**Women’s Retreat at Sugar Creek Bible Camp**

October 9-11, 2014

Living with Darkness

*He brought him outside and said, ‘Look towards heaven and count the stars.’*

Using Barbara Brown Taylor’s book, “Learning to Walk In the Dark”

**Icebreakers & Introductions**

*Friday night*

**Leave a Shoe, Take a Shoe (10 min)**

Have each person take a show off and put it in the circle. Go and find a shoe, and then find it’s match. Introduce yourself and something about you that very few people know.

**“Me, Too!”**

Supplies needed:  Spool of twine or string at least 100ft long for each group of 8-10 ladies *Notes: If your group is larger than 10, you’ll want to break up into smaller groups of 8-10 people.*

Give each group a spool of string. Choose someone to start by telling their group something about themselves such as:

* My favorite color is green.
* I like to sing in the shower.
* I have two children.
* I dip my pizza in ranch dressing.

Once the person with the string says something that applies to another person in the group, that person calls out, “Me, too!” The first person holds on to the end of the string and passes the spool to the other person.  If more than one person has a “me, too” then the string passes to all those people, and ends at the last person to say “me, too.” The person with the ball of spool then says something else about themselves.  In the end, a group will end up with a web of connections.  Have each lady count the number of “me, toos” she had and point out how much the groups have in common with each other.

Lesson: This weekend we are all a part of something bigger than ourselves – part of this community, part of body of Christ. In conversation, will find differences… but have more in common than we might realize. Respect, mutuality, confidentiality, fun.

Read purple book pg. 96, “women in community”

**Introductions (20 min)**

* Name, church/town, somewhere you saw God yesterday/today…
* Introduce myself - connection SCBC, family, current call
* Introduce the bell, the prayer request, the candle
* Introduce theme:
	+ Live ND, learned love winter though gift summer… long nights, light! Makes winter worth it – yet fall comes, find myself ready for darkness 🡪 setting sun, cool crisp air, warmth nights inside, blankets, slippers, hot tea, candles… something comforting w/ dark and yet not…
	+ ND, sun not rising until 8am, I’m not motivated!
	+ As move deeper into fall, season encroaching darkness, settle into it in winter – movement says something important to us about faith
	+ First need to struggle a bit with darkness… introduce book
	+ Invite participants pay attention dark at retreat, go walk night (by yourself, some more most incredible God moments in valley at night, by myself), look up, witness moon/stars
	+ Ponder where darkness might be your life right now…
	+ Read Taylor, pg. 20-22
	+ End with “welcome to the dark”

**Session One: 9:30-10:45**

*Saturday morning*

**Mary Magdalene & the Dark: John 20:1-18 (10 min)**

* My love for Mary Magdalene – not prostitute, pope 3rd century
* Beloved disciple of JC, have something learn women scripture, their experiences dark!

20Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’ 3Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. 4The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10Then the disciples returned to their homes.

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’ 14When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ 16Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew,‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher). 17Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” ’ 18Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

* What’s the setting?
* What do we know about tombs?
* A woman first person JC revealed resurrected self to – there in dark!
* Paradox w/ Easter (dawn, light, lilies) and crucifixion (dark, candles, black, cross)
* PLACE WHERE FAITH HAPPENS! The in between…

**Defining Darkness (20 min)**

* Share with partner, negative experience you had w/ darkness…
* After sharing, come up list words help you define darkness
* Share with larger group, writing them on flip chart 🡪 observe if ‘fear’ is a part of the words used – we are afraid of being afraid… cycle of fear, learn darkness bad, we start incorporate belief into own life, whether we believe it or not
	+ Story: I never afraid dark – didn’t want light room when sleep, plug under door w/ sweatshirt if light come through… not afraid until had experience w/ total darkness Namibia – sit around fire, barely see house, but going toilet night – first time feeling bit creaped out dark… at same time freeing!
* Now share positive experience had w/ darkness…
* Was it hard to come up with one? What made it positive?

**Stories of Our Youth (15 min)**

* What stories parents tell you, think back now – kinda dark? Did you tell your children same stories? Why/why not? Are your grandchildren hearing same stories? Toned down version?
* Maggie nursery rhymes – Goosey Goosey Gander 🡪 ending is dark! As parent, choose allow these stories, even w/ darkness – don’t want her hear hardcore violence, but don’t want shelter her from darkness – don’t want her think only good happens light, only bad happens dark
* What stories can you think of?? Have them share with group, open conversation…

**Bible Study (30 min)**

* Unfortunate thing – scripture doesn’t help us struggle see darkness as gift… have participants look up following scriptures:
	+ [**John 1:5**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1%3A5&version=ESV)The light shines in the darkness, & the darkness has not overcome it.
	+ [**Matthew 8:12**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+8%3A12&version=ESV)While the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
	+ [**Ephesians 5:8**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+5%3A8&version=ESV)For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light
	+ [**Jeremiah 4:28**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+4%3A28&version=ESV)“For this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above be dark; for I have spoken; I have purposed; I have not relented, nor will I turn back.”
	+ **I**[**saiah 8:22**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+8%3A22&version=ESV) And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.
* Gather small groups 3-4, each shares after each reading, listening to what each other really says about understanding scripture and darkness, close with prayer, each praying for person on their left
* Story of Abraham in Genesis 15:1-5
	+ One word
	+ Phrase/idea
	+ When have you experienced God in the darkness of nature?

