

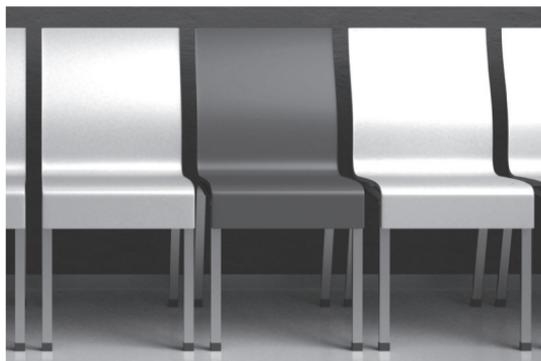
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INTRODUCTION



My second daughter was born two months ago, and she taught me a lot about waiting. She was born several weeks early, and after the whirlwind of her complicated birth I spent a lot of time sitting in hospital waiting rooms. My wife and I would wait for this doctor or that specialist. We'd wait to speak with respiratory therapists and nurses. It felt like most of my waking hours in the weeks following her arrival were spent in a hospital chair waiting for someone.

The waiting room on the fourth floor of The Woman's Hospital of Texas, just outside the Newborn Intensive Care Unit, became my sanctuary. I sat for hours in a chair by the window overlooking the hospital's courtyard. I talked to doctors and family members and friends in that chair. More importantly, I talked to God in that chair.

The concept of a waiting room is simple: It's a place to stay until you know what's happening next. It's a quiet place to collect your thoughts, a refuge from the chaos. Just beyond the walls that define the waiting space there are loud operating rooms and brightly lit labs and treatments centers. But there's peace and safety in the waiting room.



If you examine the state of modern culture, you don't have to dig too deeply until you uncover the sense of urgency that characterizes life in the twenty-first century. The immediate rules the day—instant gratification, electronic communication, the incredible weight of “now.” The immediate nature of our culture overflows into every area of life, and nowhere has it become more apparent in the lives of young adults than in our relationships.

Low-commitment, high-consequence connections rule the day. Sexual immorality has become an accepted part of life. Somewhere along the way, normal got redefined, the idea of lasting commitments became strange, and life began spinning faster and faster out of control.

I wish life came with waiting rooms. Amid the flow of life's decisions, there should be a place to pause. There should be a refuge. There should be a chair by the window.

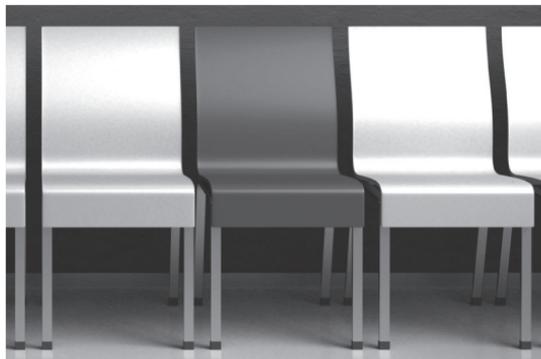
If you'll allow me to make a suggestion, I'd like to offer you the six chapters of this book as one of life's waiting rooms. A place to stop. A place to think. A place to consider your commitments.

Pull up a chair, and get comfortable with being weird, because waiting makes you weird. Waiting makes you an anomaly in a society that teaches us to value fitting in. But there is still value in waiting. In a world that would convince you otherwise, waiting is worth it . . . and you are still worth the wait.

Tyler Walea



CHAPTER ONE – WHO TURNED OUT THE LIGHTS?



Defining Darkness

“Find people who understand you.”

That’s the slogan of the Experience Project, an online library of user-submitted life experiences. The website is approaching forty million anonymous posts ranging from hilarious to heartbreaking. The posts are in response to simple prompts like “What did you have for dinner?” or more complex ideas like “I know I’ll be alone forever.” Buried in the millions of experiences is one post by the user *alienatedvirus* entitled “I Prefer Darkness over Light.”

I prefer darkness over light. The darkness allows me to hide who I am and what I truly feel. In the light all things have a chance to be revealed. Darkness makes it easier to hide. In the dark you cannot see



what is coming next. The darkness is a place where you can lose yourself. Lost in the dark is a great place to be because then you are free from what you were and can be what you want. The darkness is bliss.

