



Learning to Walk in the Dark

Barbara Brown Taylor

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Learning to Walk in the Dark

Barbara Brown Taylor

Learning to Walk in the Dark Barbara Brown Taylor
New York Times Bestseller

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor's *Learning to Walk in the Dark* provides a way to find spirituality in those times when we don't have all the answers.

Taylor has become increasingly uncomfortable with our tendency to associate all that is good with lightness and all that is evil and dangerous with darkness. Doesn't God work in the nighttime as well? In *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, Taylor asks us to put aside our fears and anxieties and to explore all that God has to teach us "in the dark." She argues that we need to move away from our "solar spirituality" and ease our way into appreciating "lunar spirituality" (since, like the moon, our experience of the light waxes and wanes). Through darkness we find courage, we understand the world in new ways, and we feel God's presence around us, guiding us through things seen and unseen. Often, it is while we are in the dark that we grow the most.

With her characteristic charm and literary wisdom, Taylor is our guide through a spirituality of the nighttime, teaching us how to find our footing in times of uncertainty and giving us strength and hope to face all of life's challenging moments.

Learning to Walk in the Dark Details

Date : Published March 24th 2015 by HarperOne (first published April 8th 2014)

ISBN : 9780062024343

Author : Barbara Brown Taylor

Format : Paperback 208 pages

Genre : Spirituality, Nonfiction, Religion, Faith, Theology, Autobiography, Memoir, Christian

 [Download Learning to Walk in the Dark ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Learning to Walk in the Dark ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Learning to Walk in the Dark Barbara Brown Taylor

From Reader Review Learning to Walk in the Dark for online ebook

Lud says

I love Barbara Brown Taylor and would pretty much read anything she wrote. I was amazed to see her on the cover of TIME Magazine for this book. "I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light..."

Ron says

I have read Barbara Brown Taylor's other books and had high expectations for this one, but it didn't really deliver on its premise--that there is spiritual insight to be gained from darkness (both spiritual and physical). I tend to agree with her portrayal of the church today as solar-centric and able to offer little more than sunny platitudes for those like St. John of the Cross who experience a dark night of the soul.

I failed to find any spiritual insight in the chapters devoted to a trip into a cave, watching a moonrise, and visiting an installation which offered a simulation of blindness. The description of how light pollution has an adverse impact on wildlife was interesting but unconnected with the book's overall thesis. The only lesson I took away from this section of the book was that not sleeping in total darkness has a negative effect on our health. As for "learning to walk in the dark," I'd say the book offers little in the way of guidance in that regard.

Joanna Beatty says

Perhaps one's level of edification by this book depends on the levels of darkness one has experienced in her/his own life. Personally, I've thus far found myself casting this work as "Dark-lite; Also Known As Darkness For Amateurs." That's harsh, I know. We can't judge one another's hardships and inner demons. However, it IS true that some experience more severe tribulations and/or more frequent trials than others, and we who struggle so are often in need of those who get it, on our level. Brown Taylor either doesn't get it to that same degree, or she's not speaking to it as I and those like me need her to.

Thus far, in a rather irresponsible and dangerous fashion, Brown Taylor repeatedly romanticizes spiritual darkness. In our societal context and given current pop culture trends, the "dark angels" of which she speaks are the ones to whom audiences DO flock, albeit not in the way she perhaps wishes. While there is good to be found in the dark, she says nothing of the demons that reside there alongside the angels. It is one thing to encourage others to face that which is hard; it is quite another to push them into running headlong into a raging oblivion for which they are not prepared.

Up to chapter five, I have yet to encounter juicy, genuine, nourishing discussion of spiritual darkness. It's all about, "Oh, yes, life is hard. We have to face the hard stuff. That's what we need to do because God is in the hard stuff. And the moon is pretty, don't you think?" To be honest, it angers me a bit because the discussion turns into full-on patronization. Where are the full encounters with our sins? How about the shadowy terrors of depression? And the fangs of isolation, addiction, and so on and so forth?

Brown Taylor admits to not knowing about many aspects of darkness, a confession that speaks to the book's ironic refusal (to this point) to go deeper into the shadows. I, for one, picked this up because I'm a regular in the pitch black, frequent flyer miles racked up for life. I've survived enough to know what to do (usually), but it's still extremely difficult and always terrifying. Given my circumstances, a particular sort of Death's presence is a constant, and I know it and feel through to my marrow. I need the Word of God, I need the resurrected Christ, and I need the Lord, the Giver of Life to help me weather these constant storms. And the gracious Spirit almost always throws me textual lifelines. Thus, when I switched on the Nook, I was hopeful. So few people tackle this subject in earnest; I thought that maybe Brown Taylor could be a guide in helping me better comprehend, or a comfort in my tumult. So far, she's not.

