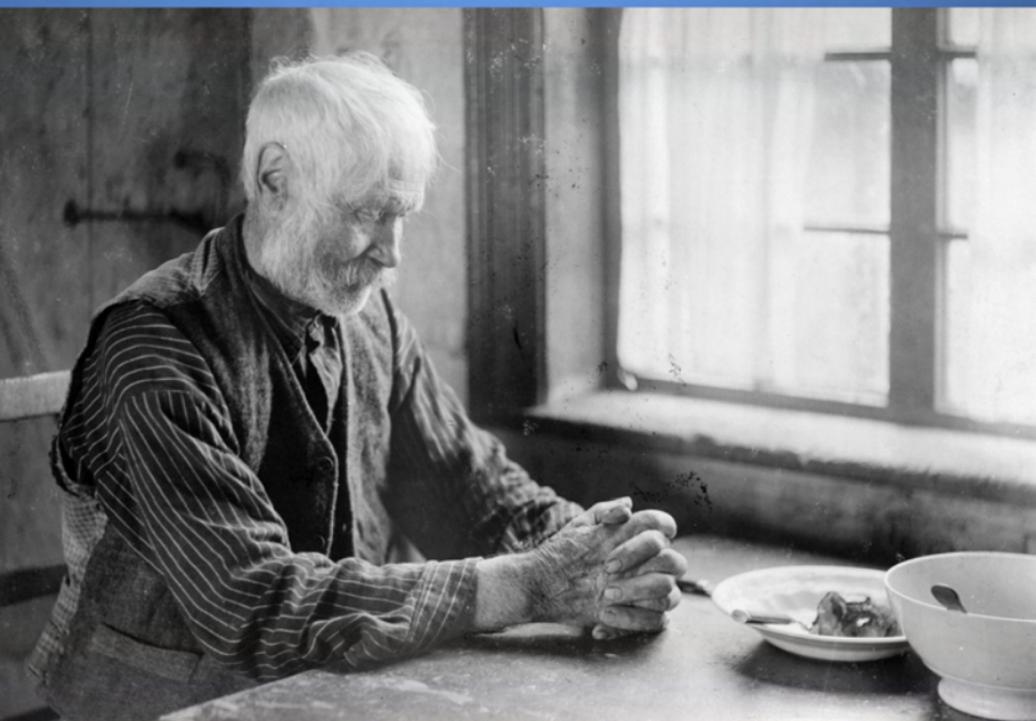


# HOPE

THE LAMP OF THE BODY



David D. Zelenka

# HOPE

## THE LAMP OF THE BODY

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Matthew 6:22-23

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For Richard

(and all who are seeking a path home)

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# HOPE INHERITED

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be fear or pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat on the throne of heaven and earth said, *"Behold, I make all things new."*

Revelation 21:4

Just a couple of days ago I had another one of my nostalgia dreams. It's always the same. The scene is beautiful. I'm living in a sense of wonder and joy. I am either a child or at least childlike in my adult body. But soon the joy starts to fade in my dream. The scene darkens because I begin to realize it is just a dream and I'm really older and it has been years and years since I was really a child. I slowly recognize my bed-covers and the dark room of my home and begin longing to return to the dream fully. Then it hits me. An intense wave of sadness, a deep depression, sweeps over my body. The feeling is so strong that I'm shocked into full consciousness. At first, I can still feel the deep longing and sadness. Within about a minute or so, the despair is gone, but the feeling never really fades completely. Just under the surface, I am always grieving the loss of my childhood, or what seems like childhood. My entire being lives partially in this intense longing. Even so, I am consoled, because I know the grief is God's way to call me home.

I once came across the word, *sehnsucht*, while reading an article by C.S. Lewis. Curiosity forced me to look it up. It is German and doesn't seem to have an adequate translation in English. It's the sort of

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word that is difficult explain in any language. The closest word I know is *nostalgia*. It is the feeling buried with my childhood self that awakens in my dreams, the feeling that's never quite awake in this world. Sehnsucht calls me to play with my children. Sehnsucht calls me to go to the mountains. It calls me to love and to rediscover life. As beautiful and just out of reach the feeling is, I am thankfully to be overcome by it every now and again.

Once as my wife was paging through a Lopi knitting book I noticed a photograph of a rustic house alongside the stark Icelandic seascape. For a moment I was overwhelmed with a peculiar and fleeting feeling. It was the same intense longing, maybe for summer in the grayness of perpetual winter. Maybe it was for wildness and distance from civilization, but because I've never been to Iceland, it's a nostalgia for something I've never known. I get the same feeling about the 'North' country, whatever that means. High latitude skies, cold winds across the bracken may trigger the feeling in me. I also get this feeling from simpler things, especially good children's literature. Try the original Winnie-the-Pooh Series, especially the last chapter of *The House at Pooh Corner*.

In that final scene Christopher Robin is walking through the forest explaining to Pooh all the things he will be learning in when he goes to school. Christopher Robin is growing up. He will be leaving Pooh soon. Pooh just doesn't understand what is happening to his faithful friend, and poor lovable Christopher is oblivious to the fact that he won't be able to come back after he goes away. My eyes fill with tears each time I read that final chapter.

I also get the sehnsucht feeling when I think about *The Hobbit* and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series. Years ago after reading those books in rapid succession, I went through a mild depression when I realized I had left Middle Earth for good. The series of books was over and the

movies sure don't do them justice. I couldn't go back. Today, I still long for the Shire in my life. But it can't be. I know that.

There is a purpose of *sehnsucht* and its purpose is to point us in the direction of *life*. We are not supposed to go back or retreat into or relive or even seek to restore the *sehnsucht* in our lives, because the feeling is primarily a compass for us. Many people spend their lives trying to get the feeling back, rather than finding out why the feeling is important. I expect that one day I will awaken into it. I will learn that it was God calling me all along. If I understand correctly, this is how C.S. Lewis understood it, too.

It makes me wonder if Jesus lived his life on earth with this feeling—perpetually. As Emmanuel, “God with us,” how greatly he must have longed to return to his Father.

I have the fortune to live between the Olympic Mountains and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, in Washington state. When the rain clouds of winter don't obscure the peaks and ridges, a snow-capped peak named Mount Angeles looks down on our town. Though this particular mountain is south of our town, most people I know refer to it as in the northerly direction. We always gets directions backwards because Mount Angeles and the ridges that support her are at the top of our world. She is compelling and reminds us of something deeper, far deeper than even her root. She calls us with a *sehnsucht* voice.

Recently, my son Peter and I went up to spend the night on a shoulder of Mount Angeles—Klahanie Ridge. It felt like the first day of summer here. We had a long, wet and cool springtime. I longed to get up in the mountain—if just for the evening—and camp on a rocky alpine ridge. So we went up and got there just about dinner time with our bagels and snacky foods. The pale blue and orange evening light lit up the north-facing snowfields to our south and the

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green mountain ridges to our east. To our north, we could look across the smooth waters of the Strait to Canada. At our elevation, it almost felt as if we could see the permanent summer light of the 67th parallel.

There's wasn't a cloud in the sky, so we could sleep under the stars and looked upwards into near-infinite space. It was the first time Peter had slept under the stars and certainly not the first nor hopefully the last time for me. The wind in the stunted firs kept us company, as well as the summer constellations, a thin crescent moon rising around midnight, and a shooting star or two.

My body isn't accustomed to sleeping on the ground, so it wasn't the most comfortable night's sleep, but what better place to toss and turn a bit. When I have a starry sky, sometimes I try to get a 3-D perspective of the nearby stars. To do so, I must make my mind think that the brighter stars are closer and the fainter are more distant. Although this method isn't entirely accurate, if I can convince my mind of it, the 3-D nature of space can pop into my view of the heavens if only for a brief moment. It's a very humbling experience and illuminates Psalm 19 when David says that the "Heavens declare the glory of God."

The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they display knowledge.

Psalm 19:1-3

Although the experience of sleeping under the stars is delightful, there always seems to be something missing. In this case, I was thinking, "I sure wish my wife could experience this with us." But if she was with me, it would have been something else. This is the experience that *all* of us have all the time. No matter what we're doing, something is

always missing. This is why the grass is always greener. This is why marriages fail. This is why revolutions occur. This is why people have eating disorders or fall into the attraction of drugs.

But what is missing? There is always something missing for man in this world and I am convinced that this is because we were banished from the Garden of Eden and no longer does our Maker walk physically among us. In living our *sehnsucht* lives, we are missing our God.

Two thousand years ago, this was the big excitement for those who understood who Jesus was. They realized and were filled completely by the knowledge and presence of Emmanuel. This is why Christians long achingly for the return of Jesus and we know that he is true to his promise. John declares this boldly for us at the end of his Revelation, “Come, Lord Jesus.” This hope is written in *us*—a hope that we have inherited from him.

Although there may be something missing right now, there will be the day in which we are filled at last.

## **Mount Olympus Beckoned and I Responded**

Mount Olympus is a heavily-glaciated, relatively low-elevation mountain located about 25 miles from where I currently live. It is a gem of ice. You should know that I’ve never actually climbed it to the top.

However, I have traveled its glacial flanks. Once on a five-day trip in late August, some friends and I hiked around the east side of the Olympus massif. We started at the Hoh visitor center, hiked up the lush rainforest valley and traversed the eastern glacial lobes. We

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worked our way over to the headwaters of the Queets and back northwestward through the Bailey Range. After having to spend one foggy night in a very tight position on rock ledges and atop krummholtz dwarf trees, we exited the wilderness through the Sol Duc two valleys over and to the north of the actual peak of Olympus.

That last paragraph told you very little of the experience. Can writing ever do an experience justice? Rather, I wish to convey the difference between the reality of wilderness (or the reality of experience) and what we read, hear or experience through words, literature and media of all sorts.

Nothing compares to living reality. Books, words, photographs and film don't even come close. Each time I go hiking in a beautiful place, I end up saying to myself, "Oh, now I remember what this place was like." I can't know it until I'm there again. I can't even really remember it. There's a built-in amnesia for those sorts of places. The epiphany doesn't occur until I'm immersed in it. I call this experience *wilderness amnesia*. But there are many other amnesias of this sort: well-being amnesia, love amnesia, home amnesia. Places, experiences and people can't be conveyed in an accurate manner through words or media. In fact, reality is not designed that way.

History and civilization has had the same effect on us human inhabitants as does distance from wilderness. The further we get from our roots, our home, the more the amnesia sets in. The more we don't know what it was like. The more we think, "This is normal," when it is not. This amnesia sets in until the reality of our existence is so hidden, so foreign, so fragmented that we become blind. We go beyond the threshold, the horizon, of knowing reality.

As a Christian, I feel the same about the Kingdom of Heaven. Like wilderness, Eden was a place that is almost unfathomable for us

humans. Unlike wilderness, Eden isn't a place where we can simply hike into. However, as Jesus says, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," we can get glimpses. I've received fleeting epiphanies of the Kingdom of Heaven. The experience in wilderness is one of those fleeting epiphanies. The experience of truly loving relationships is another of those fleeting epiphanies. God's communication through prayer is yet another example of those fleeting epiphanies. Thankfully, these epiphanies help keep amnesia at bay.

We are beckoned by these fleeting epiphanies, whether it be Mount Olympus or the Kingdom of Heaven. The beckoning may even come through words, pictures and media of all sorts. But the beckoning itself is fully realized in experience. So, get out there and feel the beckoning call of wilderness, of the Kingdom of Heaven, and of the *sehnsucht* voice of life.

## The Joy of John

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 22: 1-5

The more I study the book of Revelation, the more John speaks

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directly to my heart. Since my world view is not all that materialistic, I have an advantage in comprehending John's strange, wild, deep and colorful book. I believe dreams and visions to be integral aspects of reality. Things that dwell in our minds are not only reflections of reality, but reality itself may actually become manifest within the reflections of our minds. Hope also does this for us. It takes root in our dreams and visions, grows embryonically and finally manifests in reality. In John's vision, John was witnessing the reality of the past, present and future. His writing was the reflection of reality. To understand Revelation, lie on a couch and put on your dream interpretation spectacles and pick up a Bible.

I by no means fully understand John's Revelation, but only very dimly, nor do I think it is possible to fully understand it. The symbols of his vision are very archetypal. They do have meaning we can see clearly, yet some symbols and the fabric of his thoughts have been obscured by the decay and metamorphosis of language and culture over time and will be irresolvable until the end of history.

Mostly John's Revelation is a book of hope. It shows that the earth's abominations will not deceive us cyclically or eternally, nor will they crush our joy forever. On the contrary, the message is as clear as it is in the gospels: *Have Hope! Goodness will prevail in Christ Jesus.*

Even with this message, it is tempting to seek understanding of the hidden meanings within the book. This is where so many have gone astray and ended up looking very silly with their interpretations of John's Apocalypse. Many have acted on that temptation due to fear or desire for power and attributed all kinds of worldly powers, past and present, to the various evil characters within the book.

"Look! Obama is the first beast!"

"No, George W. was the first beast and Obama is the second beast."

“Be careful not to get it wrong! America is the Great Prostitute and Israel is...”

“Watch out for Pokémon and Hello Kitty. They are actually Gog and Magog!”

We end up building our interpretations based on our political, philosophical, cultural or nationalistic bias. How many people will use John's Revelation to point fingers at the other guy?

In my study of the book, have I really been any different from the finger-pointers described above? Not really. I've fallen into the same trap. But I do feel that the book of Revelation does have a particular antagonist. A definable character and it is not George, Obama, nor Pokémon. Only now, the difference is that I'm pointing back at myself, not really me specifically as a person, but toward the greater civilization in which I am a cog. This antagonist has been known by many different names: Babylon, Rome, the West, etc. By this I mean the dominating global civilization that exists worldwide today and has existed for quite some time. I think much of the prophecy in the book discusses the fall of ancient Rome, its rebirth in the West, and the final removal of evil from the places of power when history ends. But then again, my bias might be leading me astray.

I'll provide an example. In my mind, I've never been able to let go of the common idea that ancient Babylon, Ancient Rome, and the present-day modern civilization are of the same ilk. The exploitation of people and the planet by modern 'Babylon' has encouraged a gut feeling in me that says: The things that we (our present civilization) have done to the people and planet are not right. The things we do for profit and greed and lust are wrong. Neither technology, nor education, nor military, nor law will not resolve the matter.

I feel the same way that John does but instead of Rome, I feel it about

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our global civilization. We have been an abomination for a great variety of reasons. I am and have been a part of that machine. In John's Apocalypse he didn't have the nicest things to say about the great civilization of his day either: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations."

Now he might have been talking about ancient Babylon or some other future civilization, but I tend to think that he was talking about the Rome of his day, and in Revelation 18 he may have been describing what was to be the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. The rejoicing in heaven of Revelation 19 seems to be due directly to the fall of the Rome.

If I take this interpretation to be true, then it leads me to think that the Millennial Period—which people make such a fuss over—has already occurred and was simply the period from the 5th Century to the 15th Century, the so-called Middle Ages. This was a time when the great civilizations of the West were stifled by the Church. The flourishing of civilization was put on hold for one millennium. Satan could not fully deceive all the nations without the glory of a great modern civilization. But the unleashing of the worst was yet to come.

"And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea."

Revelation 20: 7-8

And curiously just about a thousand years after the decline of the Roman Empire, the Renaissance, a rebirth of Rome occurred. The Church was ruptured into the hundreds of splinter groups in the Protestant Reformation. The ancient serpent was set free. Rome was

rebuilt and expanded worldwide to create the industrial, technological, post-modern world we see today.

Despite all the problems I have with our civilization, whether foretold or not in John's book, I cling to the hope in Christ rather than hope in any social structure. Likewise, the joy of John was his hope for Christ Jesus to make everything right. His Apocalypse was the seeds of that hope in words. But did his mind conjure it all up or was it a vision handed to him? Jesus tells him to, "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later."

What hope do you have? What dreams do you have. Write them down. Make sticky notes. Put them on your fridge. These hopes are dreams and are what make us alive. They are God's way of calling us home.

## Happy Talk

Happy talk, keep talking happy talk,  
Talk about things you'd like to do,  
You gotta have a dream, if you don't have a dream,  
How you gonna have a dream come true?

*South Pacific* (Rodgers & Hammerstein)

My wife and I watched *South Pacific* a while back. Although it was a bit sappy, it was a truly fascinating film. Written just after the WWII, it genuinely had a feeling that seemed special to that time period. The movie itself was produced in 1958 and had a feeling, an innocence, that was a part of American culture just prior to that big shift into which the boomer youth paved our way.

Despite the warm feelings that the movie produced inside of me, I was

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oddly compelled by the song *Happy Talk*, sung to the two young lovers by the older Tonkinese woman named Bloody Mary.

The last line in *Happy Talk* is “You gotta have a dream, if you don’t have a dream, how you gonna have a dream come true?” This line is pivotal to all of us in our lives here on earth. We must have a dream, because we go the path of our dream. And we all have a dream. But it may just be a dream that someone has planted inside us, rather than our own. Then we go the path of another’s dream, and that may or may not be where we want to end up.

What’s curious is that *Happy Talk* encapsulates the dream I seek. You’ll notice that I began saying, “Although it was a bit sappy...” My inner motive was on the defense saying in effect, “I’m not really that sappy.” And why would my inner motive want you to think that? Because in our culture there’s an idea that says, “Smart people shouldn’t really believe in romance and happy talk. Sweetness is not of value. True love and joy is really impossible.” No, our culture injects us with a fear that we won’t belong if we believe in those ‘sappy’ sorts of things. You who do are anti-intellectual, live in a ridiculous fantasy world, and really must be a dimwit to believe it to be true. I also believed this line of thinking for many dark years.

But it is possible to believe in that happy reality. Although we will all see darkness and pain in our life, one day, this dream will come true. This is the Joy of John. Many dreams do come to fruition. It’s the special character of humanity. It is true to each and every one of us. So, if you gotta have a dream, what’s yours gonna be? It may very well come true.

Mine is that joy will abound more and more externally, where each purpose-filled day is bright, new and exciting, where sleepy nights take us to a banquet of dreams, where fellowship is the most sought-after of

riches, where God's love is tangible, material and ever-present in our lives.

