

Learning to Walk in the Dark
Chapter Six
Entering the Stone

This study guide is formatted for a small group gathering. If you choose to use it as a small group leader or as an individual, feel free to adapt it in whatever way seems meaningful to you. Enjoy!

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Quotes and ideas worth repeating:

Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad had all spent significant time in caves, along with Saint Patrick and Saint Francis. (page 112)

In a cave...always, always look back... Nothing looks the same coming out as it did going in. (page 126)

Related Scripture:

Ruth 1:15-16 *“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.” But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”*

Mark 4:30-32 *What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed...*

Matthew 19:13-14 *Disciples reject children, but Jesus welcomes them*

Centering Song: “The Longest Night” by Peter Mayer or “Darkness” by the Indigo Girls

Gathering question options:

Tell us about your homework experience of spending time in a dark place.

Has anyone ever visited a cave? Describe it using your senses-how did it feel/smell?

Share something that looks different in darkness and in light.

Reflection/discussion:

Describe threshold between dark and light.

In a cave, always, always look back. Every few minutes, turn around. Nothing looks the same coming out as it did going in. (page 126) Agree or disagree?

BBT was amazed at things she could hear that she doesn't normally notice. Are you surrounded by noise? What might you miss? (page 122)

Resurrection happened in the dark. BBT says new life happens in the dark. Agree or disagree? Give examples.

Counselors help you get out of the dark. Spiritual directors help us to be led further in. (page 129)

Agree or disagree? Discuss.

Discuss BBT's unpacking of the cave stone from her backpack: *we look for the large and bright. Often God gives us small dark treasures.* (pages 130-33) Can you think of a time when high standards/expectations caused you to miss a treasure right in front of you?

Closing: "A Blessing for Traveling in the Dark" by Jan Richardson

Go slow
if you can.
Slower.
More slowly still.
Friendly dark
or fearsome,
this is no place
to break your neck
by rushing
by running
by crashing into
what you cannot see.

Then again,
it is true:
different darks
have different tasks
and if you
have arrived here unawares,
if you have come
in peril
or in pain,
this might be no place
you should dawdle.

I do not know
what these shadows
ask of you,
what they might hold
that means you good
or ill.
It is not for me
to reckon
whether you should linger
or you should leave.

But this is what
I can ask for you:
that in the darkness
there be a blessing.
That in the shadows
there be a welcome.
That in the night
you be encompassed
by the Love that knows
your name.

Materials need to lead:

Handouts, copies of O'Donahue poem

Music and player for "The Longest Night" by Peter Mayer or "Darkness" by the Indigo Girls

Homework for next week:

Make time for quiet. Try spending quiet time in the care instead of listening to radio/news/music.

or

Read the following poem by John O'Donahue:

A Blessing for a Friend on the Arrival of Illness
by John O'Donohue

Now is the time of dark invitation
beyond a frontier that you did not expect.
Abruptly your old life seems distant.
You barely noticed how each day opened
a path through fields never questioned
yet expected deep down to hold treasure.

Now your time on earth becomes full of threat.
Before your eyes your future shrinks.
You lived absorbed in the day to day so continuous
with everything around you that you could forget
you were separate.

Now this dark companion has come between you.
Distances have opened in your eyes.
You feel that against your will
A stranger has married your heart.
Nothing before has made you feel so isolated
and lost.

When the reverberations of shock subside in you,
may grace come to restore you to balance.
May it shape a new space in your heart
to embrace this illness as a teacher
who has come to open your life to new worlds.
May you find in yourself a courageous hospitality
towards what is difficult, painful and unknown.

May you use this illness as a lantern
to illuminate the new qualities that will emerge in you.
May your fragile harvesting of this slow light help you
release whatever has become false in you.
May you trust this light to clear a path
through all the fog of old unease and anxiety
until you feel a rising within you,
a tranquility profound enough to call the storm to stillness.

May you find the wisdom to listen to your illness,
ask it why it came,
why it chose your friendship,
where it wants to take you,
what it wants you to know,
what quality of space it wants to create in you,
what you need to learn to become more fully yourself,
that your presence may shine in the world.

May you keep faith with your body,
learning to see it as a holy sanctuary
which can bring this night wound
gradually towards the healing and freedom of dawn.