She doesn't get it. She doesn't get it at all. That's why I intend to finish the book. I'll do my best to be rid of an adversarial attitude, and I will hope that later passages are, pun intended, more enlightened. Ultimately, while I'm bothered by her book, it *is* useful, as it helps me engage my own thoughts on the matter. This might lead to a work of my own because, as they say, if I can't find the book that I'm searching for, then I need to write it.

Marian Beaman says

Barbara Brown Taylor's *Learning to Walk in the Dark* is the best book about exploring darkness I have ever read. In fact, it is the only book on the topic I have encountered. Early on, the author warns that her book is more of a journal than a manual, "focusing on spiritual practice rooted in ordinary, physical, human life on earth, like going for a walk, paying attention to a tree, hanging a load of laundry on the line, and treating other people like peepholes into God." How can we develop the courage to walk in the dark if we are never asked to practice? she asks. The chapters that follow probe the mystery.

In nine chapters that track the phases of the moon, Taylor investigates the idea of darkness through four prisms: physical, psychological, spiritual, and theological. Rich with research, the book also enlightens its readers on the subjects of cosmology, biology, and history. As scholar, she introduces her audience to writers who have explored the topic: Miriam Greenspan, Jacques Lusseyran, James Fowler, and Pema Chodron among others.

Taylor, New York Times best-selling author of *An Altar in the World*, is most fascinating when she reconstructs her own history with darkness. Readers can vicariously experience dining in an opaque restaurant where guests eat in the dark, participate in a Dialogue in the Dark where the blind really do lead the blind, go spelunking in an unlit cave, and gaze at the night sky alongside the author, who assures insomniacs that not until the invention of incandescent lights did people think it necessary to sleep for eight consecutive hours. (NIMH study)

The author's bio includes fifteen years in parish ministry and decades as professor of religion at Piedmont College. Thus, readers can expect her to address a spirituality that works in the nighttime, one that teaches us humans how to develop the courage to walk in the dark. And to re-read scripture to see all the times God shows up at night, a metaphor that can stand in for what we fear.

Robin Warden says

Would read a book of blank pages if Barbara Brown Taylor's name appeared on the cover :) Seriously, this is another great, insightful, soul-mining piece by BBT. Having just experienced my own time in the dark...wrought with questions, doubts, hopelessness...this book gave merit and worth to that time. As a dear friend shared (thank you Kate Watkins...for turning me on to BBT AND for sharing that nugget from Isaiah), there are things to be learned from treasures found in the darkness. Great book!

Nicole says

Great book exploring the "darker" side of spirituality -- the usefulness of "the dark night of the soul" and how integral it is to Christian theology and Biblical understanding as well as our own personal development. Easy read for anyone who is tired of superficial Christian thought that tells people that as long as they "pray" (the right way) all will be well. Sometimes we just have to sit in the dark for a while and see how God comes to us.

Patty says

“Meanwhile, here is some good news you can use: even when light fades and darkness falls—as it does every single day, in every single life—God does not turn the world over to some other deity. Even when you cannot see where you are going and no one answers when you call, this is not sufficient proof that you are alone. There is a divine presence that transcends all your ideas about it, along with all your language for calling it to your aid, which is not above using darkness as the wrecking ball that brings all your false gods down—but whether you decide to trust the witness of those who have gone before you, or you decide to do whatever it takes to become a witness yourself, here is the testimony of faith: darkness is not dark to God; the night is as bright as the day.” p. 15

Taylor is a person of faith that I have respected for many years. Her writing, both books and essays in **The Christian Century**, have sustained me as I have explored my beliefs. I feel like her faith journey intersects periodically with mine. Although our paths have been different we have been walking through the heart of Christianity for about the same length of time.

In this book she is tackling a deep subject. People really are afraid to walk in the dark in all areas of life. The aspects of her book that I found most helpful were those dealing with religion and faith. Right now for Western Christianity these are dark times. Many churches are becoming more rigid because the changes are so painful. I believe that is not the best solution – to resist change. However, I could not have imagined that my own congregation would be facing so many problems. We are walking through the dark, praying to be ready for what is ahead.