Yes, I'm a dreamer, but thankfully my dream will come true.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

Genesis 40:15-16

## **The Lion and the Horse**

I had another series of startling dreams of the *sehnsucht*-type that I've had in recent years. As usual, my dreams are strung together like cloud-pictures waxing and waning across a blue summer sky. But one segment of this particular dream wasn't so summery.

I was walking along in an ancient place. The kind of scene you might happen upon when reading an Aesop's Fable or when reading about the life of Noah. There were rolling prairies, a ravine, and in the distance, ancient rocks jutting out of the field of grass. But right in front of our path, was a lion, an archetypal beast of horror. The roaring, the barring of his teeth, his angry pose reared up on hind legs terrified us all. His head did not have the typical mane you'd see on a lion. His head and neck looked more like a lioness, with massive muscles flexing beneath his thin vellum of skin.

He was ahead of us, but there was no turning back. We pressed on shivering in fear. My dad was nearby across the ravine. Oddly enough, he was a horse, dark brown with a long mane. He didn't notice the

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lion. I tried to yell to warn him, but he didn't hear us over the ambient noise of the wind and the creek.

Soon, we were upon the lion, close enough to touch him. I then realized that the lion's master was there also, a human figure, who in a word could tell the lion to devour us. Immediately, I grabbed his hand and prayed, "Lord Jesus...Lord Jesus." I prayed for Dad and for us. I just babbled to Jesus in fear. I knew that I must hold that man's hand and pray until Dad was safely beyond the lion.

My dad passed safely as did we. I ended the prayer and we continued on, looking back only briefly. The intensity of the moment was such that I awoke quickly with the feeling still lingering in my flesh. Afterward, I couldn't help but think that the man's hand I held was the hand of God.

Infrequently, I find myself praying to Jesus in my dreams. It's a remarkable experience and has changed my dreamworld significantly. I recommend it to anyone, but there's a catch, in order for prayer to take hold in dreamworld, it must be done first in reality. At least that has been the case for me.

If you live anywhere near a city or where people suffer, each day you'll find someone on the street with which to pray. It's really great practice and is very humbling. Every time I go to Seattle, I find those people. They find me. God brings us together. If you keep your eyes open you'll see them as well. They'll find you. It is through our prayer that we discover our relationship with Christ, a friendship that actually has always been there. We inherited this friendship as his children. It's the only valuable inheritance we will ever come to know.

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# TWELVE UMBILICAL CORDS

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

Romans 6:5

## **Interdependent Hope**

Someone looked at me quite puzzled the other day. She is an elderly lady who I know from simple chats and conversations. She seems very sensible and kind. We were having a conversation at Sunday School and I was trying to explain how I am similar to the person who does or has done the most horrific acts known to man, simply because I am in the body of Man. We are all branches of the same tree. I should have said something like, "Because we are connected historically, socially, and relationally, are we really any different?" I did go on to explain something about us all being connected. But as you might expect, her puzzled face intensified. My explanations and justifications didn't seem to do much good. Her face did clear up and I don't think it was because she suddenly 'got it'. She may have been thinking that I was fit for the looney bin or the correctional facility in comparing myself to Adolf Hitler or Saddam Hussein. I suppose I could keep my mouth shut more often.

But seriously are any of us all that different? The only thing that

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separates me and you are probably less than twelve umbilical cords if you are Caucasian, maybe only Six Degrees of Separation, as was popularized by John Guare's play.

I do think each of us are distinct persons, but not as different as most of us would like to imagine.

The people know the salt of the sea  
and the strength of the winds  
lashing the corners of the earth.  
The people take the earth  
as a tomb of rest and a cradle of hope.  
Who else speaks for the Family of Man?  
They are in tune and step  
with constellations of universal law.  
The people is a polychrome,  
a spectrum and a prism  
held in a moving monolith,  
a console organ of changing themes,  
a clivilux of color poems  
wherein the sea offers fog  
and the fog moves off in rain  
and the Labrador sunset shortens  
to a nocturne of clear stars  
serene over the shot spray  
of northern lights.

Carl Sandburg, *The People Yes*

I can honestly say that I feel no different from the horrors of this earth. If there's a man that you can point to and say, "He is a wicked man," that man is me. Or if you can say, "Can you believe she did that?" I am her. We are all more alike than we would like to believe.

That was on a Sunday. The next day, I walked into the dentist office and was immediately told that upon leaving "I'd be fully *sanctified*." It was a quippy remark probably based on our past discussions. And the sanctification he spoke of didn't have anything to do with my smile. I

think he wanted me to really know the truth to what John Wesley spoke of when he spoke about our “new birth” and our “entire sanctification.” And there’s truth to it, even though we may be twelve umbilical cords away from Saddam Hussein, Christ has promised us that we, his disciples, will be cleansed completely. The Hitler in us will be washed away. I can trust and should fully trust that promise and feel entirely sanctified. It was a good thing for me to hear.

So, oddly enough, I did leave the dentist’s office feeling fully sanctified. I can proudly say that I’m no different from the great Joy of this earth. For yes, in the great horrors I will die forever, yet in the great Joy, our beloved Christ, I will be raised with for eternity. The spiritual umbilical cord that I have with Jesus will never be severed.

The beautiful thing about being truly connected to the body of Man is that we can say, “I’m sorry.” Like Christ we can take the heat for our brothers and sisters. And we can gain forgiveness for ourselves *and* for others.

## Monica’s Wooden Rule

In her dream she saw herself standing on a sort of wooden rule, and saw a bright youth approaching her, joyous and smiling at her, while she was grieving and bowed down with sorrow. But when he inquired of her the cause of her sorrow and daily weeping (not to learn from her, but to teach her, as is customary in visions), and when she answered that it was my [St. Augustine’s] soul’s doom she was lamenting, he bade her rest content and told her to look and see that where she was there I was also. And when she looked she saw me standing near her on the same rule.

Confessions, Book III

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Like most mothers, Monica desired the best for her son Augustine. She gave him the means and education that she hoped would set him off on a path to success. How often do mothers and fathers provide the means to success, but only watch their son or daughter fall sharply or take a road wrought with high-living and despair? It was no different for Monica. Except she did far more for her son than to just provide the earthly means to success.

As Augustine lived the high-life as a cosmopolitan youth in the sophisticated cities of the Roman empire, Monica prayed unceasingly for him. In doing so, she kept him lashed tightly with the spiritual umbilical cord she had with Christ. Monica's dream represents her life and her work on behalf of the spiritual debts and guilt incurred by her prodigal son. In the dream, Monica learned from a joyous, bright youth that her prayers for her son were significant in paying for his debts. This is what it was meant that Augustine was standing side-by-side with her on the ruler of judgment. How many parent try to buy their sons and daughters success, only to ignore the only success that has any real value—a friendship with Jesus.

I know in my town, some parents strive to get their children in band or strings, not primarily because they want their children to succeed in the joy of music, but because it will set them down the right track in school with the kids who don't get outwardly in trouble. The driving force behind this approach is too often fear. Fear is the opposite of hope. Now Monica would have certainly known the track her son was taking or she wouldn't have been weeping daily for him. But her sorrow turned to great joy through her ardent and long-suffering prayer. There will be times when we are unable to have hope. In those cases, we can have prayer. Then Christ becomes our hope.

On the other hand, to fight fear, how often do we buy friendship with others by forming an appearance or by our topics of conversation,

rather than by strengthening our collective bonds with Christ?

Monica learned about the power of intercessory prayer. We can learn from her dream as well. Prayer both builds bonds between people and Christ. And In doing so, a miracle occurs. Those for whom we pray stand on the ruler of judgment with us. They stand on the rule together with Christ. And it is Christ who paid for all of our debts.

Guilt and debt are the tightest of bedfellows. We cause others to feel guilty in ways that are not even remotely obvious, yet are clearly destructive to our lives as well as those we cast our guilt on. We usually pass the guilt out to our most kindred people. In doing so we subconsciously and manipulatively use it as a tool to strengthen bondage, yet ironically it isolates us from them.

Likewise, the debts we charge others not only superficially places us in power over them, but it also impoverishes them spiritually, emotionally and financially. It binds us to them and them to us. And no one is greater than the least in a relationship. If part of a whole is impoverished, then the entire whole is impoverished. It doesn't work the other way around either: the least is not as great as the greatest, at least not in this type of bondage. (It should be noted that bondage of Godly love is entirely different. The least is as great as the greatest.)

The reason for the impoverished state is that the relationship is in a state of stressful tension. The impoverished segment wants and needs to pull away, yet the debtor calls in the debt that he is owed. It is self-consuming. Both parties begin to die because of the interconnectedness.

It is also a vicious cycle. As we feel the guilt (the reality of owing), we are required to pay back our loans. To pay back our loans, it requires us to find our payment from elsewhere, so we manipulatively (consciously or subconsciously) create guilt with others (usually the

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closest and easiest prey, maybe, say, a spouse) so we can keep paying off our debts. There's no filing for bankruptcy in the emotional world either. It doesn't seem to work that way.

We can place people in debt in many ways: lending of wealth, status, sex, emotions, trust and even a simple look. This is not only how the power-hungry, charismatic, cult-of-personality, psychopath takes power, but it is also how marriages start and friends form. None of us are innocent of using guilt as a manipulative device.

Although we may not be innocent, we can have a clear conscious in this life. We do that by releasing our debts and asking for forgiveness. Both must be done in tandem. However, this is a Catch-22. We can't just release our debts because all of us are connected with the same chains of debt and guilt. I am connected to you and you are connected to me. We're siphoning to and from each other. I can't release my chains because I owe someone. The chains I have attached to you must feed the one that I owe and so on. I'm bound by this web of guilt and debt. It is a law as strong as gravity. It's impossible to let go of the chains unless we know that our debts have been paid for.

But we can drop our chains in the light of knowing that our debts have been paid. This is what the cross of Christ is all about. Our chains of guilt have been severed by innocent blood paying the debt in full.

We are free to be free. Now what we need to do is to start severing the chains that bond us through our guilt burden on others—no more glances, no more “you owe me” consciously or subconsciously. We are free to free others. We have the key and the key fits all of our locks, and everyone else's, too. We are free by the blood of Christ.

We can even release guilt when we are bound to others. In fact, we should do this while bound to others. Many others still need our ‘cash

flow' to pay off their debts. They don't realize that they are free and so are still paying the loan officer. If they don't take it from us, they'll take it from someone and incur more debt. It is best to take it from someone who won't ask for it back, none of it, spiritually, emotionally or physically. When we are truly free, we have the supply. This is what Monica's dream meant for Saint Augustine. This is what Jesus means for us. We become free to be bound together in God's love rather than bound to the debt of sin.

## The Age of the Jubilee

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Matthew 6:24

It's clear to me that one of the harder roots to our world's financial and economic problems is usury. The traditional arguments against usury are laid out in a variety of places, so I won't go there today. I'm going to approach the issue of usury from the point of promises and expectations.

To begin, let's say you lend someone \$1,000 to buy a car. He *promises* to pay you back and you *expect* him to do so. The keywords here are "promise" and "expect." Not all lending requires one to have expectations and make promises. But in our example, notice that he is required to lie by promising to pay you back. It's a lie because he may or may not be able to pay you back. He can't be certain. Secondly, you're making him indebted to you through his promise and your expectation. For all practical purposes he is bound to you as a debt-slave, and it must be added as noted previously, that the bondage goes

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both ways. On top of that, if you charge him interest, then you are binding him to you beyond the balance of the debt. Scales are fair only when the sides are equally balanced. Usury unfairly weighs the scales.

You may argue that, say, he delivers pizza with that car you lent him money for, then he has made some money on that car of which you should have a cut. This may be true, but again, it's about expectations. Work may create more wealth or it may not. He might need to get a new transmission and there goes all the profits. Work is not financially fruitful all the time. Moreover, if we can't expect someone to repay a debt, then we can't expect him to pay the interest either.

Now if he doesn't promise to pay you back, but just says that he'll do his best, then he's not lying. And if you truly don't expect him to pay you back, then you're not making him a debt-slave. But how often is that the case in our modern world? How often is this the case within our hearts? Not only do we expect to get our money back from the bank we lend it to, but we also expect interest as well.

Jesus makes it clear how our hearts should be with regard to lending and borrowing. Jesus explains, "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great."

However, if we read The Parable of the Ten Minas, doesn't he tell us to do the opposite? Shouldn't we expect a return from our debtors? "Finally the master said to him, 'Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'"

In the parables, we read what our hearts want to read, which is not always the truth of the story. Jesus is saying to lend freely, to lend our money, to lend our talents, to lend our lives, and when we do so, inevitably, there will be reward. We lend freely. We lend without

bondage, “hoping for nothing again.” In fact, he’s also saying that if we don’t lend, but rather hoard, then our wealth, our talents and our lives will stagnate and rot.

Now I personally have money in the bank, and my money is being lent out to others. But I pray that my heart is still “hoping for nothing again” from it. It’s not really *my* money anyway, is it? Could I be so egocentric to think that any particular thing in this world is mine? On the other hand, could I be so detached to think that nothing is mine? My breath is mine for an instant; in me and out of me. If it sits too long in my lungs, it becomes poison.

Burying our talents and our gold may be poison too, but so also is indebtedness. In the bondage of debt-slaves, the stagnating wealth becomes poison like high CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the lungs. Instead of stagnating in one person’s lungs, it stagnates amongst two.

However, we must remember what happens when you try to hold your breath? It’s inevitable, you will breathe. The debt-bonds will also be broken. There was a remedy for the moneylender-debtor bondage in the Hebrew world and that was the Year of the Jubilee. Not only was the jubilee good for the debtor, but it was also good for the lender, for bondage goes both ways. The moneylender and debtor are a single unit and are freed. They are chained together in bondage by umbilical cords of debt, false promises and the covetous heart’s expectations. There are only two ways about it: we can be bound to mankind in slavery or bound to man in love.

As we watch the injustice of debt and usury crashing our world, there might be a tendency for us to be afraid about what is next. But no, it’s just that we are so used to living with stagnating air that we don’t know what it’s like to breathe anymore. But fear not, fresh air is coming. We must be free of our economic, physical and spiritual

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debts. I do long for the eternal age of the Jubilee. But Christ says this age starts now. We must start by freeing the bonds of others, while at the same time binding them with the embrace of God's love.

## The First Step to Counseling Others

Forgive us for our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us.

Matthew 6:12

Because we are all so connected, not only do we need to free others of debts, but we also need to free others of their problems. Oddly enough the first step to counseling others is to recognize that I am actually bound to their problem. My spiritual umbilical cord is connected to their issues.

When someone comes to me with a problem, I'm finding that the most important step in providing good counsel is to understand that I have ownership in their problem. You may ask, "What ownership do I have with so and so's problem?"

We all are connected. In many ways we are all a part of the human organism. We affect each other in ways that we don't understand. The frustrations that I hand off to one person affect another person and so on. The things that I don't do or even hesitate to do may hurt others. What I'm saying is that on the grand scale, I have ownership in Mankind's problem, even the ones occurring on the other side of the planet. The anger I spill out in a simple look of my eyes can spread like wildfire. It is imperative that I know this simple fact when faced with a position to counsel another. If I say to myself, "His problem is his problem. I'm a neutral party," then I'm missing the big picture

and I'm missing the biggest part of reconciliation: repentance. In repentance, water is sprayed on the wildfire. I must repent for my part before I can do any good. In fact, the act of my repentance is part of what helps them. When we are faced with another person's problem, we must seek forgiveness for ourselves first as part owners of the problem. Then we can become true intercessors.

Naturally, this becomes a burden for us, if done with the fullness of our heart. We are in a sense, shouldering the judgment which, if truly felt and truly accepted, will cause us suffering. However, this burden does not need to be heavy for us. The ultimate intercessor of Mankind is Christ, so our burden is on his shoulders and nailed to his cross.

On the macro-scale, this is what Christ did for the world. The Father rendered the judgment owed to mankind on himself and allowed for reconciliation between God and man. But Jesus passed this role on to his Church. Christians have this particular purpose in life and any human can fill this very special role. It is our priestly role. We are to go throughout the earth and consume the wildfire of man's sin, through our repentance first. We do this through interaction, intercession, and counsel with others, but we first do this through acceptance of our personal involvement with someone's suffering. Even if I think I'm remote, distant, disconnected and neutral, I'm not. Your problems are my problems. The only important distinction is in choice. I can choose to ask for forgiveness. This happens within the domain of our will.

## **How to Stop an Argument 101**

Being connected together in the family of man also helps us be compassionate with others. We take the loads for others and carry their crosses for them. That's all very good and well, but why do we

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keep the arguments going. Why do I argue with my family and closest friends when I'm supposed to be bearing their burdens? I know I shouldn't, so how do I stop?

### Step 1: Takes One to Know One

Arguing is human nature, isn't it? I'm right and you're wrong and this is why: "Because of (a), (b) and (c)..." Or I might just yell, "nuh, uh!" There have been the times when justification for my 'point' resorted to name calling in my adulthood. And with that the argument really starts to dissolve. Then comes my personal favorite rebuttal: "Takes one to know one!" At least, there's a bit of humility there.

I'm finding that all arguing, yes, all, is a completely useless enterprise. In fact, it's more than that: it is self-defeating. Everyone has had the sort of argument when as you start arguing your side, you actually end up justifying your 'opponent' through your argument. *Digging your hole deeper* they say. That's the way it always is, only sometimes it is more apparent with those who are less gifted in the art of speaking.

Just because I am arguing expresses a hesitance that, um, maybe I'm not fully justified in my position. Truth is self-justifying and we know it in our deepest being. That's why we argue, because we want to hide the facts through reason. But the only necessary and valid witness in any argument is Truth (Himself). And don't think that any one side is usually in the 'right'. I suspect that even if one side of the argument seems valid and true, there are falsehoods tucked deep within. Truth has no need for arguing, because truth is self-evident.

I sometimes feel that the only reason language was 'invented' by man was to conceal truth through reason. Was language really necessary before man began his path manipulating others. Sure, we communicated, but it was probably more akin to song before that. We still can express ourselves in a myriad of ways, none of which need

actual words. Words, especially too many of them, can just complicate arguments and create a fog so dense that we can't see the other point of view anymore.