Easy to hide. A place where you can lose yourself. Be what you want. Darkness. It's a frightening but accurate description of twenty-first century culture. In modern society the cover and comfort of spiritual darkness has allowed the abnormal to become normal. Things that were once considered sinful are now acceptable. Bizarre behavior is expected and even celebrated. The shocking is no longer shocking.

A simple web search of recent headlines provides enough proof to last ten lifetimes:

“Human trafficking on the rise in Pennsylvania.”

“Heroin addiction increasing across the US.”

“Abortion rate still increasing among impoverished women.”

“Dozens die of overdose as popularity of raves increases.”

“Terrorist sleeper cells proliferating in Germany.”

Slavery. Drugs. Abortion. Terrorism. Darkness.

Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:19-20 (NIV), “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”

It's into this darkness-loving culture that we are called to shine a light. The difficulty is that modern culture is not passive or ineffectual. An increasingly dark society begins to normalize deviant behavior. Evil deeds are expected, faith is questioned,



and morality is presented as only one of many paths to fulfillment.

It creates a difficult task for those who are called to be salt and light in a light-hating society. Given time, being immersed in reality can begin to rob the salt of its savor and dim the brightest of lights. That's why the struggle to change our world without allowing the world to change us remains one of our most challenging fights.

We've given it innocuous-sounding names like societal drift or moral decline, but the truth is there is a very real enemy who is out to steal, kill, and destroy everything we value. It is no longer enough to strive to be counter-cultural in our stands on morality. The time to simply "make a stand" or "speak out" against culture has passed; it's time to go to war to set free a generation that is being swallowed by spiritual darkness. And make no mistake, it is a war, and the prisoners do not know they are prisoners.

Swimming in a Cave

Imagine you've just stepped into a cave. The floor, walls, and ceiling are slick black rock. You step deeper inside and light a candle that sends shadows flickering down the black path. As you go deeper, it gets darker. After walking downward for several minutes, past stalactites and stalagmites, you come to a small body of water and the light of your candle reveals small fish rising to the surface and then sinking back below. You kneel for a closer look and realize many of the fish have no eyes. They are swimming up and down, searching for food in absolute darkness, some blind, some entirely eyeless, oblivious to your lone light shining across the surface of the water.



It almost sounds made up, but it's not. *Astyanax mexicanus*, the blind cavefish, has a lightless existence. In any normal lake or pond environment a blind or eyeless fish would quickly become the dinner of a predator. But in an environment that doesn't require sight, the fish thrive, reproduce, and pass on their lack of vision to the next generation.

Modern society is the pond at the bottom of the cave, and people by the billions are swimming in sightless circles, passing their comfort with darkness to a generation that doesn't know what it is to truly see. Most frighteningly, the darkness of the cave has redefined normal. In the cave, blindness is expected. In the cave, sight is an anomaly. In the cave, everyone grows comfortable with the dark.

Darkness has become a frightening, new kind of normal, and we are all in this cave together. For years we played the card of "us," the church, and "them," the world, as if we were somehow entirely insulated from society's flaws. The truth is, while we may with God's help be immune to culture, we are still immersed in it. We must, therefore, somehow find it in our hearts to live holy, to live pure, and to live right while everything around us invites us to close our eyes and give in to a lightless existence.

We understand that it is possible to live seeing in a sightless world. It is possible to walk circumspectly, as Paul directed us in Ephesians 5:15-16, wisely keeping our eyes open because the day is evil. He goes on to remind us one chapter later, in Ephesians 6:12, that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places. We understand that the fight for our collective future is not a natural one, but a spiritual one. The problem, however, is that



our greatest weakness tends to invite our most persistent battle. And when it comes to weakness, the fact that we're made up of an enormous amount of flesh makes us weakest of all. We're fighting a fight in our bodies, but it's not just our bodies that we're fighting. We're warring with powers, and darkness, and spiritual wickedness that wants to destroy not only our bodies, but also our souls.

The effect of long-term cave dwelling on our flesh is easily seen. It shows up in our music, our media, our television shows, and movies. Biblical directives to think on good things and to set no evil thing before our eyes are challenged every morning before breakfast. It's heard in conversations in the hallways of our schools and elevated in the classrooms of our greatest universities. It's even in the actions of many who say they are Christians but live as if God is a creature from a fairy tale. Above all, it's seen in the context of our behavior, our conversations, and our relationships with others.

