

chapter 7

by Sarandon Smith

How do we conquer our dark nights?

As I have ventured through Learning to Walk in the Dark, I have found myself experiencing a deep sense of healing and understanding. This feeling was with me as I started chapter 7 of Barbra Brown Taylor's book, and just life chapters before, *The Dark Night of the Soul* did not disappoint.

Chapter 7 begins with a discussion of part of life that is all too familiar to most of us, that being time in our lives when clouds seem to descend from the heavens, and we are caught up in suffocating darkness. Each dark time is unique to us, Taylor states, and according to her the only way out of a dark night is by surrendering ourselves to go through it. We have no choice of when our dark nights happen. The choice we do have is how we choose to deal with each situation. Choosing to walk through the darkness, instead of running from it, because each of our darknesses is tailored to us, specially fitted with a non-transferable policy. The impact of that statement in particular hit harder than I had imagined it would for me, as I have been grappling with my own dark night recently, and finding that one of my greatest struggles is allowing myself to experience these parts of my life, truly feel my emotions, and be fully present in my journey. I held Taylor's insight carefully, another gem to tuck in my bag as I push forward. So, with that lesson on confrontation of dark nights, Taylor moves on to further elaborate on the essence of our dark experiences.

Shifting gears, Taylor then launches in to the story of John of the Cross. The story of John elaborated on the experiences about which Taylor talks, and sets the scene for the rest of the chapter. As a prisoner for living his faith in a way contrary to that of the church at the time, John faced his own dark night. While in prison John wrote his book *The Dark Night of the Soul*, which was a recollection of his experience in the dark, and his relationship with the dark whilst actively and joyfully seeking the gift he knew was wrapped in the darkness.

But how could this idea relate to personal faith, and the larger church? Taylor ties her previous discussion to this question by pointing out the apparent "dark night" that the

church is going through in present day. Also, she touches on how our own personal questioning of our faith may be a signal to be searching for newness in the darkness. As far as the church is concerned, Taylor proposes that perhaps this dark night for Christianity is a signal to purge what is not working, and start looking for ways to make the church relevant again. In terms of personal faith, in times when we find ourselves rejecting rituals and doctrine we have never questioned before, and questioning more than ever the foundation on which our faith is built, it is possible we are being called to be transformed through our confusion.

Taylor wraps up the chapter with one last statement that struck me. "When depression passes, all is restored; when the dark night passes, all is transformed." As with previous chapters, many parts of Taylor's writing in chapter 7 resonated with me. Some of the concepts I found most significant were:

- The need to walk through dark nights, knowing they are times given by God as opportunities for transformation.
- Knowing that each of my dark nights is meant for me, and therefore I must receive them with joy and anticipation.
- Understanding that growth in dark nights also involves growing out of things, and it is OK to move on from old shells that once held your definition of faith.

I hope that as you read chapter 7, you are able to find parts that resonate with you, just as they did with me, and come away from your reading ready to confront your dark nights, and excited to grow.

Questions to consider:

- Have you thanked God for important dark nights in your life?
- What in your life might be acting as a "God substitute," keeping you from seeing and knowing your true purpose?