The flip side to truth being self-justifying is that lies are self-convicting. This is why we never need to argue, nor should we argue in our own defense or in the defense of others. Yes, we must witness to the truth, but there's no need to go further than that. This or that is the way it is. And if we can say something in truth, then the truth will be self-justified. And if we lie or mislead, then no matter how much we argue, the falsehood will be revealed.

## Step 2: Examine Yourself

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.

2 Corinthians 13

It's amazing how sometimes I go into a situation trying hard not to argue, because of all the things I said previously, but still I end up laying down my perspective, this way and that way, trying to justify myself especially when I consider myself to be falsely accused. The argument builds. Listening break down along both fronts. (Yes, all arguing is a form of warfare.)

What do we do in these situations? We should stop justifying ourselves and our point, no matter how much we think our point or our character has been hurt. We can't and we shouldn't try. In fact, if we try we will fail, because it's simply not our role and it is impossible to truly win. Everyone is a loser in a battle. We must know in our hearts that *justice* is pure and real. We don't need to engage in warfare for ourselves. If we are being truthful and are in the right, then we will be justified. It's a simple fact that takes faith to employ.

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What is most crucial when these events occur in our lives is for us to search inward. How have I injured another? How have I lied? Then we must take steps to obtain forgiveness. But that's the most difficult thing to do, especially when we think we're in the right and have been wronged. It's completely counterintuitive, but it is the solution to all arguments and all warfare for that matter.

Have you ever seen a president or a king do that before? "You are right, we have been putting economic and social strain on your land and people. Forgive us." It's unlikely for that to happen. However, we can make these sorts of amends almost daily in all of our interpersonal interactions, whether it be our spouses, parents, kids, friends, associates, you name it. This is peace as painful as it may be. And it most likely won't make things all hunky-dory afterward either, not by a long shot.

The process I'm talking about is a lifelong journey and is only really possible through Christ. This is the most practical application of *the cross* that you or I will ever engage in. The cross is all about the self-sacrifice of the innocent, though as I've tried to explain, none of us are truly innocent. But this is how many of the saints began their walk in the Kingdom while living here on earth.

### Step 3: Listening

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

How many times has someone said to you, "If you would only listen"? I certainly couldn't count the times I've been told that on the fingers

of a troop of monkeys.

Now it may have been that I wasn't listening, but more probable would have been (especially these days) is that I was listening, but I was simultaneously formulating my own response, defense or accusation. That's not really listening either, is it? Listening requires the act of taking in the others' perspective fully and then examining the ideas deeply to see if they apply. I'm speaking mainly with regard to interpersonal arguments, but listening applies to all sorts of arguments: political, religious and scientific debates, and should be applied to all aspects of our lives.

In all communication, especially arguments, the deeper motive is generally overlooked. When we listen, we must hear the words and the meaning, but also the fear, the pain, the joy and the love. And no need to over-analyze here. We may hear fear and pain, but we shouldn't go in and try to assume that we know why the fear and pain is there. That's beyond our realm. The inner motives of a person are just that: inner, unproddable and out-of-bounds. If we assume that we know why they are fearful or in pain or even joyful, we will miss the point. Don't try to psychoanalyze the other person. Just feel the pain or feel the joy. It's extremely presumptuous to think that we know why someone is angry or in pain. No matter how smart I think I am, I'm probably going to get it wrong.

Just the simple act of listening and feeling the pain, helps the other person heal, however painful it is for us to hear. In fact, if it's not painful for us to hear, then it's likely that the person isn't healing. We must feel the pain. The problem is that if we don't disperse the pain given to us, it will destroy us. It's too much for us to handle on our own. Once again, that's why Jesus hung on the cross. There he takes all our burdens.

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### Step 4: Lose the Argument

If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.

Luke 6:29

“Look! If you-know-who was such a great president, then why...”

“You see, it’s clear that the earth is 4.5 billion years old...”

“Come on, you know it’s on Route 441 rather than HWY 28, we need to get off at the *next* exit not this one...”

Stop for a moment and seriously consider *losing* the battle. Try submitting to your opponent for a moment and see what happens. If you’re not 100% certain or at least 100% riding on faith in your perspective, then submit to your opponent. If you are certain, then there’s no need to argue. Just say the truth with authority and move on. But consider going their way in love.

“I never thought about it that way.”

“I suppose that I’m basing my facts on ideas which I’m really not all that certain about.”

“Okay, let’s take this exit.”

But be honest with your statements. If you say you’ll think about it, really do take the information and digest it. The bomb will be diffused. See where it takes you.

Please note that I’m not talking about capitulation here. It’s not really possible to compromise truth. Don’t water-down your belief here. Just be humble where humility is appropriate. This form of submission is

like saying, “Wow, the universe is an amazing, complex, yet simple, and a gloriously beautiful place, more so that I can imagine. I’ve been wrong before. I could be wrong this time.”

And if you find out you were right all along, you can have a fight—a fight with yourself. You can have that epic battle to stop yourself from saying or even thinking, “I told you so.”

## Happy Interdependence Day

Knowing about the spiritual umbilical cord of mankind has been humbling for me. It has helped me abandon the arguing and fighting so ever-present in my life. Of course, I still catch myself in my selfish pursuit of being 'right' all the time. But the humbling effect of knowing my similarity and connectedness to humanity prompts me to ask: Is anything really ever independent? So, each year for the past ten years or so, I've personally celebrated *Interdependence Day* on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. We are far more interdependent than independent as I've tried to explain.

There is no joy in independence. We are all one in the body of Adam. How many have hung on the cross of patriotism? How many have been burst apart by the rocket's red glare? Where is freedom when another is bound and blinded by sin? Only the grace of the body and blood of Christ can we have a Happy Interdependence Day. We are all connected by the spiritual umbilical cords called mankind.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus,

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remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Luke 22:39-43

# THE FAITH PARTICLE

God said, "Let there be light!" So there was light.

Genesis 3:1

Greens and blues and reds silently blossomed and folded in and among themselves. I lay on the warm summer pavement of the Hurricane Ridge Road stiff in awe. Shimmering whites melted into darkness and pinpoints of starlight. In the northerly midnight blue sky shined the bright lights of Victoria and more green and blue auroras held motionless due to distance.

What is light anyway? Is it timeless or of all time. I have this notion that all light is from the same source and all light is the same light, shining from a point broader than our universe itself. That, unlike snowflakes, every photon is exactly alike. Are we light also, timeless beings, manifest in the flesh?

I came to the Olympic Peninsula desiring beauty and adventure. As a lustful, dreamy young man, I was fearless in my pursuit of truth, walking in pride and youthful ambition. Now I'm ready to find what I've been seeking: a way back to the heaven of Eden where the facade of Man is no more, where truth shines in a timeless world, and where the relentless waters of this world no longer lap with thirst toward progress. I long for that world, where technology, the pride of mankind and the lust of the deceitful, is not a cog in the universe. Can we get back to Eden where my hands can glean the fruits of the earth without the reaper's sickle?

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The path back to Eden is probably too simple for our corrupt minds to imagine. Is it a metamorphosis that requires our patience in a cocoon? Who has that kind of patience? Who has that level of sacrifice?

I long to go back to Eden, but the past is a shadow world, one probably not of the current reality. Like memories written in our skin, the past is scarred. The hard truth is crammed into hidden places, burned, hung and crucified. To return to Eden, must we traverse that dark, cloudy, uncertain, undefined, empty, half-erased and colorless landscape? Is there anyone who could make that journey?

I suppose the journey could be through the 'now' like some would lead us to believe. But the now is ever-fleeting and never passable. The moment our minds grasp the now, it is gone whisked into the past, unless it is held in some sort of static, dead state.

Is the journey back to Eden a march forward? Then what direction must we go? Which signposts lead us wrongly and which signposts lead correctly.

What I do know is that I, shall I say we, will get there. Eden will not be like it was in the past. It won't be like our visions of the future. And it won't be like our vision of the present. But it will contain all the good, all the lovely, all the awesome archetypes that our minds can behold.

The only reason I know this is due to hope I have in Jesus Christ. I know no other way.

## Shining Our Hope to Others

Years after witnessing those stunning August auroras, I took another

trip to the Ridge, this time to Hurricane Hill. That late October evening was a movement into the sublime. I wanted my dad to go there with me. I have been there, at night in the wilderness, so many times before. I wanted him to experience it with me.

Walking in the wilderness at night has been an important part of my life for many years now, at least as long as I've been an adult away from my parents. It makes no difference whether the moon is full or new, if there are at least a few stars visible in the universe above, the experience is the same. I walk out into the vastness of God's creation and feel as if the universe and I are of the same ilk.

I can touch the moon. I can touch a star. I can reach out and touch the hazy blur of Andromeda. The light in my eye from these distant places is just that: in my eye. Their light is in me. I am a part of them and they are a part of me. In the sublime, I find that the speed of light is irrelevant. Time and space is irrelevant. The stellar bodies, their space and me are of one body: God's creation with Christ as our head, as Teilhard de Chardin would remind us.

On that special night, when my dad entered the sublime with me, the stage was set with a grand sunset. The fiery ball had sunk beneath the edge of the earth minutes before we arrived at the trailhead. In its wake a sea of crimson and orange faded upward into the earth's blue shadow. The light-sharpened and serrated western mountainous horizon provided a pure gestalt form for my time-boundless psyche to explore. The brilliant light in the sky above and solid-opaque Olympic Mountain below tunneled into my subconscious sparking memories unresolvable, memories that are more akin to the dream of an infant. Those are feeling-stories spoken in color and form, without words, without names, and without knowledge, but full of wisdom. They are the stories worth telling. I wish I could tell them with words or more plausibly with music. They shatter my worldly reality. They are the

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words of God himself. Jesus tells these stories. Jesus is this story. I am only an infant yet a brother in the sublime.

The horizon of which I consumed followed us all the way to the top of Hurricane Hill, waning as the stars and quarter moon waxed. At the top we could see long horizontal lenses and tails of zephyr-like cirrus clouds over a small corner of the Pacific. The curve of the earth was detectable, if only through logic. I tried to take some photos for my dad. There is no justice in those pictures.

I write this now and hesitate to describe what was on the other side of Hurricane Hill. I hesitate to mention the lights twinkling in the cityscapes below. I hesitate to cast your eyes northward upon the array of lights spreading in a linear scatter plot, mapping out the landforms and massive waterways from Port Angeles to Victoria and onward over the San Juans to the metropolis of Vancouver, British Columbia. I hesitate because I don't want to look back into the choppy sea of humanity, but to look forward to the peace and sublimity of the Kingdom of God.

But I cast your mind's eye on those lights in the cities, towns and houses, because those lights represent the sublime, too. Just look beyond the facades, push aside the pride and prejudice, throw off the rose-colored glasses, clean up the self-pity, rip off the dead skin and look. There it is. See. See all the stars. Focus in on one, on yours. It really is. You're right. It's not all that much different from Alpha Centuri nor our sun for that matter. But your star is very special. Keep it uncovered and you'll see where it takes you. It's the most important thing God ever gave you. For it is you. No you don't! Don't you dare hide it under that bushel.

This little light of mine. I'm gonna let it shine...Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

## Flipping Burgers in Love

The most excellent method of going to God is that of doing our common business without any view of pleasing people but purely for the love of God.

We ought not to grow tired of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed.

Brother Lawrence

My brow is furrowed. I'm staring at the computer screen trying to solve a technical problem. Hours have passed and I've hardly moved. My wife walks in and asks me, "How are you?"

My focus is broken and I look up at her and take a moment to respond. In this condition, I am sometimes a bit more terse, but this time, I think of Brother Lawrence first. I muster the strength to shine my light. "I'm just flipping burgers for the Lord," I say.

We made up this saying from reading *The Practice of the Presence of God*, a short book printed over a century ago about Brother Lawrence. This man was known for his closeness to God, as well as his obscure and simple life. He worked much of his life in a kitchen at a Carmelite monastery in Paris.

Our saying, "Flipping burgers for the Lord," is what keeps me going with the work and tasks that come to me within this society. If I didn't have this purpose, I would not care to take part in the ongoing folly within the depths and breadth of human civilization.

I've found that without God, everything in which our society endeavors is folly. What's most important is *how* we go about doing our work. The way we do things colors all the products of human

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creativity. Sadly, so few of the products are colored in love. So many of the products are tinted and tipped with the poison of greed.

I remember once taking a bus in Peru. It wasn't the lowest fare bus, maybe two up from the bottom. Afterward, I wish I had taken the lowest fare bus, the one that didn't offer video service. About 20 minutes out of the Lima bus station, the bus driver's helper put in a video for everyone to watch. It was a film clearly produced in the United States. It was a horror-sex film. What was most alarming wasn't the movie—I know the kind of movies America produces—but was the responses of the people in the bus. It seemed to me that everyone was watching this film as if it was normal. Even parents weren't shielding their children's eyes.

Eventually, I couldn't take it any longer. I stood up and yelled to the passengers something like, "What are you doing!" But in my moment of righteous indignation, when only a few people broke their gaze and cast a glance at me, I realized, "I'm an American and this video came from my country. This is a product of me and my culture." So, I just slunk back into my seat and tried to keep my half-wandering eyes off of the screen. I also learned that we can't shield our ears. I suppose I could have hummed, "la la la, rum-tum-tiddle-um-tum, la la la..."

Over the years, I have come to think of human technologies as fruitless, whether it be our products, media, medical technologies and even services. Humanity loves to glorify its creations. Look at the cover of any technology magazine and you'll see a sales pitch that makes you glad you're on board. But is technology really that fruitless? Even though I am highly immersed in technology with my work, I still feel that technology is the manifestation of our pride and selfishness. But how then do I resolve the fact that I am clearly and deeply engaged with civilization and its technologies, as most of us are?

“I’m just flipping burgers for the Lord.” And not only do I just get it done, but for Jesus, I do it well. That’s not to say that I always will be involved with technology. As grateful as I am for the work, I pray that one day God will extricate me from this line of work.

Solomon knew the purposelessness of our endeavors. He or someone in his court wrote all about it in Ecclesiastes, the Bible’s existential book. It’s no different today with our advanced technologies, our space exploration, or our health care than it was in his time.

And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after the wind. Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.

Ecclesiastes 1:17-18

I still feel that the Kingdom of Heaven is more closely akin to what we think of the Garden of Eden which, as Genesis describes it, was pre-agricultural. I just love taking hikes in the wilderness for the simple purpose of marveling in the Lord’s handiwork apart from our technologies. But even this is missing the point that Brother Lawrence had to offer.

Inside each of us is truly a light. This light is what I’ll call the *faith particle*. We choose to let that spiritual photon shine or not shine. No matter what kind of seemingly meaningless work we do, we can shine that light to others.

If we don’t shine that light, then we end up oozing the darkness of cynicism, spiritual gluttony or existential despair. But through the fog of sin, the faith particle rings out to others in peels joy in the quietest of whispers, “I know Jesus. He who is love. Come with me to meet him. He loves you. He forgives you. He calls us home to the Father.”

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## High Moon

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;  
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be.

I just walked outside and looked up at the Harvest Moon. It's a dry, clear night here in Western Washington. The moon is brightening the fresh snow on the northern peaks of the Olympic Range. Jupiter shines bright accenting the pseudo-day of the high moon. Later tonight the moon will be replaced by Venus only to be trumped by the dazzling light of the morning sun which will outshine all our other heavenly lights by many orders of magnitude.

Everything turns cyclically, right? Everything in the natural order, that is. And rest assured there is a supernatural order as well. We aren't bound to life in an infinite waveform. We haven't been given such as nihilistic fate. The natural order rests nested within and among the supernatural order, maybe like an electromagnetic waveform. No, maybe like the way an electromagnetic wave is indistinguishable from a particle. No, maybe like space is to time. I don't know exactly how they relate to each other, but I do know for certain that some truths are only revealed in mystery.

Modern science does an excellent job at observing natural phenomena. Science can also generate experiments in order to determine agents of change. These two methods are exactly what science is designed for. Aristotle called these the *material* and the *efficient causes*. Science is designed for observing the natural world in these two ways. But that's as far as science can go. Modern science will never be able to reliably determine the ultimate form and function of nature phenomena (Aristotle's *formal cause*). "What is beauty" is not answerable through

science, nor should it be. And lastly, science will certainly will never be able to answer “Why?” (Aristotle's *final cause*). We never look to science to answer these questions, nor the ever-important question, “Why did God create me?”

Beauty and purpose can be explored, and known, because they are just as important as those truths that are found in the realm of science. You can discover these truths in poetry, art, music, and most importantly in *faith*.

Because of the limits of science, there's a tendency within our modern scientific culture to see everything as cyclical. Science can't see the ends of time or space, so scientific reasoning limits our understanding. Science sees the cyclical nature of things, but can't understand the final circle. Practically speaking, science can do the math and solve for pi, but it will never get the final answer. Let me share an example.

I read an interesting comment today on an economic blog about our current state of affairs. I can't say that I agree with him entirely. I think he's a bit too stuck in his cyclic metaphors. The natural and human world isn't as rigid as he thinks, but his writing made me think. Plus, I like when people think metaphorically. Poetic reasoning can sometimes allow us to find nuggets of truth.

The writer thinks we entered a long 18-year cycle in 2001. Strauss and Howe who wrote *The Fourth Turning* might agree. These writers seem to believe that civilization cycles throughout time. And in this cyclical nature, a population's general mood shifts from foreboding to resting and back. This mood shift affects our culture, economics, etc. Generally speaking, I agree this argument and also believe that a general mood shift has occurred in our culture in recent years. However, I don't believe life to be so deterministic. Though there very well may be cycles in nature, there is also the overarching foundation

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to life which drives the materialistic world: the supernatural order of faith.

I reiterate the term supernatural, not to scare you off (I'm not talking about the Ghost Busters sort of supernatural), but I am describing an order that goes beyond the rigid simplicity of wave patterns and orthodox determinism. Again, the supernatural is in the realm of faith.