Although Taylor is not specifically talking about silence or solitude, her book has been a great addition to my reading in those areas. A number of times Taylor is spending time by herself. I think that many have a similar fear about the dark and about being solitary.

I personally am more comfortable alone than in the dark. However, Taylor makes the dark something worth exploring. Her essays, which follow the phases of the moon, are well-written, interesting and provide some challenges to my ideas about the dark.

I recommend this book to anyone who is actively walking a path of faith or exploration. Although Taylor is Christian, she finds answers in other religions. This makes her book open to anyone who is trying to figure out the big questions of life.

Gela says

I noticed this book laying on a table marked Christianity at Barnes & Nobles. When I flipped the hard cover over and read the summary on the left page I was drawn to it immediately. The book is good however, I felt at times it was a struggle to read. The book itself did not grab me and hold my attention as the summary did. I was hoping for more of a personal experience and from the heart. The book is good but I felt it was forced writing & had to many references as well as quotes. I felt like I was reading a research paper rather than a heart felt personal guide on how we need adversity to shape character and how to overcome it.

Kathryn Hall says

Saw Barbara Brown Taylor on Super Soul Sunday and was impressed with her, so bought this book. Loved the beginning. There are exquisite passages I found myself reading to friends. However the book rather devolves away from a rich personal exploration to what felt like "reports" based on intellectual research, and that the "assignment" was "darkness" so I kept losing interest. This was compounded by the author's apparently lifelong struggle with her ambivalence with The Church and its teachings, about which she has written extensively in the past I learned. I was not expecting quite so much of that and I found this a struggle I could not relate to, not having been a minister who broke away from the Church, nor did I ever reach a point of disillusionment with The Church per se. I can see religion for what it is and what it is not, and have no trouble honoring what works for me and what does not, and supplementing with my own explorations without pushing against religion. This author has not reached that, and while I do not judge her for that, her expounding on that left me skipping pages and moving past her angst. So, mixed reviews. Rather a pity considering the wealth that is in this book, but it's a bit like mining for gold.

Lisa says

Brown Taylor wants us to think about darkness as another way we learn about God and to experience Him, rather than as the opposite of light. This was a provoking as well as a comforting read. So many cultural and geographical reasons why we think about darkness the way that we do and as Christians we're sometimes dysfunctional in our attempts to see Christianity as saving us from the darkness. Instead, we should think about what we learn about ourselves and the world in and through it.

Katie says

This book has it's moments, but in general, I found it to be deeply disappointing. Why is Barbara Brown Taylor writing a book on darkness? For the first 50 pages or so, it seemed like the point of this book was to

fulfill a three-book contract so that she could go on and write what she really wants to write. I really wanted to read a thoughtful book about the spiritual aspects of the dark. We need more books about darkness, but they should probably be written by people who have experienced it in the normal course of things. This feels forced, kind of like when a family on a reality show throws a party or takes a trip to the zoo so that the crew has something to film. Brown Taylor's gift is giving words to experience. Here it is as though she manufactures some experiences so that she has something to write.

In the first third of the book, I missed the thoughtful, wise Barbara Brown Taylor I came to love through reading *Leaving Church* and *An Altar in the World*. When I read those books, I wanted to underline every sentence. I wish this book had been written with the same thought and care. Instead it seems padded -- the text is a point size larger than necessary, and there is a great deal of space between the lines. In the first few chapters, the sentences are bloated and drafty. If I hadn't paid full price for this book, I never would have bothered to finish the introduction, let alone read past it.

The introduction is an off-putting afterthought, hastily scrawled and rife with sweeping generalizations about the Church and Christianity. I have my own critiques of both, but Brown Taylor's narrow observations make her sound like she doesn't know what she's talking about. I live in the Pacific Northwest of the US, and churches aren't all the way she describes. I would have loved for her to use words like "some", "most" or "few" to lend her critiques more flexibility and truth. I was shocked at how dualistic she sounds. Maybe Brown Taylor is just feeling wounded, but her attitude makes her sound both provincial and arrogant. I can't tell who her audience is. Is that introduction an attempt to garner a wider one?

This book would be so much better if it started with what is now the epilogue, then worked backwards through the chapters, eliminating or condensing the first 52 pages of the book. On page 53, she states her agenda, redeeming the dark, and then the book begins to come together and make sense. The whole book is based on an exaggerated argument -- that darkness isn't an accepted part of the Christian tradition. In some places, that may be true. That has not been my experience.

