



Tunneling Through

WITH THE LAST SCRAPS OF LIGHT OFFICIALLY extinguished, my eyes scrambled, irises expanding to full capacity, trying to adjust to the total darkness that had enveloped me. I couldn't see a thing. It was pitch black.

I was in the St. Paul Pass, or Taft Tunnel, of the Hiawatha Bike Trail. For years I had read about – in fact written about – the Hiawatha, and had longed to put my bike tires to the gravel, riding the trail myself. So a few weeks ago, just before it closed for the season, I made it happen.

I'd heard warnings about the first, and longest tunnel, which stretches nearly two miles and takes you 8,771 feet beneath the rugged Bitterroot Mountains. I was excited for the adventure!

The temperature immediately dropped upon entering the tunnel, and the gentle sound of water, dripping and seeping through the rock, echoed in the cavernous space as it fell down the walls and pooled in large gutters on each side of the gravel and rock covered trail. My bike light, which had seemed so bright when I accidentally shined it directly into my eyes while checking the batteries the night before, suddenly seemed deficient. Though it struggled to illuminate the way, its light was nearly devoured by the darkness. My back up headlamp felt equally ill equipped for the heavy darkness.

A small wave of uneasiness washed over me as I assessed my situation. It wasn't fear; rather, it was the recognition this situation was different from any I had been in before, and I had some things to figure out quickly.

Glancing farther into the tunnel, and then to the sides, I looked for some feature upon which my eyes could anchor, to get my bearings. This only served to throw me slightly off balance, as my depth perception and peripheral vision were compromised.

Driving a car, you are to supposed to shift your eyes, looking in

front of you, to the sides, in your rearview mirror and then glance up again to look farther ahead down the road. When darkness is all around you, though, that isn't always an option. With no reference points, I decided to work with what I had: a small swath of dim light revealing only what was directly in front of me. I shifted my shoulders forward again and looked straight ahead, focusing on the small patch of trail that was faintly illuminated.

I pedaled steadily, feeling the cool air pressing against me while keeping my eyes trained on that small pool of light. As I pedaled, I thought about the situation I was in, and how our lives often unfold in a similar manner.

Sometimes you enter a season of life, or a tunnel. There is no way to avoid this place; going through it is the only option for getting to the other side. As the light goes out, you are completely engulfed in darkness, and it can feel uncomfortable. You look around for something – anything – to cling to and to lean on. Just like on the bike, you're moving and things are coming at you fast. As much as you would like to find a safe place to stop and assess your plans, there just isn't time. As Corrie Ten Boom, the Dutch Christian imprisoned for helping Jews escape the Nazis, famously said, "When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer."

You must take action. So you pedal. Slowly, methodically, and with determination.

Though it is tempting to forget to keep your eyes focused on where you are going and where you want to be, you can't allow yourself to be distracted by looking to the right, the left, or anywhere you don't want to go, because if you waver and look that way, you will spin out.

So, you pedal. Slowly, methodically, and with determination, through rough, frightening, dark places in life, because you know the only way through is to keep going, no matter how dark it is. You keep your eyes focused on what is ahead, knowing that is where the light will eventually be. And when you can't see that light? You have to keep pedaling, trusting it will appear.

Often, when it seems like the tunnel has gone on too long, it happens. The darkness dissipates; light gradually starts to seep around the corner, and suddenly, you are out of the tunnel, safely into the daylight. You made it through—and the view is incredible on the other side!

Sometimes though, there are blessings and glimmers along the way in a dark tunnel. Two bikers, conquering the trail in reverse, emerged from the tunnel as our group was preparing to enter it. "Oh my gosh, people were singing in there!" one of the men exclaimed. "It was the most amazing thing I've ever heard, it was beautiful. Out of the darkness came this sound, like a choir, but we didn't see anyone else. It was like angels were singing."

I had put that thought far out of my mind when, three-quarters through the dark tunnel, I heard something. Softly at first, but growing ever louder and stronger, the beautiful strains of *Amazing Grace* filled the entire cavernous space. It was unbelievably beautiful.

When we victoriously emerged from the tunnel and blinked in the bright light, everyone in my group looked around, exclaiming about the singing and trying to figure out from who or where it had come. There were no singers in sight, nor anywhere along the trail that day, and no explanation for who could have been singing.

Perhaps it was just a sweet blessing and glimmer, meant to make the tunnel more bearable because, after all, glimmers are what help us tunnel through.

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