We could look at all this in another way: the order of the natural world is like science, one closely akin to reason and logic where a clear and precise order is based on cyclical causality. However, the natural world is not without the supernatural world. We peer into the supernatural world when we get to know love and when we act in faith. Love and faith are not in the lexicon of science, nor should they be.

Yes, most definitely, everything in nature cycles, but all of those cycles rest on the particle of *faith*. Because of this, we can't say outcomes and prognostications are as simple as bright men and women so determine. We can say that there is an order that comes and goes in waves, in a flux, yet that order can come to an end. Waveforms have ends and beginnings like waves that crash into a beach. There are freeze-frame terminations. There are also new beginnings undetermined by the past, which is a very refreshing thought indeed and is essential to the theology of grace. If everything happened in waves, how could we ever get out of the vicious cycles that tear at us? We couldn't. But thankfully God made the supernatural world full of grace, mercy, love and forgiveness. And that is the world we live in. Without the *faith particle*, we'd be doomed. It is our Christian hope.

What's going to happen 18 years from now? I don't even know what's going to happen tomorrow. I suppose I expect the moon to set in a few hours. I expect the earth will continue to turn. Thankfully, I also

expect that God's love and grace will be freshly supplied anew.

Like the light of the moon itself, the faith particle is reflected light. It isn't something that can be held under lock and key. It must be reflected into the world.

And if faith is like light, a beacon of love, then hope is a force similar to gravity, drawing us ever-nearer to our beloved Christ.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—  
“Great is Thy faithfulness,” Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,  
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,  
Join with all nature in manifold witness  
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Great is Thy Faithfulness

# LOVE THE LAMP OF HIS BODY

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.

John 11:13-14

## Hope Manifest Today

How influential have your teachers been to you? Was there one particular teacher that pointed you into your present career or one that directed you away from a particular path? In our world, teachers prove to provide great influence over the paths of both individuals and our society in general.

What if your teacher was to say things like:

True joy is for those who are poor, persecuted, meek and merciful.

Don't retaliate when people hurt you, instead give them something good from your heart, not with the intention to make them feel guilty for the way they treated you, but with the intention to lift their spirit—to just love them.

When you give to the needy do so without anyone knowing. In fact, why not put a smiley-face sticker on the back of your

income tax envelope?

Be poor. Don't seek to make money, but instead seek good things that aren't tangible.

Promises are unbreakable bonds, so be very careful what you promise.

If you judge others or engage in outward or subconscious 'profiling', you'll be setting the standard to which you must comply.

The words you speak about others behind their back, under your breath or in your heart are equally damaging to you.

Don't worry, be happy.

Even if you are locked in the deepest and darkest dungeon where the castle walls above you have been toppled and seal the entrance to your hole, there is still a way out.

Would you think he was a fool? Would you think he was crazy?

These statements are paraphrased from some of the things my favorite teacher has told me and I believe every word of it. I certainly don't think he was crazy. The trouble is I keep trying to water down his teachings. I think, "He must have only meant this or that only under some particular condition, right?"

In Matthew 23, Jesus also says:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

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What we dwell upon in the inside of our cup does affect us. What we have allowed into our hearts may not only cause us pain, but may also hurt others. That is why Jesus instructs us to clean the inside of our hearts first and not to worry about how we look on the outside—how others perceive us. The outside will come clean only after we allow Jesus to clean our innermost part.

While his spirit is scrubbing away in us, he teaches us many things. First and foremost, he teaches us how to *love*.

## Boyfriends and Girlfriends

My peers started talking about being 'in love' in late elementary school. Being a first child (actually a twin), the oldest of cousins, and not having any really significant older peers in my neighborhood, I was a slow learner and naive about 'love'. But by looking back at the motivations behind those early relationships, by examining closely my particular life experience, and finally by learning from what my close male and female friends have confided in me, I can clearly see what boyfriends and girlfriends are all about.

It seems to me that girls are the first to recognize and quietly clamor for those sorts of relationships. Boys don't seem to seek girlfriends until they start consciously or subconsciously feeling the chemistry building. Boys might start experiencing those relationships earlier, but mostly to satisfy the play of their friends. There certainly are exceptions.

Early on, for girls, having a boyfriend is clearly a type of play where girls tinker with adult ideas in the only way they know how. Having a boyfriend is simply a game, one that has its roots in preparation for marriage and having babies. It's a game just like the

wrestling and war games in which boys dabble.

Playing is fun. Playing is living in a realm of fantasy and that realm has intersecting spheres upon which both sexes play. Play is a creative dance upon which the archetypes of this world are built.

But the game becomes darker for girls, especially the ones that learn that they have the ability to manipulate others using their bodies and words as tools. At that point the experience of having boyfriend crosses the fence from play to power-play. This is also when other girls, who don't have that self-perceived ability, get marginalized. These girls also start learning other ways to manipulate. It's the nature of anger to manifest itself into power-play. This is the middle school drama. It starts in late elementary and for some it lasts their entire life.

Of course, boys aren't off the hook. Some boys learn the same manipulative devices as their cohort females. They not only learn how to wield the power of their body and words, but they also have the driving power of male lust behind their action. Girls and boys alike must watch out for them. They are a raging fire and may be dangerous their entire lives. Pain is in their wake.

At a particular point, boys begin to feel that drive to have sex, which is natural. However, society does a fantastic job of heightening that desire. One of the worst things for me as an adolescent boy was my encounter with pornography, whether it be the real deal laying out on the sidewalk or even the newspaper Montgomery Ward lingerie inserts. The almost naked body has a profound effect on boys and girls (for that matter). It heightens our sexuality, because it places images in our minds. I firmly believe, that the sexual development within boys is mostly a habitual response to imagery and ideas placed in our heads from others. The imagery grows as we allow it to grow. We allow it to be fed in a variety of directions, mostly with disastrous effects. As

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someone once put it to me, “Is it really natural to have a shoe fetish?” The answer, of course, is no. Through habit and the choices of the will, we allow ourselves to develop our lusts. And for lusts to survive, they must be fed and fed well. In fact, the greater the lust the more it must be fed and the more creative the fuel. Lust desires new fuel. It won’t burn as well on the same fuel as before. The food that lusts ends up consuming becomes truly revolting. But that food starts simple. For boys, it starts with pornographic imagery.

Images provoke our creative sense. Images produce a reality (if not only in one’s head). They take on a life of their own. Our dreamworld develops from the things we stuff in it, as well as what the world pours forth. So, dreams become a mixture of reality and false-reality, especially when we’re fed with those things that are false. If the images that enter us are in any way, shape or form based on premises of lust, those images spawn more lust in the mind of the adolescent or of the adult. Fortunately, we are given the ability to allow or deny entry into our heart, but we must have help. This cannot be done alone. What we allow into our hearts is the most difficult task of the adult. We must be assisted by community. We must learn how to confess and repent. Ultimately though, keeping a clean heart can only be done through prayer by the grace of God. Jesus does the washing from the inside out. This is why Jesus commands us to pray, “lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil,” and maybe more importantly, “forgive us of our trespasses.”

In boys (and girls), these imagined realities become living entities within the mind of us individually and within the group-think our general society. They are most always false impressions of reality and they may consume our focus. They become literally and figuratively indwelling creatures. In most cases, the reality of human sexuality is not what society or the individual perceives it to be. But these

imagined realities, build, develop and push the male and female to fulfill this fiction in reality.

If that imaginary reality becomes unchecked, it can become a dangerous fire. If he or she allows others to feed the flames, the fire gets bigger and bigger. And it takes more dangerous fuel to feed it.

On the other hand, *agape love*, God-like love, is most closely related to friendship and fellowship. It is the love inherent to brotherhood and sisterhood. It is the relationship we have with and through Christ, for true love comes only through God.

Sadly, some people feed their lust furnace with the only true concepts of love that we will ever know, brotherhood and sisterhood. When that happens, we begin to die. Since we are all interconnected, our community and families also fail. Brotherhood and sisterhood should not be allowed to feed the fuel of lust.

These two components of false-love (power and lust) are best defined together as powerlust, *libido dominandi*, as Saint Augustine puts it in *The City of God*. The fuel of powerlust feeds an unquenchable fire. Society and individuals together must once again understand that this false-love has no home with *agape love* and is forever doomed.

We must learn from our teacher about the only food that truly satisfies the longing heart.

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

John 6:35

## Quid Pro Quo —Oh, No!

“Life is *quid pro quo*.” Is that really the way life is? I certainly hope not. Most people take life to be that way. They expect outwardly and inwardly that if they do their part, they will get the other side of reciprocation. Is life just a series of subtle and not-so-subtle contractual engagements? I hope not.

Here are some types of *quid pro quo* thinking:

“I’ll smile and be polite, then...”

“If I give her the job...”

“If I take care of her kid this afternoon...”

“If I marry him...”

“God, if I believe in you...”

Expectations such as these are a setup for disaster, because life is not *quid pro quo*. Life isn’t so mechanistic, at least not the life I know. If it was, there would be no hope, no grace, no joy, no love. We’d be bound in slavery as Quid-Pro-Quobots.

We have a self-determination that allows us to choose and ask and grant and love. With that comes responsibility. My three-year old boy and I were talking about responsibility recently. And he was wondering if Magpie our cat was able to be irresponsible. He had noticed that she would get on the table and clearly she knew the table was off-limits. As with many of his deeper questions, I had to think about how to respond. I explained that cats aren’t able to be responsible, but that Magpie still isn’t allowed to get on the table. I probably hedged a bit in my explanation. Then he went on to ask about other animals and whether or not those animals were capable of

being responsible or irresponsible. Neither of us were completely satisfied with the conversation. Even so, I still hold that animals don't have the ability to be responsible, yet we do. We make willful choices and that special characteristic places us under an umbrella of justice—God's justice.

God's justice is perfect, but that doesn't mean life is an eye for an eye, or if I rub your back you will rub mine. Relationships aren't so simple. God's relationship with us isn't that simple. If relationships were, where would friendship be? Friendships aren't so rote. But isn't that the contract we see establish with most relationships. Don't most people engage in quid pro quo relationships? Those relationships are doomed to fail or to become drudgery. True friendships don't work that way. They don't care what the other has done for them recently. They act in love. True friendships are much more like water flowing in a river than life living under the bondage of quid pro quo.

Then he dropped two in at once, and leant over the bridge to see which of them would come out first; and one of them did; but as they were both the same size, he didn't know if it was the one which he wanted to win, or the other one. So the next time he dropped one big one and one little one, and the big one came out first, which was what he had said it would do, and the little one came out last, which was what he had said it would do, so he had won twice and that was the beginning of the game called Poohsticks.

A. A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*

For Pooh, it was easy, he was a bear of little brains. He inherently knew how to be a friend. But how do we go beyond the worldly standard of quid pro quo—we people of too big brains? How do we move into the realm of true love?

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## Love: a perpetual motion machine

I'll be piggy backing on a theme written by Mike Mason—that love is a perpetual motion machine.

[T]here is only one true perpetual motion machine in the universe, and that is love. Love is the only energy that will keep on going forever, which is why it is the mainspring of eternal life. How can love keep working forever without getting tired? The answer is simple: because the way it works is by resting.

Mike Mason, the Gospel According to Job

Is love really an infinite process? Doesn't love fade like a burning fire until the embers are soot? If so, love would be entropic, and thankfully, it's not.

Over the years, I've abandoned entropy as a fundamental assumption in my understanding of how the universe works. To understand entropy, think of a wound-up mechanical clock. The clock is given energy during the winding process and it ticks down and finally stops.

But is this really the way the universe works? Are we and our emotions just deterministic clockworks? If we look up at our majestic starry sky, we will see many seemingly endless cycles, whether it be the earth going around the sun or the solar cycle. Closer to home, we see cycles in geology, water and life. I love the life cycle of the tree, because it's so simple: a seed grows into a tree, a tree makes seeds, a seed grows into a tree and so on. One who believes in entropy argues that all of these processes eventually wind down. They may fluctuate or change state, but they don't just vanish, do they?

It's our modern understanding of death that gives birth to our human-

contrived concept of entropy. We see death on the horizon for our bodies, so we apply that concept to the universe. But is this projection true? Is death really the end to all things?

In ecology, death is always a metamorphosis. Death is a transformation of energy from one form or state to another. The typical scientist will argue that there is always a net loss within a system to heat and this net loss is the slowing down or cooling of the system. However, the left over energy is still there. The energy has just transformed. Something must happen to it. It's doing something. I expect we think we see a loss because we don't understand energy very well. It may also have to do with awareness and consciousness, but that's another story for later.

I acknowledge that we do see entropy in our human inventions, like clocks. Human technology may be the only entropic system in the entire universe, which is why I believe that one day, the energy put into our technology will finally be exhausted and it will wind down to a halt. Love is different.

Unlike human technology and the power that drives it, love is the ultimate force in the universe.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth...Love never ends.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Admittedly, the more I understand what love is, the more I realize how truly blind I am to love, how unnatural love is to me, and how akin I am to the other type of love (false-love), the one that drives my lusts.

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The irony is that God's love—the perpetual motion machine—is enterable only through the cross of Christ. Here are a few practical examples of how we can fuel ourselves and others with the power of a truly noble love.

Toil with a friend, or better yet with someone you have a damaged relationship. Work without a price. Drudgery becomes joy when we toil together.

Praise someone for the work they do. Outward focusing praise restores humility and reduces pride.

Take the blame for someone. Debt turns into thanksgiving.

Allow someone to be angry with you and accept it without any excuses, even if they are in the wrong. The pain is diffused.

When someone tells you about all the terrible things that they are feeling or that has happened to them, listen without judgment and without explaining it away. As painful as it is for you to hear, it will heal them.

When someone gossips, the initial reaction is to spread the news to someone else. Tell Jesus instead. It will put out the fire ignited by another.

It is not in our first nature to love with a noble love. Our impulse is to do the opposite and spread the pain to others. However, love is perpetual when it is sacrificial. This is what Jesus teaches us when he speaks about the narrow gate in Matthew 7. It is narrow because we can't do it without Christ. He must let us in and out of the gate. All the pain, blame, anger and gossip must rest on him. If it rests on us, it kills us. Instead, we pass our suffering to Christ on the cross, because it is only through him that suffering can transform into love.

## Word Shrapnel

Love happens among others. It doesn't happen alone. Wherever we go, we go carrying our sphere of influence with us. As we move through the world, we are charged to provide safe harbor for those seeking love and true friendship. But too often do we allow weapons of death into our domain.

I was substitute teaching the other day and my second class of students came in a furor, some were late, some were cussing and some were just quietly dealing with life. It's my policy not to allow students to use profanity. When I hear cussing, I instantly make that clear.

As usually happens, one kid was trying to trick me, by saying "ass" and then saying that he just meant a jackass or donkey. He got a referral and I didn't see him again back in class. Then the students were outraged (also typical), "He didn't cuss! I can't believe he got a referral for that!"

This prompted me to think, "What is wrong with cussing?" You find lots of adults that speak profanely. You hear adults tossing out non-profane words in profane ways: god, shoot, etc. I've spent periods of time cussing as well. Strangely enough, it's addictive. And it doesn't even have to be a standard four-letter word. It can be some other sort of outburst, a quick, direct and painful statement, a mean jab, a belittling joke, etc.

The reason it is wrong to be profane to others and even to oneself is because it is a jab, a poke, a barb. It is an outburst of pain and anger, usually directed at someone. If it's not directed at someone, then it's just an explosive, ejaculation of barbs that hits all those who are near. If no one is near, then the barbs land back on the source. It's all about hurting others or oneself. We all have anger and pain, but it's

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important that we not release it onto others.

Profanity is a weapon and it causes pain. Profanity is an explosion of anger that is no different from a bomb. The damage it does is to spread anger and to manipulate through the fear of pain, although this is usually done at deeper levels.

Why don't I allow it in a classroom? To answer this we have to look at the idea of domains and the realms provided to authorities. In some way everyone has an authoritative position over another person, everyone except the smallest of children. We all have people that go in and out of our domains. It might be students in a classroom. It might be our family members. If I was a teenager, then it might be my little sister or my friends if I have the unspoken leadership role in a group.

People in our domains are given to us for protection. It is our role to provide safety and comfort for those who come in and out of our domains. It's my role to provide that protection to people in my house or even to people who are walking down the road with me.

The damage done by the malice of profanity in many ways cuts deeper than shrapnel from a grenade and can have longer lasting damage. Warfare is most effective when you don't know where the enemy is hiding. Words provide a hideous hideout for our enemy. The enemy must be exposed.

As a Christian, I know that I am on a pilgrimage. And as I move through the world, my sphere of influence goes with me. I have learned that I can't passively allow oozing darkness and detonations of pain and suffering to cross my threshold and hurt others. I am called to protect those within my domain from those weapons that breach the heart and attempt to stomp out God's love.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12

## The One Love: Friendship

I remember hiking with a friend in Death Valley a bit over ten years ago. We were exploring the stark, bright landscape examining the canyons, rocks and various living things that hid in the limited shade of this bleak world. Across a rocky field we walked, wandering the arroyos that meandered out of the nearby mountain canyons. My friend asked me, "What do you think love is?" At that time in my life, I really didn't know much about love, which was clear by some dreadful mistakes that I had already made in my life. But I responded to him by pointing down at two small dry streambeds that coursed their way together into one larger streambed.

"Love is like the 'Y' in that stream," is how I responded. Was I correct in my response? Is love the moment of action where two become one, when the two parts have identity, yet there exists one larger, grander identity? Maybe there was some truth to it.

Maybe this is what love is, however, in human love most often it does not work this way. Love is often thwarted by selfishness—our ego. The existence of the ego depends on separateness. The ego cannot tolerate love and will fight endlessly to retain sovereignty over the will.

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The ego will defend, defraud and devour any attempt at a true union, for if it does not, it will cease to exist. This is the great paradox of human love.

The ego set foot on the planet when man chose its own path apart from God. Without God, in our separation from him, human love became no more than powerlust. This type of love is seen in the covetousness of some child's play. "Give me your balloon," says the two-year old. The two-year old takes other child's balloon, bangs it around for a moment or two, and tosses it away.