Relationships are interesting things. In no other area of life is our soul and our body so connected as in our relationships. You've probably heard dozens of people use phrases like "soul connection" or "it's not just physical," when discussing sex. Sexuality does not stop at the physical. That is the power of relationships. It impacts the emotions and the spirit on an even more permanent basis than the physical. Perhaps that's why the enemy of our souls comes against our bodies so relentlessly through the sin of lust and the desire for sex.

Sex Gone Wrong

It's no secret that we have a sex problem. Studies and statistics abound that prove we have a sex problem that is not going away on its own. Sex is consistently portrayed in



modern media as being primarily recreational. The Association for Psychological Science recently released a study that says at least 85 percent of movies released in a year have significant sexual content. The few minutes of screen time portray a fantasy but fail to follow up with the reality. They don't show the pain, the emotional scars, or the bruised spirits left in the wake of momentary relationships that need more than time and distance to be healed.

Dr. Archibald D. Hart says in *Healing Life's Hidden Addictions*, "The most powerful force in the physical world is not the nuclear bomb—but sex! Addictions to alcohol and cocaine may be major problems for our age, but they pale into insignificance when compared with the ravages of sex gone wrong."

If sex can go right, it can also go wrong. And the "wrongs" of sex are what we rarely talk about or see played out to their true end on one-hour television dramas.

Unwanted Pregnancies

Although the birth rate among teens has dropped to a sixty-year low, consider these facts:

Every sixty-four seconds a baby is born to a teenaged mother. Every five minutes a baby is born to a teenaged mother who already has another child. One million teen women get pregnant each year. Sixty-five percent of teenaged mothers are unmarried. Seventy-eight percent of teen pregnancies are unplanned. (Source: Anderson, p. 120, Alan Guttmacher Institute, Teen Sex and Pregnancy.)

It's sex gone wrong.



Abortions

In the past forty years, about forty million unborn children have been legally aborted in the United States. Every twenty seconds, two lives are taken by abortion. The first is the unborn child. The second is abortion's forgotten victim—the mother who has to live with memories for a lifetime.

It's sex gone wrong.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

In 1972, the year before the US Supreme Court's landmark abortion ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, there were only two sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) at epidemic levels. Today, there are at least twenty active STDs. A third of all Americans over the age of ten have one or more of these diseases. An estimated sixty-five million Americans are afflicted with at least one of these incurable diseases that can lead to infertility, miscarriages, stillbirths, mother-to-infant infections, and cancer. And, sadly enough, each year twelve to fifteen million new cases are reported. (Mark Tapscott, director of Center for Media and Public Policy at the Heritage Foundation).

It's sex gone wrong.

Emotional Trauma

Sex outside of marriage carries a high emotional price tag. Couples engaging in premarital sex quite often think the relationship is much deeper than what it is. They find out how shallow it is soon enough when the hurt comes: guilt, fear, heartbreak, misunderstanding, loss of identity and personal values, and a fracturing of the soul.



It's sex gone wrong.

The fact that society is getting increasingly dark is inarguable. But if sex and society can go wrong, they can also go right. Let's turn on the light, shall we?

A Better Plan

God has a better plan.

Say it aloud. Seriously. Wherever you are right now, say it aloud.

God. Has. A. Better. Plan.

Sometimes you have to remind yourself of that. Otherwise, you'll get stuck in the rut of believing the chaos and darkness that so often surrounds us is all there is.

God has a plan for your life. God has a plan for your talents and giftings and abilities. God has a plan for your relationships and for the family you'll someday have. And yes, God even has a plan for sex.

Look down the road and dream a bit. Imagine the married version of you. Imagine a couple of kids on a swing in the backyard. Imagine the minivan. Yes, go ahead and imagine the minivan. Here's the thing. We tend to make life decisions based on the "us" of the next ten minutes rather than the "us" of the next ten years. God's plan looks even further than that.

Most individuals' regrets revolve around making decisions with short-term thinking that had long-term consequences. The twenty-year-old version of you doesn't realize that the

