go at your own pace, and use the time to pray, listen, reflect, and feel. One step at a time, let yourself lose track of the outside world as you move toward the center.
3. **At the Center:** As you linger in this space, considered the most sacred of the labyrinth, receive what is there for you to receive.
4. **The Return Journey:** Reflect on what you have learned, and let yourself feel gratitude for the journey and insights. Remember them as you re-enter the world.

Scan this QR code to learn more about the Habito Labyrinth.
Or visit www.smu.edu/perkins/labyrinth

Unlike a maze, the labyrinth is not a puzzle and does not have dead ends. The labyrinth is one single-coiled pathway leading toward a center and then back to the world again. To follow the way of faith in a labyrinth is to journey to the sacred center and then return, renewed, to the world.

- Have you ever repeated a spiritual journey and why do you believe that has happened?
- What did you do differently the second, fourth or perhaps tenth time?
- Can the way out, be the way in? Why?

Table Sharing >



Jesus was born in a cave and rose from the dead in a cave. By all accounts, a stone blocked the entrance to the cave so that there were no witnesses to the resurrection. Everyone who saw the risen Jesus saw him after. Whatever happened in the cave happened in the dark. Resurrection, if it happened, it happened in a cave, it happened in complete silence, in absolute darkness, with the smell of damp stone and dug earth in the air. Let this sink in: New life begins 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.

After reading the quote aloud in your table group, please take turns sharing EITHER:

- How is this like the walk of faith? How is it not?
- How has the silence of God motivated you into a resurrection moment?
- Share about a time when darkness birthed new life in your spiritual life.
- Share about a time when others have noticed a difference in you, in which you may have been oblivious too, as or after you experienced a cave moment.

Going Deeper >

The stone is alive but only in the dark...When I entered the cave hoping for a glimpse of celestial brightness, it never occurred to me that it might be so small. But here it is, not much bigger than a mustard seed - everything I need to remember how much my ideas get in the way. While I am looking for something large, bright, and unmistakably holy, God slips something small dark, and apparently negligible in my pocket. How many other treasures have I walked right by because they did not meet my standards? At least one of the day's lessons is about learning to let go of my bright ideas about God so that my eyes are open to the God who is.



Living into lunar spirituality and endarkenment allows us the freedom to embrace those feelings, things and ideas that resonate as true to our spirit and reject those feelings, things and ideas that injury our souls. If it is true that darkness may save us, and we embrace endarkenment as we have the light, how would your life, faith and way of being shift as we consider...

...

- ❖ We may have walked right past treasures, blessings, grace moments because they did not meet our standards.
- ❖ We may need to practice releasing our ideas about God, in order to experience God.
- ❖ The holy often arrives in small doses in the darkness.



Affirmation:

Maybe that is the difference between pastoral counselors and spiritual directors. We go to counselors when we want help getting out of caves. We go to directors when we are ready to be led farther in. I hope I can remember that the next time someone comes to me with a cave problem. The way out is the way in.

Closing:

Pushing Through
by Rainer Maria Rilke
(Translated by Robert Bly)

It's possible I am pushing through solid rock
in flint like layers, as the ore lies, alone;
I am such a long way in I see no way through,
and no space: everything is close to my face,
and everything close to my face is stone.

I don't have much knowledge yet in grief
so this massive darkness makes me small.
You be the master: make yourself fierce, break in:
then your great transforming will happen to me,
and my great grief cry will happen to you.