As adults we engage in these same childish battles, but our methods are only slightly more sophisticated. This pernicious self-love takes on many disguises. We develop contracts with each other that bond us in unions of clandestine lust and power-play. "What happened to our love?" some will say. It no longer feels like love for time has ripened the true fruit of their union.

The ego cannot allow its power to be shared in union. Operations will be developed to trump any bargain that was developed. In a union, the egos will battle for headship. This is why strife invariably occurs in marriage and any other union. The battle may take the form of outward or passive aggression. To win the battle and remedy the paradox of human love, people take a variety of approaches, from disassociation to isolation and from detachment to distraction. Ultimately, all human-inspired solutions dig us deeper into the quagmire of the ego and its ever-isolating inward focus.

I'm tempted to think that the solution is pure selflessness and servanthood. For instance, if battles are being waged in my marriage, wouldn't doing good and giving freely solve the problems? Wouldn't acts such as these that kill the ego and render my self-centeredness impotent solve my marriage's problems? Selfless acts may point us in

the right direction and can help. However, without first aligning oneself with God, these good works can turn on us. I may end up being consumed by the other person's ego, who seeks to control my will. I may be used and abused without helping the relationship at all. Jesus says, "Never give what is holy to dogs or throw your pearls before pigs. Otherwise, they will trample them with their feet and then turn around and attack you." God wants us to serve others in love and self-sacrifice, but he doesn't want us to renounce our hearts to the will of another, unless that person is Jesus.

I found the only solution to the quagmire of the ego and the paradox of human love is to be in bondage with the one love that God sent us in the person of Jesus. In this union, I am reconnected to God and am reconciled from the ancient detachment that causes my ego to engage in powerlust. Finally, by knowing the one true love, I can love others in truly meaningful ways. And not only can I be transformed, but so can my relationships. And they really are.

Of course, my ego still tries to thwart the all-consuming power of God's love. But my ego is losing the battle. Less and less I see myself engaging in the false-love of powerlust. I sometimes see myself as if from a distance. It is as if my ego is detached from me. In some sense, I can watch my selfishness die. But in reality, it cannot die. It will not let itself die. That's the nature of the ego. But it is detaching from me. It is being consumed by God's love and I am being restored.

Jesus said, "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well." This is one example of how we let our selfish ego be consumed. When Jesus, my love and my friend, tells me to act counterintuitively to my ego, I do it.

Recently my wife and I were sitting at the dinner table across from

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each other. My hand was resting on hers. Our two-year old son noticed and remarked, “You all are friends.” Then he added, “Reid is my friend.”

When I think of true love, I no longer think of sex. I no longer think of male or female. I no longer think of human marriage. I think of friendship. “What a friend we have in Jesus,” as the old hymn sings. Friendship is the highest love.

For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

Mark 12:25

## Sacrifice on the Frontlines

There lives a desire in each man and each woman to be a hero or a heroine. You’ve probably had the hero fantasy before where you “saved the day” for someone you love. When a my wife was a girl, she played Wonder Woman as an imaginary game. She even had a theme song:

Wonder Woman’s  
Comin’ to town  
Taking all the bad guys  
And puttin’ them in ja-il.  
Wonder Woman,  
Just wants to have...  
Friends.

I expect that each of us have these sorts of fantasies or dreams at periods in life. But as we engage in life, events rarely play out with such bold excitement. The only time I ever acted out the superhero character was when I was about 27 and saved a dog that had fallen

over a waterfall into a deep canyon that drained by waterfall into an even deeper canyon. I was asked by the owner if I had any rope, which I did. So I ended up rappelling down to the rock island where the dog was safely perched and harnessing the dog onto the rope. The owner was then able to pull the dog up the cliff to safety.

Of course, I've helped actual people out in the past, but never with such drama.

I remember being helped out twice by an unknown person with one glass eye. On two different occasions this person 'saved my day' while stranded on the road. Never did I see him again—a true masked man.

But heroic acts are rarely so straightforward and clear. I've recently been reflecting on Christ on the Cross and his humble heroism. Among other things that makes his heroic feat odd, he entered into Jerusalem on a donkey, he washed his disciples feet, and he was hung and died on a tree. This is not your normal heroic act. It was certainly not written from one of the hero games that children play. But this is the model of true heroism and is the archetype of love toward which each of us should strive.

Over the past few weeks I've been studying First Timothy. It has a number of confusing passages that Paul writes to Timothy and the Ephesian Church in the First Century. Specifically, I was studying the roles of men and women in the Church.

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to

## Hope the Lamp of the Body

remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Apostle Paul, 1 Timothy 2: 8-15

This is clearly a difficult passage for Christians to understand today. Being that it is in the body of Scripture, we're forced to grapple with it.

When we seek to understand Paul, we must always look to Jesus to understand him. He can't be understood based in his own light. None of us can be understood on our own. We must all be understood through the light of Jesus, Christian or not. As an aside, history itself can't be understood without knowing who Jesus is.

For me, the key to this passage is the mysterious phrase: "Yet she will be saved through childbearing." I believe Paul derives this bold statement through his understanding of Mary and her fiat to God when she said to the angel who had brought the news of her pregnancy, "Let it be done unto me according to your will." All of God's children are saved through Jesus Christ who was born of the woman Mary. Her submission to the will of God is another primary example for us on true heroism.

Even today, women and men alike have the ability to give birth to the saving graces of God, but it means submitting to the will of God in *faith, love and holiness, with self-control*. In fact, this is the same way that Jesus outlines in his Gospel for us to be saved. In submitting to God's will in *faith, love and holiness, with self-control* we actually allow God to conceive through us Christ as the Holy Spirit to others. It is in our spiritual wombs that emerges the Holy Spirit of God. It is only through submission to God that we can truly be heroes and heroines.

But why does Paul express so boldly that women should not be teachers and hold authority over men? In this day and age, that seems so passé or outright sexist. Might have Paul been exhorting this mandate to a particular problem that was occurring in Ephesus at the time? I expect that Paul was acting like a big brother to his sisters in Christ in all times and places. Jesus and the New Testament writers all make it clear that the Kingdom of God is for the humble of heart.

But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.'

Luke 14: 7-11

The fact is that none of us should seek the position as teacher or authority over others—women or men alike. In doing so, we actually put ourselves in harms way. Instead, we should place ourselves at the most humble servant-level and then if God wishes to move us into an authoritative position, then he does so by his own will. Should we approach that position through our own personal desire? If we do so, we may be doing it out of lust for power.

As a man, I am called to take care of my sisters. Every brother knows that he must shelter his sister from the onslaught of vipers that are out there. Would you send your sister into the bloody onslaught of a battle? Clearly not.

James explains in his epistle that those teachers in authority place themselves in a position of greater judgment and danger. Paul is protecting his sisters in Ephesus from God's wrath. And today, I also wish to protect my sisters from the perils that lie on the frontlines of battle. I suppose in a real sense the frontlines are everywhere, for God's love is desperately needed everywhere. But there's a special

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stench that exists in the places of authoritative power on Earth.

Part of the reason men and women desire authoritative position is due to our hero impulse. But the hero impulse has a deep, dark side: *powerlust*. As a husband and a father, I find that character trait lurking, like the serpent in the Garden, always trying to seek me out as prey. The only way to battle that urge, that instinct, is to seek forgiveness, *to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with my God* (Micah 6:8). Powerlust is ugly and is the dominant species in the upper echelon of society and also of our churches. Never would I send my sister into that hostile, wormy, rotten confine of death. And I would only go there if God demanded it of me.

I find meekness to be the will of God for me and I can't understand how it would be any different for other men or women. Meekness is more important than positions of power, righteousness or even holiness. In fact, meekness and holiness are probably closely related if not synonymous. The main difference is that we are only holy through Jesus, the Holy *One*. We can't make ourselves more or less holy. But meekness is who we were before the Fall and it is how we were made. Meekness is our root: "All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return." We can actually strive to be meek. When we stray from meekness, men and women get away from our purpose and we stray from God. It's in this deep humility that we close in on God's kingdom. It's in our smallness, not our greatness. Meekness is a character trait inherent and achievable to mankind. It is when we let go of proud, haughty things, that we can finally learn to love.

But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity.

Psalm 37:11

## Mount Angeles Trail at Night

The other night a friend and I took a walk up to the bridge crossing at Ennis Creek along the Mount Angeles Trail. There was still snow around from the heavy winter snowfalls. The trail goes through some second-growth Douglas-fir forest, which made it fairly dark, especially without a moon.

The city lights were reflecting on some high clouds, so the snow was bright enough that we didn't need to use our headlamps. It's always enjoyable to walk at night without a light, and not particularly for the challenge. Walking lampless transforms most places giving them a new feel. Even though I had walked that particular stretch of trail many times, it all seemed like I had never been there before. The patchy snow, the muffled sound of Ennis Creek, and the almost-glowing tops of the trees gave the forest a quality like that of a dream—a good dream.

On the way up the trail, I followed Bryan. On the way down, Bryan followed me. We made a few interesting observations.

The first had to do with walking in the dark. Just a few steps in front of us the trail was obscured by the dark shadows of the trees. The blurry trail seemed to fold into the darkness. What was remarkable was that even though the trail lay hidden right in front of us, it was usually clear where our next step was. We could feel and perceive the next step fairly easily. How similar is our walk through time and space and with Jesus! The only really clear step is the next step and that's the one we should be focusing on. Sometimes we try to have broader, grander ambitions, but oddly enough, those goals take our eyes off of the next step, which is the most important one. Focusing on what God has laid out for us today, it seems, is most important.

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Another thing that Bryan noticed had to do with the saints and their reflected light. The reflected skylight on the patchy snow helped us navigate the trail. Where there was no snow, the forest floor was almost black. Where it blanketed the forest all around, it made the whole forest aglow. The saints, present and past, do this for us. Their faith helps us make our way through the darkness. They reflect Christ's light and help us focus our steps.

The most important observation had to do with the trail itself. We would have been stumbling over limbs and rocks and running up into 4 ft-diameter fallen trees if it wasn't for the trail. Without the trail, we would have never made it to the Ennis Creek crossing at night. Jesus has blazed our trail. Without his trail to the cross, we'd be lost without direction meandering waywardly in space and time.

Having brothers and sisters in Christ with us is essential. Bryan and I would have never made the hike without each other. Not that we couldn't have, but we probably wouldn't have. Our will and our faith is bolstered by each other. Make no mistake, there are times when we will be alone, but when we have our brothers and sisters, we must make room for them in our lives.

Do everything in love. You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. I urge you, brothers and sisters, to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also....All the brothers and sisters here send you greetings.

1 Corinthians 16:14-20

# HOPE OUTSIDE THE CAMP

Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Luke 9:58

My great joy since childhood has been running and playing in God's creation. My mom once had a dream about me. The tribal elders were gathered around talking about what to name the children who had come of age. My name was chosen to be "Running Through the Forest Boy." Even though I'm over 40 now and a bit creaky here and there, the name still fits. As a child it was when I was running through the forest and river trails of wild North Florida that I felt most at home. It was *outside the camp* that I first came to understand who God is through his creation. Getting to know God in nature is what some call the natural revelation. It's hard to miss the Author of life if you spend enough time in nature, unless you're bent on not seeing him.

Even Jesus retreated to the wilderness to pray to his father and it was no coincident that he was crucified symbolically outside the camp. It was outside the camp where the unruly youth of the Israelites were punished and sometimes stoned to death. Though as Christians we are called to live in the world, there are times when we must seek shelter in the wilds. Throughout the ages many Christians have sought refuge in the mountains, in the deep forests and in the inhospitable deserts from the rampages of man. But it is a misplaced hope without Christ.

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In his creation we are witness to our frailty and humbled by the grandeur of his works. Each time I go into the wilderness, hope is encouraged within me. I learn meanings to words I have often spoke without knowing: awesome, sublime, marvelous, life. If he made the waterfall, if he made the delicate maidenhair fern, if he put the planets in order, then mustn't he have a good life planned for you and for me. My hope blossoms outside the camp. But how did his glorious creation begin? Was it with a Big Bang? I doubt it. Bare with me while I muse on "The Beginning" for a moment.

## The Roar and the Whisper

It came from a call, wild as a roar and quiet as a whisper in the night. From one hemisphere of the universe to the other an echo resounded and remained the heartbeat of life.

Was it with a bang? Or was it with a rosy evening in one hemisphere and a husky blue morning in the other that the universe began? Was the light hot like the summer or did it shine like that of Saint Elmo's Fire—as if water and fire could be one? Must have light travel from one end to reach the other or did it appear from everywhere at once? One thing is certain, light dawned in the beginning.

I can imagine then all at once that everywhere in the great expanse bubbles appeared, small and large, bubbles of sky and water, each in its own family, in their own tribes and in His own collections. Not one of the churning, mixing, self-illuminating bubbles were alone, each were moved by the presence of the other. From among all bore life: green life, red life, colored life—for life begets life.

Next, I can imagine that a new type of light broke forth, not the rosy light of dawn nor the pale blue light of a misty morning, but white

light, bright light, light of the sort which breaks your gaze. The new light began by congregating muted colors. First one popped, then another and another until everywhere sparkled in the great expanse. Early on it was like sparkles in fresh, fluffy snow in the sunlight, but as more and more of the pale light popped into sparks, darkness emerged amid the tiny pinpoints, swirls, threads and mycelia of brightness. These lights forever changed the texture of the great expanse. Eddies, waves and tides covered the heavens. Light danced from one hemisphere to the other. Deep within and among this light-river dwelt life, ever-changing and always the same, ever-seeing and always abounding.

In one special place, so infinitesimal, so humble, and so ordinary, it was decided, that life should take on special meaning. Life was given special breath to speak and special eyes to see and special hands to create. It was right here that this happened long ago—long before memory can reckon. To this life was also given a special sense. This life could love and befriend his Creator. To those wide, fresh eyes, life was most certainly paradise.

Along with this special creation came responsibility, not like that of drudgery, but like that of royal discernment. For this new form of breath could tell living stories, yet also had the potential to slander. This new form of eyes could recognize beauty, but also had the potential to covet. This new form of hands could make things new, yet also had the potential to murder. A special rule was given to this special creature to keep danger away.

But such a regal status for such a lowly form of life was envied by one great and charismatic light. A crafty conspiracy ensued to trick the one who was loved into unfavored status, if that were possible. In perfect freedom, the special creation was deceived. In perfect freedom, the special creation ate death. In perfect freedom, guilt was pronounced.

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Immediately, a counter-conspiracy began for the special creation was deeply loved even still—to the horror of the self-loathing, self-loving charismatic light.

But with death now on the beloved creature's mental horizon, the creature could no longer bring forth life, but instead could only propagated war, for the mind was continually made manifest. The battle began for power over who rules where the victor rises in the depths of Hell—a battle of words and lies, deceit and lust, bludgeon and fire.

For centuries, this one-time battle ensued. There were those within the special creation who understood the tragedy and foretold the joy. As pronounced, their story came to life when the same roar and the same whisper that formed all of creation from the beginning was born into the body of the special creation—into the creature. The roar and the whisper took on the cloak of death, during which he spoke of the true life to be. Unloved and unbelieved, he was abandoned and in jealousy he was assassinated by those he held dear. And with him, so must all the universe die too, for all that came from his roar and whisper goes with him in his descent into Hell.

But like the Phoenix, out of the ashes arose the Roar and the Whisper, for infinite sacrifice begets infinite life. And from his mouth comes a new roar and a new whisper which conjugates light once again. You cannot yet hear this roar with your ears. You cannot yet see the new light of his voice with your eyes. You can only know it through the eyes of hope, for we are still of the Phoenix's ashes. So fix your eyes, fix your hands, and fix your mind on the Roar and the Whisper, for we are still a special creation. And when we love him who loved us first, he will say, "Out of the ashes, arise!"

And all of this was still just in the beginning.

When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

John 11:43-44

## His Word 'Gravity'

"Daddy, How does the water move?"

A while ago, my son and I took a walk up to Goblin's gate along the Elwha River, where the river funnels into a towering gray rock canyon. The naturalist in me would have wanted to reply to my son's question, maybe even with a minor nasal lisp for fun, "There's a pulling force between bodies of matter called gravity. We don't really understand it, but we can certainly see its effects." But I didn't say that.

I responded, "God pushes the water."

He came back with, "Does he use his arms?"

I said, "He uses his Word."

I continued, "God tells the trees to grow up and they do. He tells the birds to flock and they do. He tells mountains to rise and fall and they do. He tells us to love and we do."

Do you know the laws of the heavens?  
Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?  
Can you raise your voice to the clouds  
and cover yourself with a flood of water?  
Do you send the lightning bolts on their way?  
Do they report to you, 'Here we are'?  
Who gives the ibis wisdom  
or gives the rooster understanding?

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Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?  
Who can tip over the water jars of the heavens  
When the dust becomes hard  
and the clods of earth stick together?

Job 38:35

I sure do enjoy learning about nature and God from my children. As most adults can attest, they keep us seeing the world with new, fresh eyes.

Now that I have children I rarely go hiking alone, but recently, I took a hike up the Little River Trail. My back had been causing me problems and sometimes a stout hike puts all the muscles back in place, or so I like to think.

Like Goblin's Gate along the Elwha, the Little River Trail is certainly a gem for nearby Port Angeles. After passing through the park boundary the big trees and an ancient canyon begin. Many people visit only to hike up toward an old mine, but by continuing upstream instead of veering off up toward the mine, the cozy mossy veneer and fern-filled riverine forest compels me onward with each bend in the river.

Usually, when I take a hike alone, I spend much of the hike thinking. I try to spend my time soaking in the sights, sounds and external sensations, but that's easier said than done. Mostly I spend time gravitating toward an obsessive thought, some undone task or some notion that plagues me. I expect that most of us are no different which may be why most people don't go on hikes alone! They would rather occupy their senses with some preoccupation or addiction so they don't think about those sorts of things. But we must encounter our true self and our indwellings if we are to transform and our brokenness be healed. God allows ideas to flow for different reasons.

His 'gravity' speaks to us just like it does for all creation. He may press an idea into us or release his pressure on our thoughts, so we may be inspired to love or to better know our sin.