In order to hold to her argument, Brown Taylor ignores some great writers whose insights might have strengthened this book. I was struck by what was missing. Brown Taylor includes one tiny Pete Rollins quote from one of his earlier books. I wished she had read and engaged with some of his more recent work; it would have helped her along. One section echoed things I heard Brian McLaren say at a conference which Brown Taylor attended, with no citation. Another section echoed something Diana Butler Bass wrote in a bestselling book, with no citation. I really wanted Brown Taylor to tap into the writings of Jean-Pierre de Caussade, who has such lovely things to say about the dark, but we can't have everything.

Perhaps this book is about dashed expectations, how Christianity let Brown Taylor down. And maybe the reason this book rankles is that my high expectations were so disappointed. For the most part, this book lacks the depth I hoped it would have. Barbara Brown Taylor seems to hold the darkness at arm's length. I guess she was on deadline, but I wish she had taken a little more time with the idea of darkness and let the book unfold.

Michael Austin says

Learning to Walk in the Dark is a book that took me to a lot of places that I didn't want to go, did so purposefully, explained what it was doing all the way through, and then made me glad that I took the

journey. It was a difficult book to read, not because the prose is opaque (it is very clear), but because the ideas were hard. Because, like most people, I am afraid of the dark.

Taylor moves skillfully between darkness as an actual phenomenon, darkness as an emotional state such as depression, and darkness as an inability to have faith or perceive God. These are all different things, but in some key ways, they are the same kind of thing. They are all frightening because they contain unknowns. And they are all things that we would be healthier--spiritually, emotionally, and spiritually--if we learned how to embrace instead of trying to avoid.

The type for all of the other forms of darkness that Taylor describes is, well, darkness--the thing that happens at night when the sun goes down. Humans evolved in a world of both darkness and light, and we are adapted to--and actually need--both. When we flood the darkness with artificial light, Taylor suggests, we mess up a lot of stuff: our sleep patterns change, we get cut off from the stars that were once a main tool of navigation, we miss out on a lot of the wonder that comes with living in the universe.

And we impose our preference for light on many other creatures who experience light and dark differently than we do. One of the most powerful stories that Taylor tells involves her and her husband finding a large sea turtle who came ashore at night to lay her eggs and then tried to use the light of the horizon to navigate back to the sea. But because the light of the cityscape was brighter than the light of the horizon, the turtle went the wrong way and became stranded on the sand. This is a good example of the price that the natural world pays for the fact that people are afraid of the dark.

From the understanding of a naturalist, Taylor pivots to her own areas of expertise, such as the mind and the soul. Our culture has assigned "dark" to a subset of natural emotions and "light" to another subset and encouraged us to spend much of our lives trying to produce light emotions artificially and suppress dark ones by any means necessary. As she writes,

It is the inability to bear dark emotions that causes many of our most significant problems, in other words, not the emotions themselves. When we cannot tolerate the dark, we try all kinds of artificial lights, including but not limited to drugs, alcohol, shopping, shallow sex, and hours in front of the television set or computer. There are no dark emotions . . . just unskillful ways of coping with emotions we cannot bear. The emotions themselves are conduits of pure energy that want something from us: to wake us up, to tell us something we need to know, to break the ice around our hearts, to move us to act. (78)

The answer to dealing with dark emotions is roughly the same as dealing with dark paths, and is the title of the book: learning to walk in the dark, or learning to be comfortable experiencing the entire range of human emotions and not just the ones sanctified by religious and pharmaceutical communities.

The greatest impact of *Learning to Walk in the Dark* is in its discussion of spirituality, or the search for God. Barbara Brown Taylor is a preacher, but also a doubter, a searcher, and a profoundly intelligent human undergoing a permanent state of faith transition. She has experienced God, but not consistently, and not always in the same place. She left the ministry and her spiritual home (the Episcopalian Church), but she remains a person of faith, and also a person of doubt.

And that is OK. Uncertainty is OK. Doubt is OK. These things are not antithetical to faith; they are part of an opposition that is as important to us as the opposition of day and night. We need both. We learn from both.

