

# Learning To Move In The Dark

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



Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you are not lost. Wherever you are, is called here, and you must treat it as a powerful stranger, must ask permission to know it and be known. David Wagoner

Welcome and Opening Prayer:

*St. John Of The Cross*

On a dark night,  
Kindled in love with yearnings  
—oh, happy chance!—  
I went forth without being observed,  
My house being now at rest.  
In darkness and secure,  
By the secret ladder, disguised  
—oh, happy chance!—

In darkness and in concealment,  
My house being now at rest.  
In the happy night,  
In secret, when none saw me,  
Nor I beheld aught,  
Without light or guide,  
save that which burned in my heart.

This light guided me  
More surely than the light of noonday  
To the place where he (well I knew who!) was  
awaiting me—  
A place where none appeared.

Oh, night that guided me,  
Oh, night more lovely than the dawn,  
Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover,  
Lover transformed in the Beloved!

Upon my flowery breast,  
Kept wholly for himself alone,  
There he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him,  
And the fanning of the cedars made a breeze.

The breeze blew from the turret  
As I parted his locks;  
With his gentle hand he wounded my neck  
And caused all my senses to be suspended.

I remained, lost in oblivion;  
My face I reclined on the Beloved.  
All ceased and I abandoned myself,  
Leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies.

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 re-interpret when 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

Like darkness itself, the dark night of the soul means different things to different people. Some use the phrase to describe the time following a great loss, while others remember it as the time leading up to a difficult decision. Whatever the circumstances, what the stories have in common is their description of a time when the soul was severely tested, often to the point of losing faith, by circumstances beyond all control. No one chooses the dark night; the dark night descends.

- ⊕ How do you understand the meaning of the term, dark night of the soul?
- ⊕ During a dark night of the soul, have you surrendered? Resisted? Why?

## The Only Way Out

When it does, the reality that troubles the soul the most is the apparent absence of God. If God is light, then God is gone. There is no soft glowing space of safety in this dark night. There is no comforting sound coming out of it, reassuring the soul that all will be well. Even if comforting friends come around to see how you are doing, they are about as much help as the friends who visited Job on this ash heap. There is an impenetrability to this darkness that isolates the soul inside it. For good or ill, no one can do your work for you while you are in the dark place. It has your name all over it, and the only way out is through... One of the hardest things to decide during a dark night is whether to surrender or resist. The choice often comes down to what you believe about God and how God acts, which means that every dark night of the soul involves wrestling with belief.



- When you read “dark night of the soul,” what images, feelings, or thoughts come to your mind?
- What does your reaction reveal about your belief in who God is and how God is supposed to act?

## Table Sharing



St. John of the Cross, teaches by saying what God is not, hoping to convince his readers that their images of and ideas about "God" are in fact obstacles between them and the Real Thing. If this is a disappointment to some of John's readers, it comes as a great relief to others.

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

- How can learning what God is not expand our understanding of who, what, how, where and why God is?
- How can our preconceived ideas of who, what, how, where and why God is become obstacles to knowing the real thing? Why?

Going Deeper >

The old ways of being Christians are not working anymore, not even for those who are old themselves. Something in the ways has died, or is dying - truly cause for great sorrow, even among those who know the time has come - and yet at the same time something is being born. Many people refer to the new ways as "emerging Christianity" though there are so many varieties of it that it defies description. The one thing most emerging Christians will say is that the faith they inherited from their elders is all worn out.



Those who have come through dark nights of their own, not just once but over and over again, often cannot find the words to say why they could not trade those nights for anything. Yes they were nights of great loss. Yes, the soul suffered from fearful subtraction.

Yes, a great emptiness opened up where I had stored all my spiritual treasures, and yet. And yet what? And yet what remained when everything else is gone was more real than anything I could imagine. I was no longer apart from what I sought; I was part of it, or in it. I'm sorry I can't say it any better than that. There was no place else I wanted to be.

- Has the faith you have inherited become worn out? How so?
- What old understanding's have you held on to that keep you repeating some dark nights of the soul?
- How could fearful subtraction distill a new truth within you?
- What do you think the author means when she says, I was no longer apart from what I sought; I was part of it, or in it?
- How could being no longer apart be reflected within / change your life?

Group discussion>

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 injure 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...

- ❖ Faith and how we practice it often requires a fearful subtraction in order to open us to the possibilities of who God is and is not.
- ❖ The faith of our elders no longer works for us and we must find our own faith journey.
- ❖ Faith does not provide us a safe place to settle but requires us to actively engage in practicing it.
- ❖ The sense of God's absence can be a token of God's presence..

Affirmation:

This faith will not offer me much to hold on to. It will not give me a safe place to settle. Practicing it will require me to celebrate the sacraments of defeat and loss, but since the religion I know best has a lot to say about losing as the precondition of finding, I can live with that. I think I can even live inside this cloudy evening of the soul for a while longer, where even my sense of God's absence can be a token of God's presence if I let it. Because I do not understand a thing about this, does that mean I understand God? I do not know. All I know is that there is no place I would rather be.

Closing:

Dark Night of the Soul  
by Loreena McKennitt

There they dimmed amongst the lilies fair  
There they dimmed amongst the lilies fair

Upon a darkened night  
The flame of love was burning in my breast  
And by a lantern bright  
I fled my house while all in quiet rest

Shrouded by the night  
And by the secret stair I quickly fled  
The veil concealed my eyes  
While all within lay quiet as the dead

*[Chorus:]*  
*Oh night thou was my guide*  
*Of night more loving than the rising sun*  
*Oh night that joined the lover*  
*To the beloved one*  
*Transforming each of them into the other*

Upon that misty night  
In secrecy, beyond such mortal sight  
Without a guide or light  
Than that which burned so deeply in my heart  
That fire t'was led me on  
And shone more bright than of the midday sun  
To where he waited still  
It was a place where no one else could come

*[Chorus]*

Within my pounding heart  
Which kept itself entirely for him  
He fell into his sleep  
Beneath the cedars all my love I gave  
From o'er the fortress walls  
The wind would his hair against his brow  
And with its smoothest hand  
Caressed my every sense it would allow

*[Chorus]*

I lost myself to him  
And laid my face upon my lover's breast  
And care and grief grew dim  
As in the morning's mist became the light  
There they dimmed amongst the lilies fair