What we spin in our heads, what we think about, all of those things on which we dwell, affect the reality into which we tread. They are our hauntings and they guide our choices. Our inner hauntings are outwardly manifest. It's the fallen human condition. Our simple task is to allow God to transform our hauntings to holiness. It can't be done effectively by therapy. It can't be done by trying to focus on what's positive or on nothing at all. It can only be done through the blood of Christ.

I've found that when I go on hikes alone, it's essential that I go with a clean conscious. If I don't, I'm plagued by various thoughts that inhibit my ability to enjoy the beauty of the wilderness. And this principle applies to everything in life, not just pleasure hikes: relationships, meals, working, relaxing, sleeping and dreaming. What is a clean conscious anyway? Is it really possible to feel that free? I say, yes, but only through Jesus Christ. On my own, I can't. I've tried.

By being in Christ, our conscious is interminably cleansed. But we have a role here. We must actively participate in his washing. First, we must allow him to wash us. Secondly, we must not participate in those things that cause our conscious to be marred. For me this means: cut off those things that are addicting in my life, follow the law of the land, love those who are difficult to love, be steadfast and upright in my commitments and engagements, and many more practical daily actions that become habitual—if I let them. But mostly we are washed through prayer. When we pray to Jesus, we enter into the Holy One. And when in him, we are totally clean.

On this particular walk, I ended up going about two miles upriver.

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Until that point, I was dwelling mostly on Jesus and his work in my life and on the beauty of the valley. I was amazed at the softness of one particular red huckleberry plant and its new bell-shaped flowers that hung like tiny white ornaments on the thin, evergreen branches. The rush of the river and the sparkle of sunlight were other delights. It wasn't until I started spinning a work-related problem that I stopped my upward ascent and the gravity of the thought turned me around.

Even on the return hike, I was able to enjoy my surroundings a bit. For one, cold water always seems to pull me out of my hauntings, whether I swim, drink or just wade in it. But today I just splashed through it at the river crossings. My recommendation for any temperate forest hiker is to always wear sandals. It makes river crossing easier and a fresh, cold foot washing is certainly a joy.

Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean...Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

John 13: 8-11

We are all cleansed by Christ. Wading in clear, refreshing mountain stream is only a weak shadow of what Christ has in store for us. When Jesus washed his disciples feet, in his humility he showed them and us how to love and be healed through his servanthood. But we must allow him to wash our feet at the foot of his cross and respond to his word. We are also called by him to wash the feet of others in love. It is the most humble of acts. The lowly acts are the highest in God's

Kingdom.

As the popular song goes, “I’ll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross...” But how much did it really cost for Jesus to go to the cross? There have certainly been many people throughout the ages who have died horrible deaths for the sake of others. What was so different about Jesus?

To answer this, I find myself remembering the warbling chatter of a flock of pine siskins in the top of a tall stand of ancient Douglas-firs. I step back or watch my family and friends enjoying each other’s company. I remember the bright quarter moon on a cold, clear winter evening with stars speckling the deep blue sky. I close my eyes and think about the reality of the most distant galaxy.

In John’s gospel he begins, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

But when Jesus died, mustn’t everything that was made through him die also? And not only that, but Jesus was also said to have descended to hell. What does that mean for all the universe that was made through him?

The sad truth is that when, in our pride and jealousy, we executed the author of our beloved universe, we sent all of nature to hell too—including ourselves. Nothing we ever do will compare to the damage we’ve already done by sending Jesus to the cross. We think our weapons of mass destruction are bad. They are nothing.

Our only hope is to be raised again with Jesus. Proclaim it from the rooftops. It is that real.

## The Last March of the Ents

When I was in my early twenties, like many passionate, justice-desiring youth, I was spellbound by nature, forests, rivers, oceans and living creatures in general. I entered into friendship with circles of youth who would be labeled by some as environmentalists. (Though labels rarely do justice to the human heart, do they? People are always more than the labels they have won for themselves. In everyone we must seek to know that child of God, not the label.) These friends of mine, many whom are still my friends and acquaintances, usually had good intentions, but more often than not, they lacked the same conviction to protect the temple of the body than they did creation. How often does our sinful acts of the flesh destroy relationships and groups of people? But I digress.

As presumptuous as it now sounds, I, too, had the conviction to 'save the earth', but as the pressures of human life and sin burdened my mind and body, I took less notice of the problems our planet faced. I still take notice, but not as an activist. I feel more like a seabird that has been pressured out of his coastal home or a young Doug-fir tree surrounded by intersecting overpasses. I also am more convicted than ever that plant and tree roots are far stronger than concrete and they will one day take back over all the cities, though that might be considered misplaced hope, now wouldn't?

But even though part of me looks in scorn and contempt towards man's greed and his destructive nature, I suppose I have matured to feel more long-suffering than I did when I was younger. I feel less like an environmental activist and more like an *ent*.

Do you remember Tolkien's ents? Ents are patient forest-dwelling creatures found in the Lord of the Rings. They are a race of men that resemble trees.

“Hoom, hum, I have not troubled about the Great Wars”, said Treebeard; “they mostly concern Elves and Men. That is the business of Wizards: Wizards are always troubled about the future. I do not like worrying about the future. I am not altogether on anybody’s side, because nobody is altogether on my side, if you understand me: nobody cares for the woods as I care for them, not even Elves nowadays.”

After lengthy deliberation in *The Two Towers*, the Ents decided to take action against the evil wizard Saruman. They marched against Saruman’s Isengard and eventually became so enraged that just the power of their voices alone helped destroy Saruman and Isengard. ”If the Great Sea had risen in wrath and fallen on the hills with storm, it could have worked no greater ruin.”

As concrete and asphalt spread across the planet and greed fills our hearts, I feel like Treebeard in a quandary. Our world is controlled by the archetype of Saruman and he and his brood cause suffering to our planet, its creatures and the family of man. Thankfully, the damage is not forever. But like the Ents at Entmoot before they marched, I am still in deliberation about what to do.

As people are used and sold by corporations like slaves, and oil and gold is valued more than friendship, I continually ask God, “How long must we suffer?” When will the stones cry out saying, “Look, you humans! Look what you are made of. Look at the black, slimy filth. Take a good look. Enough! Can’t you see covetousness, the false god of profit, and murder in your own heart?” Which of you have you not heard say, “I wish gas prices weren’t so high?”

Folks, it does get better, but only in the man we know of as Jesus of Nazareth, for it is to him and only him that the stones cry out. And he will come again to make the path straight.

I can hear Treebeard now, “Hoom, hoom, a-hoom...”

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As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”

Luke 19:37-39

It is outside the camp where we can learn about the glory and power and justice of God. My son asks, “How strong is God.” My answer is stronger than the waves, stronger than the thunder, stronger than the sun, even stronger than the universe itself. It is in wilderness that we can also learn how God's justice and grace works. We see these peculiar traits clearly in the process of evolution if we seek to understand it with an open heart.

## The Pride and Prejudice in Evolution

God keeps some of his knowledge of the universe secret for his purposes. Maybe because he wants to surprise us. Maybe because he wants us to see our sin when we fight over meanings and truths, which is just the reason why we understand evolution very dimly. The pride and prejudices in the human heart keep us from seeing truth. These character traits keep us from truly knowing and understanding those things nearest and dearest to ourselves. But when we remove those scales from our eyes, we begin to understand things more clearly, including the natural phenomena which surrounds us, such as evolution.

First, let me take a stab at the definition of evolution as I understand it (which is not very Darwinian) in one sentence: Evolution is the

process whereby a natural system becomes its archetypal form. Or let's get even shorter: Evolution is life becoming itself.

For example, the archetypal form for a grazing animal that feeds on upper tree leaves is the giraffe. Its morphology is tall and lanky to feed where other animals can't. As I understand evolution, the giraffe form itself exists, even when there are no tall, slender beautiful creature such as a giraffe walking on the earth. Throughout the ages, the giraffe morphology has evolved and disappeared from the fossil records from within different groups of animals. So even when the giraffe morphology goes extinct, it reemerges again, not primarily because there are leaves high up in trees to eat, but because the form is literally 'available' for a species to move into, like a hermit crab finding its shell.

We can apply the same principle to all biotic and abiotic forms of existence in the entire universe. It can be applied to you and your body. It can be applied to planet Earth. There is even an archetypal *you* and your evolution is the process of you becoming the archetypal you, a story that began long before you were even conceived. You, the earth and the giraffe were defined as archetypes before the beginning of time.

Without getting into more detail on the process, I'd like to look at the psychological response of two sides of the evolution debate. I'll start with the Christian side, since I'm a Christian.

Within some circles of Christians, there is an established group-think that if one doesn't read the Genesis Chapter 1 and 2 literally, where it 'should' be read literally, then one is distorting the Word of God. When we think this, aren't we being arrogant? In a since we are saying that my interpretation or my group's understanding is correct and this places us in a place of power over another and, ironically, over God.

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We may be just going along with what we are taught, and that may not be arrogant, but it is prejudice. In this case, we are evaluating something based on our fears, rather than what we know in our heart. The root of prejudice is always fear. It may be a fear of not belonging to a group or it may be a fear that God will strike us down for not thinking correctly. If it's the former, then so be it. It's vanity to want to be accepted by others at the expense of truth. If it's the latter, then we need to get to know God better. We will find out that God is gracious and merciful, especially when we tell him that we don't understand something. We are not judged based on things we don't know. However, we are judged by the standards that we expect of others, or place upon others.

In other Christian circles, the opposite is going on in order to please society, "What scientists say is fact." Their pride and prejudice is getting the best of them also in a similar vein: vanity of the ego and fear of being marginalized. In fact, both camps are making the same error!

Now, let's move on to the general outlook of atheistic Darwinism. Generally, it's easy to see the pride and prejudice in this group. The prejudice is the most clear. There's a prejudice toward the exclusion of God as driving force behind the process and a reluctance to ascribe a plan to the outcome of the process. The prejudice (once again, a 'pre-judgment') is that God is not the impetus, which colors the final analysis. I must add that I believe that the deeper motive here again is fear: "If there is a just God, then, oh, no!" says the unconscious, "I'll be convicted of this or of that." In this case, the atheistic Darwinian cannot add God to the equation or the ego would be squashed. But once again, if the atheistic Darwinian would try to get to know God, then he would find the God of justice *and* mercy.

The ego is also to blame for the pride within this perspective. Man

and his innovation must be the first to contemplate evolution. This is a clear example of our human covetous, “it’s mine” perspective. So, here again, pride colors and distorts truth.

Mostly though, the whole evolution debate is a red herring. It keeps us fighting and that’s the best way to obscure the truth. During any fight, each side obscures their individual error, and both sides also do an excellent job of concealing and burying the truth that the other holds dear. Yes, both the atheistic Darwinian and the Genesis-literal Christian have truths to tell. The atheistic Darwinian is witnessing a process of the materialistic reality unfolding within the natural world which is very true and very real indeed. The Genesis-literal Christian understands deeply that God is the ruler of a just universe and that he has designed the archetypes before the beginning of time. These archetypes are awesomely unveiled as a witness and revelation of God’s glory.

But by burying the other side’s truth in their pride and prejudice, each group limits the other’s ability to see the wonders of God’s creation. We are observing, feeling and perceiving beings. We can understand joy. Besides beautiful human relation, nothing gives me greater joy than looking closely at God’s creation. Why does it give me such joy to think about how ginger is related to a banana or how relatively unchanged a fern has been for millions of years? Why do I delight in discovering how I am evolving to become the “me” of God’s planning? I cannot fathom.

But mostly, when we shed our scales and look wide-eyed like a child at evolution, we begin to understand more importantly the revelation of who God is. We see the God that begets life. We see the God that is a provider. We see the God who makes things new. We see the God that restores brokenness. We see the God of freedom and the God of order.

Hope the Lamp of the Body

## The Archetype of You

I've now defined evolution in one line: Evolution is the process whereby a natural system becomes its archetypal form. Let me go a bit further on this idea so we can get to know God even better.

First, to see where I'm going with this we must realize that an individual is not independent. Like our twelve umbilical cords example, nothing is independent. Everything is part of a greater whole. As John Donne put it:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind...

The same goes for a species. To understand how a species develops a particular set of characteristics or a morphology, we must look at the broader organism: the species as an organism, the genera as an organism, the order as an organism, the phyla as an organism, and even *life* as an organism. And not only do we need to look at a particular family or genetic grouping, we also need to look at the local and broader ecosystem as an organism. For example, the grasslands with all its organic and inorganic substances is an organism. The continent of North America with all its climatic influences and biomes is an organism. The earth is an organism. The universe is an organism. I suppose I've gone far enough. You get the point. And I'm not speaking of the Gaiaism, which is fundamentally idolatry.

Here's the clincher: each of these life forms grows just like you do, just like a dog does, just like a tree does. An apple seed becomes an apple tree. A baby dog, becomes a dog. A grassland 'seed' becomes a grassland. An earth 'seed' becomes the earth. Your seed become you.

The Earth 'seed' didn't become Mars. A tiaga seed didn't become a tropical rainforest. A rainforest may have once existed where the tiaga now exists, but it grew out of a different 'seed'.

Each of these broader organisms is a form of life and has a particular specialness that is inherent to itself. Each had a seed. Each, one might say, inherited a plan, much like the genetics written in your DNA. But the seed that grows a grassland, doesn't look like a cashew nut. And the egg that grows a whole elephant species didn't take just 22 months to develop into an elephant. These broader seeds took millions of years to develop the genera and biomes we see today.

What's also interesting is that in the first few million years of growing into an elephant, the elephant didn't look anything like an elephant. In fact, it probably looked more like rock hyrax. But, make no mistake, it became an elephant. It also became other things too: manatees, dugongs, mammoths and mastodons to name a few. But the 'seed' that grew the elephant species could not have grown a cheetah, a whale or a star. It simply couldn't have. It couldn't have no more than your mother's egg could have produced a hummingbird instead of you.

One common misconception in evolution is the focusing on one-half of the process of evolution and missing entirely the other half of the story. The common notion is that the branches become more diverse as time progresses, call it an upside-down pyramid, or the phylogenetic tree.

But the opposite is also true. There's a right-side-up pyramid that deserves equal attention if we're really and truly to understand how evolution works. This pyramid has to do with the evolution of broader ecosystems. It's also known as succession.

Let's take the example of a grassland. Over the years the correct

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climate and soils would drive the characteristics of the local ecology to take on the appearance of a grassland. This is the case for all biomes.

It is also the case for you. If you let the forces of God act upon you, you will become your archetype—the special person God planned you to be. But you must let him mold you. God uses his forces to make the grassland. Yet the main difference between you and the grassland is that you have a choice. The grassland is always going with God.

There are so many of these archetypal forms in nature, which is why God's creation is so beautiful and so awesome. But I don't think there is an infinite number of them. There may be a seemingly infinite number of successional steps within a particular biome just as there are seemingly infinite number of steps between you as a fetus and you as an adult. But if you look around the earth, you will find a fixed number of these archetypal biomes. Each of them are slightly different, but in principle they are the same. Grasslands, forests, deserts, tundra are some of the primary ones on land. No matter what you do to these systems (unless you change the climate), inevitably in time, they will redevelop into their archetypal form.

And what's so totally amazing—from a personal and relational standpoint—the same is the case for you. You have an archetypal form. God can make you and remake you. He is the author and you are the co-conspirator. The key to life is really as simple as finding out who you are—who God intended you to be. And you do it by going with God, not against him.

Yes, these are the sort of things that I've learned wandering outside of the camp and exploring God's glorious creation. And don't worry, you'll find you. All you need to do is ask and he will show you the way.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

## Confidence in God's Plan for You

As I've noted, we each have an archetypal form, a plan that God has for us. What if we're not confident in the existence of this plan? What if we've grown skeptical in any plan or order or meaning to our existence? If we lack this confidence, like so many do, how do we get it back?

As child I was very shy around others, debilitatingly so. As I got older, my lack of personal confidence morphed into a speech disorder. I began stuttering in about fourth grade and it became progressively worse due to anxiety resulting from social embarrassment. Fortunately, my stuttering ended fairly abruptly at the end of college. I have had a handful of stuttering episodes since that time, usually corresponding to high levels of conversation anxiety, but as a park ranger and teacher, I have also been highly successful in public speaking. From my analysis, I think that stuttering has both a physical and a psychological component. As my dad likes to say, its cause is “multi-determined.”

What were the causes of my stuttering? I expect it has something to do with my personal physiology, with the English language itself, with social expectations, with my lack of personal confidence, and with pure and simple pride.

Regarding my physiology, I have a fairly high level of energy. The elders didn't name me Strolling Through the Forest Boy. I think my

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energy level was one of the major causes, as well as how my brain's visual center is more developed than my verbal center. My brain would think faster than I was capable of plugging the correct words together when vocalizing thoughts. I was also quite shy and I had a tendency to be nervous in the first place in front of groups of people. So when I would stutter in front of the class, my uneasiness toward the next speaking event would compound my anxiety.

As a student, the worse situations (as one can imagine) were when we were reading from a textbook aloud and one student after another would read going down the rows. The anxiety would build and build as my turn approached. The anxiety along with the mental image of the embarrassment of public stuttering would set me up for disaster. Each event was always a disaster. It's important to note that I feel that my mental vision of embarrassment would increase anxiety and set me up for a self-fulfilling prophecy. I would envision a stuttering event and it would happen.

These anxiety-driven stuttering events occurred into my early twenties. Fortunately, as a child, not all teachers required me to speak in front of the class, and as the other students became older, there was less snickering as my classmates matured. A compassionate classroom, although rare, was always helpful.

I'll also note that I used my stuttering as a manipulative device to get things my way sometimes. I can look back at a few events and know this to be true. But let me also make it clear that my stuttering was real, yet there were a handful of events where I consciously and subconsciously abused my speech impediment for my own selfish motives.

But there is a pride that exists under the surface when we have a lack of confidence. Our innermost being won't trust in the 'plan' that God

has given us. We don't want to accept his rule. So, the first step to regaining confidence in ourselves is accepting God's rule in our lives.