And we illogically fear one and try to annihilate it with the other. We need to cut that out, Taylor tells us, and I will quote at length from an important passage that tells us why:

Once you have emerged from whatever safe religious place you were in – recognising that your view of the world is one worldview among many, discovering the historical Jesus, revolutionising your understanding of scripture and up-dating your theology; once you have changed the way you do church, or at least changed the music at your church and hired a pastor who twitters, or you can no longer find any church within a fifty-mile radius in which you can let your guard down long enough to pray; Once the Dalai Lama starts making more sense to you as the pope or your favourite preacher, and your rare but renovating encounters with the Divine reduce all your best words to dust, well, what's left to hold onto?

I do not believe I am describing a loss of faith in God here. Instead, I believe I am describing a loss of faith in the system that promised to help me grasp God not only by setting my feet on the right track but also by giving me the right language, concepts, and tools to get a hook in the Real Thing when I found it. To lose all that is not the same thing as spending eleven months in a dungeon (speaking of John of the Cross). It may not even qualify as a true dark night of the soul, but it is without doubt the cloudiest evening of the soul I have known so far.

After so many years of trying to cobble together a way of thinking about God that makes sense so that I can safely settle down with it, it all turns to nada. There is no permanently safe place to settle. I will always be at sea, steering by stars. Yet as dark as this sounds, it provides great relief, because it now sounds truer than anything that came before. (139-140)

Learning to Walk in the Dark is a remarkable book full of revelations, surprises, and genuine grace. The journey that it advocates is a scary one, on several different levels at once. But the book itself is an excellent guide to what the author calls “endarkenment.” May we all experience its endarkening rays.

Mary says

Another wonderful experience with my small group. This book stretched and challenged me and ultimately left me wanting to explore the dark and see a full moon rise (but not to visit the dark inside a cave :-). Again, Taylor's writing is beautiful; she crafts amazing sentences to share her thoughts. and again, I read this book with a pencil and nearly all the pages are marked with underlines, words, exclamation points, stars, or simply hearts. The first part I marked with a heart is from the introduction

In many ways this book is the third in a trilogy dedicated to scooping up the bottom halves of things, or at leasts the words used to describe them - first the world, then the flesh, and now the dark - not only because these words have been libeled long enough but also because there is so much life in them that has been rejected on bogus grounds. If there is any truth to the teaching that spiritual reality is divided into halves, it is the truth that those pairs exist in balance, not opposition.

Purely by accident, I read that trilogy in order (*Leaving Church*, *Altars in the World* and now this one) over the past few months. These books (together with the wonderful women in my small group) have shown me

many new and wonderful ways to see my faith as a journey ... not a destination.

Like Taylor (and thanks to her), I now feel a special devotion to Mary.

Part of it is that she is a she; the other part is that she is entirely human. Most of the time I think she understands me better than her son does, since she has a whole DNA spiral and a body that operates on a lunar cycle...

I also want (to try) to embrace the waxing and waning of my energy, devotion and faith.

In the end, I can't begin to capture even a bit of what all this means, but Taylor does a nice job in her epilogue

...learning to walk in the dark has allowed me to take back my faith, moving it from the glare of the full solar tradition to recover by the light of the moon.

I have a lot of learning still to do, but I can see the path.

Gea says

I'd really like to give this 3.5 stars if I could. There were so many wonderful insights here and I'm very glad I read this, yet I was hoping for more. More darkness. More depth. More anguish. I listened to this on Audiobook and Barbara Brown Taylor narrates it herself quite nicely. She definitely opened up the spiritual dimensions of darkness for me, but she could have gone farther, deeper. This felt a little shallow in places. She visits a cave, spends a long night alone in a cabin, but I was looking for more than that. There is some wonderful stuff here about blindness and our modern aversion to darkness that was quite fascinating. It's clear Taylor has spent her entire adult life studying the spiritual dimension and asking deep existential questions. This is definitely worth a read, I just thought she could have gone deeper into the darkness. I wanted more of it.

M Christopher says

An engaging read, I finished in one evening. Barbara Brown Taylor writes beautifully and here she grabbed my attention with a topic that appealed to both the child and the adult in me. Why are we afraid of the dark? What does this mean about our physiology, psychology, culture, and spirituality? Those who are subjected to my weekly musings from the pulpit are likely to hear my ruminations on this book as early as this Sunday as I consider the interplay between belief and unbelief, or as Rev. Taylor might put it, solar spirituality and lunar spirituality. Is it possible to fully dwell in the Son-light without the Dark Night of the Soul?