## After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’ 2But Abram said, ‘O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’3And Abram said, ‘You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.’ 4But the word of the Lord came to him, ‘This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.’ 5He brought him outside and said, ‘Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ 6And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

* Discussion

**Closing Prayer with Group (5 min)**

**Session Two: 11:00-12:00**

*Saturday morning*

**My Darkness Story (10 min)**

* Sharing about Christoph’s cancer, CPE, Kaylie at Children’s Hospital
* Kaylie was ‘my faith’

**Activity: Faith in the Dark (20 min)**

* Create portrait of your ‘faith in the dark’ experience… time, experience, death, illness, your life, someone else’s, a seasonal change in yoru life – how did God reveal God’s self in midst of dark?
* Try to stay away from ‘light language’

**Sharing Our Stories (30 min)**

* Invite participants to share their story in 5 min or less

*Announcements: evening session, please bring coat with you, anything may need outdoors.*

**Session Three: 7:00-7:45**

*Saturday night*

**Evening Vespers**

Hymn: He Comes to Us in Ways Unknown

Scripture: Psalm 19:2

Prayers:

Hymn: Now that Day is Over

**Darkness Walk**

* Invite participants to go on a silent Darkness Walk. Encourage go alone. Notice sights, sounds, smells. What point are you comfortable, at ease? What point scared, uncomfortable? What is God saying to you? Be quiet, listen, God speaking in dark…
* Meet at campfire ring in 20 minutes, or when hear singing – follow sound.

**Sermon – 10/12**

Psalm 23

INTRO

* Who had hard time walk last night? What hard? …. Trust your footing? Light moon? Hard trust, especially if doing something first time, or first time in long time…
* Trust not easily attained – think about relationships, when broken, takes time renew trust

PSAM 23

* Often used funerals, beautiful scripture… thought of as image heaven, which might be, but more than this writer wrote it about life on earth, here and now
* Like many psalms, written midst dire situation, crisis 🡪 walk valley shadow death, dining presence enemies – visions that raise image complexity (we’ve been there)
* Psalm 23 referred to as ‘trust psalm’ – poetic language ultimately fits writer’s trust in God to see him through darkness (valley shadow death)
* Notice writer doesn’t ask for God’s light shine. Lies beside green pastures (day, night?), leads beside still waters… wouldn’t be opposed to light I’m sure! But instead seems have patience with the darkness – realizing that God is revealing himself even in valley
* “I fear no evil, for you are with me” 🡪 trust

NIGHT NATURE WALK

* Confirmation cabin, too girly… I thought they needed get in touch w/ nature, their roots (Mother earth), came up with idea…
* Night Nature Walk (not much different than I sent you on last night); blind-folded, with partner, barefoot. Went out some prairie paths, wider, open, sometimes soft grass underfoot, sometimes mud… and we walked. They invited be silent, partner only there guide them w/ hand on shoulder, all of us led by light moon. Listen sounds creation - crickets, frogs pond, smell lilacs bloom, feel earth beneath feet
* Did this several weeks one summer, each time returned cabin – girls comment what powerful experience that was – “I would never think to do that at home”
* They trusted each other, in process they also trusted themselves – like think learned something about trusting God in the dark corners of life, the change all around them

*Trusting God – as leave, what do you need to entrust to God as you live into darkness changing season? Winter setting in…*

CLOSING

* Maybe trust what retreat boiled down to… midst changing seasons, darkening days, falling temps; midst of night of lives, deafening darkness 🡪 God is calling us to into relationship of trust with God – whether we be times darkness, light, the in between dawn/dusk – trust God to be with us in it
* Go outside witness way sun dances off changing leaves, and way harvest moon rises steady in sky; listen for crunch leaves beneath our feet; unplug TV, turn off phone, draw bath and sit candlelight or dark, warm water lapping at our skin; lay under stays on quilt grandmother made and take it in; let tears of joy, sorrow, loss, pain fall from eyes and pool blanket below us
* As God told Abraham, *‘Look towards heaven and count the stars.’ L*et our cups runneth over, our souls be restored. Amen.