So, as a stutterer what did *not* work for me? That's simple: continuous phonation. That's a classic technique where the stutter slides into the difficult sounds. For example, instead of saying, "David is a boy." The stutter would say, "...hhhdDavid is a hhhboy." Basically, you learn to slide into difficult sounds. In my case, "d" and "b" were difficult sound to produce. In looking back and from hearing adult stutters today, it seems like this technique is just a crutch. It gets people talking and semi-functional, but it doesn't solve the problem. For some, at least, continuous phonation enables them to talk.

What worked for me? Again, that's simple: *visualizations of fluency*, which some might call meditation, but it's more than that. Done well, it's more closely aligned with faithful prayer.

In college, I was referred to a professor, who worked in the speech department who was working with a graduate student on conversation anxiety. I can't recall who these two people were, but their theory was simple and it worked for me. They used positive visualization techniques combined with relaxation to minimize anxiety and subsequently to reduce stuttering events. It worked for me and I probably had less than five sessions total.

My preparation for each session consisted of writing down and visualizing instances where conversation anxiety would be high, such as answering the phone, public speaking and talking with persons of authority. And I was to start thinking about those situations in a positive light. I was to envision them as moments of fluent speaking, of clear and thoughtful moments of joyful communication. Then during each session, the professor would have us sit in relaxing chairs and help us relax through standard relaxation techniques. After we

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were relaxed, we were to visualize the fluent conversational situations.

In those days, my studies were so time-consuming that I was always physically exhausted. The funny thing was that I never really got a chance to visualize the events during sessions, because each time I fell fast asleep before the professor was done talking us into a state of relaxation. But that really didn't matter, because the visualization work had been done. During my preparations I had already visualized the situations. Much of the work was done in my preparation. Throughout each week, just the fact that I knew that the session was approaching forced me to visualize moments of fluency.

I'm thankful that I was able to stop stuttering when I was in my twenties. I expect that stuttering becomes more and more integrated into one's physical nature, the longer the stutterer lives with the problem.

Please note that I think that this technique can be used for all sorts of mental and emotional pathologies. What we think and gather in our minds is potentially harmful. I had collected years of negative thoughts, thoughts of failure, thoughts of ridicule and vain thoughts that changed who I was. As much as possible, we need to lift ourselves up as well as others. We need to fill our minds with good thoughts, thoughts that please our God, thoughts that are made of the good that God has in store for us. In many ways, my experience is a microcosm of how many of our pathologies play out. We need to fill up and fill others up on goodness. Our thoughts are very powerful indeed. Our thoughts are either composed of our own plan or of God's plan. Let God speak within, rather than us ramble and murmur. If it were only that simple for us sinners.

The root cause of my stuttering may have had a physical side, but it also had much to do with my self-image. We all have problems due to

our own vain self-perceptions. For me it was stuttering. What is it for you?

Try *visualizing fluency*, but instead visualize what God intends for you. When God initially made creation, he called everything good. And that goes for you as well. Visualize the goodness that God sees in you. Visualize with confidence. Confidence in God, after all, is simply what Christians call faith. But most of all, we need to know that God indisputably loves us and ultimately it is only in him that we gain our confidence. God must be the root of our confidence. And it is in this confidence that we secure our visualizations and our mental imagery that guide our daily lives. If we practice these visualization techniques enough, we may soon find ourselves talking and walking with God everywhere we go. Then we will begin to understand what Paul meant when he encouraged us to *pray without ceasing*.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

## Searching Outward

As children, many of us were shy and lacked a certain degree of confidence, but our parents filled in the gap for us. This lack of confidence and shyness is clearly an important part of a child's development. We hide behind the legs of our parents to keep physically safe from those things that can hurt us. It would be careless for children to not be careful around other kids and adults. This type of shyness is an important developmental characteristic.

In adults, as I've noted, shyness can be an outgrowth of vanity. What

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was once a humble state of being, can become inward fear, lack of faith and deep interior pride. We may end up growing inward and closed-off which may result in a life of interior gossip—all because we lose track of who we are, our 'archetypal form'.

As we morph from child to adult, if our shyness remains it takes on altogether different characteristic of the shyness of a child. I'm speaking for myself here and my experience, which may not be yours. But I expect that it is applicable to many of those who are shy adults. Also, let's not confuse shyness with being a quiet person. We're talking about a state of anxiety coupled with a quiet, tense fear. Heaven forbid, someone might actually get to know the real me—the person God intends me to be.

Each of us has a particular identity that we think of ourselves. Call this a self-visualization. We picture ourselves as something usually in relationship to someone. We say to ourselves, I want to look this way or that way for this person or that person. Sometimes we have divergent self-visualizations based on who we are trying to impress or relate to. This can get us into relationship strife. This is one reason why some teenagers don't want to be 'seen' in public with their parents. The parent has known much of the true child all his or her life. The teenager has created a new self-impression for the group to which he or she is trying to belong. The two selves don't mix.

Divergent self-images not only cause problems in relationships, but they also cause trouble to oneself. By focusing on these differing self-images, especially when we have multiple ones, we actually can become people who we are not meant to be. We become a person who we think others want us to be. We run around daily putting on different faces. How tiring can that be!

In post-modern culture, there's a tendency to believe that one should

find out who one is—and this is not what I mean by my search to discover 'me'. Adolescents and adults alike spend much of their time trying to become someone unique. However, we are already special and unique based on our relationships to others, to our environment and to God. We don't need to find out who we are. We just need to stop being someone who we think others want us to be. We need to stop putting on the different faces for different folks.

What does this have to do with shyness? As adults we can become shy because we are afraid to bust the self-image that we have provided to others. We are afraid to fail that self-imposed, family-imposed or culturally-imposed image. We are afraid that people will see us at our best: humble. Our shyness comes out of fear of humiliation. But it is in our humiliation that we can truly become children of God.

We don't need to manufacture an image for others. It is our self-image factory that needs to be abandoned. God has made each one of us unique and we are unique only in our relationship to him and his children.

Ask Jesus to clean your temple for you. Have him kick out the money lenders and the cheats. Then ask him, "Who am I, Jesus?" Then he will tell you by leading you places. And for me, I'm still walking along with baby steps. I'm still a bit wobbly around the knees.

As I've gone along, he's led me outside the camp. I've learned, oddly enough, that to get to know who God intended me to be, I need to look in a wholly different direction than seems natural. In doing so, he has made me much less shy. Rather than dwelling on my self-image, I now look outward rather than inward. I try now to dwell on him rather than on me.

"Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old

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you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

John 21:18-19

# WHY SALVATION?

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Matthew 20:26-27

## **Transforming into a People of Hope**

To understand why we need to be saved we need to first consider whether not we think we have actual choice or freewill, and secondly, we need to consider whether or not we think there is natural justice within the universe. If we grapple with these two concepts (freewill and justice) and decide, “Yes, I do have choices, and yes, there is true justice in the universe,” then the need for salvation becomes more apparent.

I do not think that we could answer “no” to either of the questions independently. They hinge on each other. One could answer “no” to both and that would certainly be a sad Nietzschesque world.

Let’s skip freewill for now, that’s a whole topic on its own and I currently don’t have any convincing argument either way. It’s my “choice” that I believe we have freewill. If I had any argument, it would be that if there’s no freewill then there’s no real need for justice, because all things will just follow their predetermined routes. But I do believe in a perfect justice, so I believe in freewill.

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Justice is either all or nothing. The universe is either ruled by perfectly just rules or there is no justice at all. Could we live in a partially just universe? It must be a perfect justice or it wouldn't be just, would it? If a judge was to rule properly only some of the time, then he wouldn't be a very good or just judge, would he? On the other hand, the universe could be ruled by haphazard rulings. This is how many religions and belief systems work. In these systems of belief, there are various gods that decide things on their various whims. It's our role to capitulate to those whims. This system of belief is not one that believes in a just universe.

Natural laws abound. If you fight those natural laws, it may be to your own demise. I see the effects of a just universe (a just God) all around our natural world. There are clearly natural laws that rule the forces and matter of our universe. Fighting the law of gravity by jumping off a cliff would show me quickly that there are natural laws, and there are consequences when one doesn't follow those laws. This illustrates that our universe is indeed ordered, and in my understanding of things, when there is order, there is a justice that sees to keeping that order. In our government we call that the justice of the peace. The same name could be applied to the Governor of the universe.

Let's suppose that there is true justice in this universe and we do have freewill. Then if we knowingly make destructive choices, then the justice that we live under will convict us. Or if we are falsely accused, this justice will acquit us. And here is our fate: all of us knowingly make destructive choices and we live in a just universe. Thus, if the governor or the universe is just, we will be convicted.

And it's not just Joe or Adolph who should be convicted of a penalty worth death. We are all in the same family. We are all connected and co-conspirators by our twelve umbilical cords. All of our subconscious minds have similar horrific thoughts. Some of us stab others with

words. Others stab with swords. Some of the most pernicious acts are done with the eyes or a long, drawn out sigh.

This curious relationship between freewill and justice is seen in the story of the Garden of Eden. The mysterious first few chapters of Genesis can shed light on what justice is and how we relate to it. In this story, God gave man and woman choice. He gave us one rule and that rule was specific to us and our freewill. None of the other animals had that one law. The one law was that we couldn't eat from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Notice that the tree didn't have some obscure ancient name. It was written out clearly so we would all know what the fruit represented: the knowledge of good and evil. It was essential that a species with freewill not understand the difference between good and evil. We were designed so that our freewill was not capable of dealing with that fruit. But now we know the difference, and because so, our species is doomed. We couldn't handle it. That is why there was a law against it.

And let's not think it's unique to our species to have a unique law established for it. Each species or organizational structure in our universe has unique laws that apply to it and not to others. A seagull cannot lay eggs in the pounding surf, but smelt can.

What makes us unique to all the other species on Earth is that we have freewill, which is why we were given that all important law, one that was essential to our distinct nature. In essence, God was saying, "You are special, and to keep this extremely special trait of yours, you must not know the difference between good and evil."

You know the rest of the story. Unfortunately, now that we have the knowledge of good and evil, this has posed the most difficult problem to us. By possessing both freewill and knowledge of good and evil, we have become self-destructive. We knowingly choose things that hurt

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others and ourselves. And in that choice lies the guilt. On top of that, by knowing that we hurt others, we also try to prevent others from hurting us. We become bent on saving ourselves from the destructive habits of others.

It is at this point when history began. Agriculture emerged. Cities dotted the landscape. Resources began to be depleted. War arose. Finger pointing began. And that's an important point of the story: with the Fall we became aware of evil within others. We became the judge of others. We made our own government. We convicted others and we were convicted. We became our own god.

However, unlike the natural justice described earlier, our judgment is not perfect. It is always selfish to a degree. We will bias our rulings based on our desire for survival, which skews the weights and balances. Collectively and individually we become psychotic, bi-polar, racial, nationalistic and ultimately a self-destructive force. This is why the story of Cain and Abel immediately follows the expulsion from the garden. Self-destruction and murder became our nature. This nature could not be changed on its own. The knowledge was with us and would be with us until the end of history. We must be transformed through an intervention, from outside our species to the innermost inside of our species. It is due to our freely-acquired, self-destructive tendencies that we need salvation. Not only do we need it, but God has every intention of lavishly pouring it on us.

## Yes, Yes, Nod, Nod, Wink, Wink

Creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of

God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now.

Romans 8:19-21

Anyone who has spent much time with me knows that I love the weather and that I have special theories that cover just about everything. I suppose, “theory” isn’t the best word for my thoughts. It’s more like I hang on to a map that is based loosely on observation and highly on metaphor. I ask myself, “If (A) works in this pattern, then mustn’t (B) work in a similar way?” Yes, there’s trouble written all over that logic. Or is there?

I’ll share with you one of my special maps that helps me grasp processes in the cosmos. It’s quite simple: all processes of the heavens, including the ground beneath our feet, work like weather. I envision the hurricane as an example because it is so elegant and the processes are fairly well understood. We might not know why it centers on Kingston rather than Havana, but we do know the heat engine that drives it, the steering currents that push and pull it, and the general pattern of wind development. In my opinion it is the perfect model for everything from trees to planets and from atoms to galaxies. In my personal map, the hurricane is the Rosetta stone for understanding how all natural phenomena work.

As bold and off-base as this might sound, it is the fundamental subconscious map that I use to understand nature. When I think geology, in the back of my head I see the earth as a hurricane. When I think of gravity, I think of the isobar gradients that weathermen plot. If I read about a scientist’s new theory about the cosmos, I always plug the new theory into my map. How does it fit into my puzzle?

As a result, I have developed a fairly far-fetched vision of how nature works. But I enjoy it and if I’m wrong, that’s okay. I’ve been wrong

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before. My scientist friends think that I hold on to this idea, because idea is what I ‘want’ to believe. They may be right. It may be that my pride and prejudices need this map so I don’t tumble into existential despair. But I don’t think so. These days, Jesus keeps me humble. It may very well be that I am incorrectly projecting my map on to the universe. This reminds me of another ‘map’ that guides my understanding: *human projection is a real and powerful force.*

I had an interesting experience just the other day that may help me to explain. I’m using this incident as an example and by no means am justifying myself here.

I was at a dinner gathering of 20 or so men, women and children. The friends that I usually chat with were either occupied or absent, so I just sat around and watched the children play. One particular person started telling a story describing something of a political nature. As an observer to the story I listened and the storyteller knew it. Every few moments, my eyes were linked to the storyteller. I listened. As the person spoke, she told the story in a manner that had the general expectation that the audience agreed or should agree with the political position. The storyteller’s eyes were seeking facial cues of “Yes, yes, I agree with you.” But I didn’t agree. I rarely agree with any political stance, right or left. But what was interesting was that the storyteller seemed to hunger for acceptance of this particular view.

At first, I felt compelled, almost as if by a power, to agree with my eyes. But my eyes wouldn’t, they tried to stay neutral, which I found to be no different from a lie. It was so difficult. Finally, I burst out and said that “no” what was being described sounded like Hell to me, because that was the truth. Politics are Hell. Politics are simply the societal gossip that leads humans down the road toward war.

So, how do I explain this common human phenomena, this powerful

force that causes us to seek justification of our points of view from those around us? It's easy. I just look inside myself to see why I do it. I've done this before with my theories. My fallen nature desires to be God. I project—as a force—my notions, my thoughts and my lies upon reality for purposes of dominion and self-justification. At least I've done this in the past and I'm sure I do it at times presently.

I never really understood until recently how sin can have affected all the cosmos, as is taught in Christian theology. But I now understand it to be because of the power and scope of human projection. Because of our fallen state, when we look beyond our own noses we tend to project the ego outward and see the world how we want to see it. However rational and unbiased and scientific we may try to be, we can't help but to apply the root of our pride and prejudices to the universe and to our next door neighbor. This is a true force and can be likened to gravity and to barometric isobars. And it can become malicious and manipulative as we seek justification.

For quite sometime, maybe our whole lives long, we can go about thinking that we're right and that the other guy is wrong. In fact, because we're so good at projecting with a force, the universe may even start talking back to us, and nod, and say, "Yes, yes, nod, nod, wink, wink, I agree with *you*. I want to belong to your way of thinking." But eventually we will discover, that it wasn't universe talking back after all, it was only our reflection and, oh, how lonely we will be then.

We all develop these fantasies of truth and false-hopes. Jesus knew this. He saw the lonely people swooning over the leaders of his day who provided false-hope and fantasies of grandeur. He saw sheep without a shepherd. He gave them the only hope that ever existed or ever will exist: himself.

## When Song Breaks Forth

Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice  
with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

Zephaniah 3:14

I have another notion—whether it is true or not I cannot know—that human beings sang before we spoke. Once again, it may be that I like the idea, so I hope it to be true. It may be that my experience with spoken language makes me desirous of something more from language.

Language has been a positive characteristic in my life when it was simply about relating to others. In those times when I used my words in context with others for good or merriment, it was like touch, like a warming fire or like a satisfying meal. But language has also been the means of pain in my life. I've used simple words to hurt others. Haphazardly, I've spread gossip's life-eating fire. I have fought with words, scarring myself and others. Too often in my life this has been the purpose of language.

But on the other hand, song and singing is so elementary, so fundamental that it is more difficult to be corrupted. You can't make an A minor chord sound like a C major. If A minor notes come out, you're going to get a solemn feel. The intended feeling within a made-up tune is difficult to disguise. Singing speaks from the heart, especially singing without words. Our personal tunes tell our personal stories that reside in the deepest places.

Why do we have such a range of notes in our vocal chords? Did those evolve for speech or did they develop in our voices for song? I expect the latter. I also expect that human words and spoken languages

emerged simultaneously with other forms of human disguise. Like our clothes, words can hide our naked reality, our humility, our strengths and weaknesses. For out of our song we cannot disguise our heart's story, but with words, we can cloak our heart's story with various meanings—some true and some false. There must have been a time in our history when spoken words began to hide the truth of our heart. This is probably why our languages are not sing-songy. Our words have only slight ups and down. Mostly, they are monotonal. With monotonal speech we are less likely to give away something that we're hiding. But then again, it could just be easier to speak that way.

The beginning of language was also probably the beginning of History. At that point we could tell stories. Our words could be packed with meanings both true and false. Our stories could travel through time embedded in language itself. History, once initiated, took root, grew and we now see it written in our stories, on our faces, and in the landscape itself. But with that new beginning something else died to make it happen: the free life of the human heart was crushed, we became bound to the new lifeform—history itself. This is what happened to us in the Fall.

History now cloaks the truth. It hides our roots. It covers over what we are intended to be just like words do. History as well as words conceal the human heart. But there will be the day when History dies completely and what will break forth will be the most beautiful song you have ever heard.

This is the Joy of John referred to earlier, when God's song overshadows the pitiable human. And though we can't yet hear the splendor of God's angels trumpeting from on high, we can hear the prologue in every truly loving encounter we embrace. The song can be heard in love and in sacrifice, in humility, in submission, even in submission to the injustices of our governmental systems and the

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rulers who guide history in our present day and age.

## Questioning Questioning Authority

Servants, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

Ephesians 6:5-6

When we don't submit to authority and we skeptically question their rule, we may end up actually undermining our own sense of justice. By questioning authority, as good intentioned as it sometimes seems, we are still fighting them. We fight with our minds, our knowledge and our common sense. We perform a variety of litmus tests to determine the of validity of their rule. But since we are a part of their social system, whether we like it or not, we are inescapable from the judgment we cast upon them, for *we are they*. There seems to exist systemic injustice in all our forms of governments, so why question any authority? They are in their position. I am in mine. Why fight them for it? I end up fighting myself. Jesus explains, that we must take the log out of our own eye before we can see the speck in our brother's eye. This applies to authorities and rulers as well.

All human systems of society are unjust in different ways. The authority of that system simply reflects the relative justice of that system. When you question authority, you're questioning the relative justice of the system as a whole since the system is interconnected. You're questioning yourself. The leadership is not separate from the rest of social system. They are one. If the body is just, the head will be just. If the body is unjust, the head will be unjust. I don't think there's

a middle ground. Something is either just or unjust. There's no such thing as a sorta-just social system. And a system can't have compartmentalized justice either, since it's connected and intertwined.

If all human social systems are inherently unjust, how do we become just once again? This is why *we need salvation*: we have become corrupted and we can't fix ourselves.

Paul explains, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. For if he is thirsty, give him a drink. If you do this, you will pile burning coals on his head. Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good. Every person must be subject to the governing authorities, for no authority exists except by God's permission."

The reason these sentences were all blended together by Paul in the sequence he used is no coincidence. He recognized that by submitting in goodness to the governing authorities, if they are oppressive and unjust, you end up piling burning coals on their heads. The reason for this has to do with the nature of true justice and how perfect that justice is. If only a fragment of justice comes in contact with an unjust system, the unjust system will be burned and/or transformed so that it can handle being in contact with the just system. Because justice is either just or unjust, that which is unjust cannot exist in the presence of that which is just. The two are like oil and water. Justice is that perfect; it cannot be tainted with injustice. This is just another reason why the martyrs seemingly disappear from our midst. It also tells us something about ourselves and why we live amid a corrupted world. We need to be saved.

Counterintuitively, the way to restore justice in our social systems is not to rebel. It is to inject it with true justice: mercy and love. The initial injection of justice into our human society was Christ. He is the author of justice and dwelt among us to restore us. He restores us with

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mercy and love.

Yes, all authoritative social systems are corrupt. In a sense, there's no real need to question them, because they are all corrupt and unjust in different ways. It's a simple fact. However, if one rebels and takes over an unjust system, it always takes unjust means. Just one innocent life cut short, just one shout in anger, or just one contemptuous thought makes the rebel unjust as well. This has been the nature of all rebellions and revolutions throughout history.

But if there's no justice in rebelling against the unjust system, then how do we free ourselves from the bondage of injustice? Are we doomed? I may not have faith in socially-conceived systems of justice, but I certainly believe that the universe is run by a just God. Thus, there actually is a deep justice in this world, deeper than any socially-conceived justice system. And that system of justice is not only available in some heavenly realm in the future, that system of justice is available right now. We can learn how to do this from Paul, from other disciples, and from Jesus himself and his Spirit through prayer.

Practically-speaking for us, restoring justice in our spheres of influence involves imitating Christ to others and our rulers. As the prophet Micah advises us, "We act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God." When we follow this advice, we end up actually healing the authority we began to question and in the process we heal ourselves.

## Skepticism

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Matthew 7:7

When I used to teach kids about various natural history topics in Olympic National Park, I would use a skins and skulls activity taught to me by my special friend named Nick. It was all based on having the students recognize the difference between observations and conclusions. Each of the 15 or so students were given either a skin or a skull. The students had a great variety of objects to choose from. Actually, they didn't choose. That would have taken way too much time. I passed them out. There were specimens such as a bobcat skull, a deer skin, a wolf jaw, a beaver skin, etc.

On the first round of the activity the students were to make only observations. No conclusions were to be made. We went around the table and each student made one observation. As was expected a student would say something like, "These teeth are made for eating meat." Then I would say, "No conclusions please, only observations should be made this time around." Eventually, most of the students understood the difference.

Next we would go around the table and make conclusions based on the first-round of observations. Then I could praise them and say, "Yes, you're right, those sharp, pointy teeth are so that the animal can grip flesh."

We all must be keen observers, whether we are naturalists or just human beings trying to figure out our life. But being an observer and not jumping to conclusions is only the first half of the program. We must also draw conclusions from what we observe. If we don't, then we run the risk of thinking that there really are no conclusions to be made. Eventually, we must take the risk—have faith—to draw a conclusion, because there are important conclusions to discover.

The fur is made to keep the beaver warm.

The sharp canines are to hold flesh tightly.

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What about truth? Is truth observable? Is the nature of truth a conclusion we can make? If we are a true skeptic, we don't allow ourselves to assign a judgment to the nature of truth. But even the skeptic can't help from leaning this way and that way toward a particular ideal or a presupposition. It's in our nature. These leanings are unavoidable.

We are continually bombarded with observations in the natural world that help us define truth. These observations beg questions as well as answers. Why are there so many stars? Why is water liquid on earth? What is the human mind? Why do I get angry? What is love?

We are also given testimonials to truth from witnesses. These observations of others also begs questions and answers—unless we just consider all testimonial of all other humans to be questionable, outright lies, fantasy or insanity. If we believe the observations of others, then we must consider at least a part of their observations in the body of evidence. Then it's time for us to draw conclusions. We make a judgment based on what we know.

This is what the Gospels are about. They are evidence to truth. They are observations from the field. Either the witnesses were lying or they weren't. Read them and see what you think. Does it sound like they were written by people who truly believed in their own observations? The witnesses observed Jesus. They saw him on the cross. They saw the empty tomb. They saw him alive. There are even witnesses living today. In these witnesses you can observe a changed life. In them you can witness God's love (and their human sin). In the witnesses, we get to know the reality and truth of Jesus Christ himself.

It is through keen observation, where we avoid coloring our judgments with our own presumptions, that we can see truth. To understand why we need salvation, the place to begin looking is in our

own heart. If you look deeply and honestly enough, I expect you'll understand why we all need Jesus.

## “What is Truth?”

To answer this fundamental question, let's return to the idea of our outer lives as projections of our inner lives.

In this day and age, there's a deep reluctance to ascribe objectivity to the world around us. “Truth is as variable as the tides,” might be a saying of modern man. There would certainly be some truth to that saying since tides are very real indeed. But the modern idea that truth is in constant flux is not an accurate portrayal of reality. It is only a reality of the human perception. We see the truth as subjective because we *want* to see it that way. Truth in its most universal form has nothing to do with variability and does not fluctuate like the tides. Truth has to do with clarity and objectivity. Our reluctance to believe in a universal truth is because we project our inner lives onto the universe. Our inner lives are very messy and befuddled, which is how man sees his world.

In Richard Dawkins' book *The Selfish Gene*, he describes all life as having a tendency toward selfishness which is what he insists the evolutionary process to be. But I think this is his biased projection of man's selfishness onto the universe, rather than a reflection of objective reality. Naturally, man wouldn't have seen it any other way. Our vision of reality is colored by our selfish ego.

To analyze reality, we must first have clarity within our interior thoughts and feelings, because it is inside of us where we make decisions. We make our choices and those choices spread outward into our outer lives. Clarity within is essential before we can make

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judgments on reality.

When we see the exterior world as a projection of our interior lives, we keep ourselves from playing the blame game. No longer will we say: “Look what cards I’ve been dealt,” “See what life has brought me,” or “How could it be my fault? Just look at my circumstances!”

My dad said something that helped me when I was in my twenties that I’ll never forget. He said that the first step to healing is to first own 100% of my problems. He was so right. When I have trouble with someone, I should own 100% of the problem. When we see the world around us falling apart, we should own 100% of the problem. I’m not kidding. We should own 100% of the problems in our families, in our town and in our world.

He would say that I’ve taken his pithy advice a bit too far, but I don’t think so. The outer world is a projection of our inner lives, not only for us as individuals, but also for us as a collective unit. As outlined in the twelve umbilical cords chapter, we are not disconnected from the world, and thus, the world’s problems are our problems. We are blood relatives to every last human out there, from Mr. Sentenced-to-Death-Row to Hitler. Even though my umbilical cord was severed after birth, I still have a fundamental connection to everyone who has lived, is living and will ever live. We are a part of the family of man no matter how much we try to isolate ourselves from others. Someone has to take ownership of the sadness and pain. It might as well be me and you. This is what Jesus did on the cross. In his innocence, he took the full blame for the family of man.

By taking 100% ownership of our problems, we take responsibility not only of our own problems but also the problems of others. As the responsible party, we can ask for forgiveness which is where healing begins. In the prayer Jesus taught us, he didn’t tell us to pray, “Forgive

*me* for *my* trespasses.” He taught us to pray, “Forgive *us* for *our* trespasses.” The family of man is one body. If I strangle someone with my left hand, my whole body is to blame, not just the left hand. What is so marvelous about this is that in our just universe we have the ability to intercede for the rest of the body. With Monica, we can stand on the rule for others. We are 100% guilty, because we are of the same body. Yes, we are a blood-relatives of Hitler, whether we like it or not.

What does all this have to do with truth? In order to see the truth within the reality of the universe, we must make way for the truth. The big lie must be revealed within us. The big lie is that I’m not responsible. It’s not my fault. I didn’t have anything to do with what happened outside of Jerusalem. I didn’t put Jesus on the cross.

However, as a part of the family of man, I did nail him to the cross. And what I allow to go on in my head today does affect others. My mind and body are totally interconnected with the rest of the humanity. To begin seeing clearly I must clear out the lies within—the only place that I truly have some control. Jesus admonished us to “First clean the inside of the cup, so that its outside may also be clean.”

Truth, untruth, a-truth, relative-truth or whatever type of truth that you see in our outer lives is a projection of our interior understanding of truth. The way we see and interpret the world is directly related to what goes on in our inner lives. When we lie to ourselves, the lie multiplies externally to us. Truth becomes obscured and reality begins to seem variable. But we have control over the big lie, the small lies and the white lie. We can control whether or not we lie or look to the lie as truth.

Why do we lie to ourselves? We lie because our ego’s existence

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depends on a contrived-sense of individuality. The ego must project itself as the all-powerful ruler of oneself. It cannot allow itself to bleed into the rest of humanity. It would then cease to be a solitary unit. To prevent death, the ego must falsely preserve a notion of independence. The ego argues to the mind and body, “No, it couldn’t be your fault,” “Yes, you were right to take that course of action,” and the most deceptive self-preserving argument of all: “Don’t worry, the ends really do justify the means.”

However, by accepting responsibility for 100% of our problems, the power of these lies is broken, the truth begins to shine within us, and the truth of the universe becomes more clear. When we take on 100% of the guilt, we also find out wondrously that we have been pardoned 100% through Christ’s payment. Our conscious is cleared and life begins. This is our hope and in it we find living the person of Jesus Christ.

# HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.

Philippians 4:8

## Hope as a Force

Daniel, a biologist friend of mine, once explained to me how he believed birds migrated so far and so very precisely each year. He hypothesized that landscape features actually triggered their memories, but he also thought that the landscape itself held the memories of the birds. How is that possible? How can the landscape be a part of a bird's memory banks.

First, we must understand that no individual in any species is an independent agent. Each individual is a part of a community, a collection of individuals. They are also intricately related to their food sources, their predators and environmental characteristics. Even the minerals, rocks and atmosphere are in many ways part of that individual. Or it might be better to say that each individual is a part of a greater living community. Daniel was saying the same thing for memory in birds. Memory is not only stored in neurons, but also in

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chemical, auditory and visual triggers outside the brain. Those triggers might be other organisms, or even landscape objects, such as the coastline or Mount Shasta. Even though a hummingbird has a brain the size of a pea, it can migrate precisely to the correct location each year, simply because a hummingbird's brain is *not* the size of a pea, it is the size of all of its memory triggers, which may indeed include the landscape itself!

An example of this would be your right hand. By itself, it would have no idea how to get back to your mouth with a second bite of food, but in conjunction with your arm, mouth, body, eyes, brain and food, it can make that motion quite easily. You might argue that hummingbirds aren't like your hand, because a hand doesn't have a brain the size of a pea, and that a hummingbird is more like red blood cells going out and returning to the heart. Like a red blood cell, a bird travels a defined pattern and there's no real memory occurring there. Okay, that comparison may be correct. However, rather than not being memory at all, the memory that a hummingbird uses may be just a bit more primitive than ours is.

Humans may also have memories much like hummingbirds. Primitive memory types allow us to do our daily tasks. You don't have to think too much to remember how to walk or ride a bike. Understanding how these simple memories work may help us understand how less complex organisms remember how to do things.

In humans, highly complex memories may have their triggers stored in the intangible, such as words and sounds, or in the tangible, such as places, people or smells. These triggers can alert in our minds complex scenes, visions and thoughts that in no way relate to our present location. They can be as powerful and vivid as a post-traumatic stress syndrome event or a hallucination in which the person cannot differentiate his physical surrounding from a memory.

But this still doesn't explain what memory is. Above, I spoke of triggers. You smell a certain type of cooking and you are flooded with a memory of your great-aunt's kitchen years before. Or a hummingbird sees the coastline and adjusts its wings to the left. How are these triggers activating memories? Could it be that inside and outside the brain, there are just great arrays of triggers upon triggers conjuring up a memory? It may very well be. Here's an example.

Let's say you're looking at a view from a mountaintop. The colors come into your eyes and excite a particular set of neurons. Simultaneously, the wind and temperature of the air excite a particular set of neurons. You see and feel the beautiful landscape. You might even have a particular emotion going on because of someone you're thinking about. Now you use your camera and take a picture of that scene and go home. The next day, you look at the picture and the various cues in the picture trigger a chain reaction of neurons in your brain. The same or similar set of neuron is activated giving you the vision of the mountaintop scene. Now that this particular community or relationship of cells is activated again, the relationships of cells are reformed and the memory is 'burned in'. The next time you look at the picture, the community of cells will be activated through a cascade of triggers, and there you have it, you see and feel the scene from the previous day.

If this is all true, then we may be gaining a dim understand of what memories are. Memories may simply be complex communities of triggers. And, what's interesting to me and to Daniel is that the relationships between those triggers may extend beyond the local individual that is experiencing a memory. Our memories might literally be in the photograph.

One important question begs to be answered, which is the whole consciousness and awareness issue, and it may help us understand how

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truly important *hope* really is. How does our mind's eye work? We may be able to have memories, but how did we *see* them in the first place and in the second place? It's probably just magic, right? I expect not, I don't particularly believe in magic. Magic is just an illusion. We live in an orderly yet extraordinary universe. We may not comprehend that order, but it has a particular order. Magic is what tricksters do.

Now that we've laid out a foundation of how someone initially sees something: through various external and internal triggers, communities of neurons are excited to create a vision. But how do we come to truly experience it? This is a piece of the puzzle that will certainly be the most difficult to comprehend, even though right before our eyes we are seeing something right now.

If it is as simple as forces exciting an array or community of neurons that allows us to see, then what if you excite a community of molecules in a brick, are they going to see something? If this could be done, well, maybe. Let's go down the food chain and see what the less complex organisms may see from their senses. This is going to be very hypothetical, of course.

Dog:	Colors, shapes, motion, smells, sounds, etc. (not too much different from us)
Lizard:	Similar to the dog but with different emphases
Ant:	Light, shape, chemistry, sound
Ameboid:	Light(?), temperature, chemical shifts
Bacteria:	Temperature, chemical shifts
Virus:	Simple environmental characteristics
Water molecule:	Electromagnetic variations

I've added water molecule because I wanted you to notice something rather interesting. Each of the organisms or semi-organisms listed above react to their environment and to some degree 'see' or have some degree of awareness of their surrounding environment, whether it is simple light or complex dimensional space. The reaction they have to stimuli is generated because of what they experience (or what may be better described as a general awareness). Is it any different for a water molecule? If some sort of reaction is going on, even if it is done autonomically, then there should be some sort of awareness going on. And since every last thing in our universe reacts to forces, it very well may be that every last thing and collection of things has some sort of ability to 'see' or be aware of its environment however primitive that awareness is.

We can also go up the scale and do the same thing: Earth, solar system, galaxy and universe. Now, I wouldn't be so quick to say that a complex system such as the Earth has awareness like we do. It is probably the case that awareness types shift depending on their complexity level and the forces that influence them. Since the planets hold their orbits very precisely, it is probably the case that gravity is the most simple force that affects them, so their awareness might be extremely primitive, more like that of a water molecule. However, it may be that even though the force that affects these greater systems is simple, the grand scale of the influence may affect how they see in some special way. There's just no way to know. However, the point is that it is possible that what we consider to be 'seeing', should be applied to inorganic organizations such as a galaxy.

Another issue is *time*. Each of these associations should have a different perception of time, because the snapshots of their environment hold differing sets of data. And time is also dependent on memory. I'd venture to say that modern humans may have one of

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the relatively broadest grasps of time because of our language.

I'll also briefly mention the issue of deep sleep. If all organisms and matter have some sort of awareness, then why do we go 'dark' when we go into deep sleep? Isn't that a simple example of how at some moments in time we don't have awareness? I expect that the reason we don't see anything during deep sleep, is simply because we're not remembering it. The experience we have in deep sleep or unconsciousness is so foreign from our general awake awareness that it doesn't fit into our memories. But we should return to our topic of seeing and awareness.

From here on out, I'll closely associate the word awareness with what I am describing as 'seeing' above. I expect that most of you would not argue that a dog has awareness of his environment, but that you would argue that a rock would have nothing more than a zero-level awareness. I'm not saying that a rock has a strong awareness of its environment, but it does react to gravity and other forces ever so slightly, doesn't it? But don't let this get us off track. I'm trying to explain the importance of hope, so bear with me.

So, what if a water molecule is aware of magnetic forces? That still doesn't explain how something *sees*. To look at this fairly, let's go back to the human experience, because that's what we all can relate to best. What is the mind's eye? Honestly, I have no real good answer. But I will venture to say that it may be a type of force. Yes, that sounds sort of hocus-pocus or like I'm stealing some dialogue from OB1 Kenobi in Star Wars. But we haven't even touched on forces yet. We've talked a lot about matter (life forms and other stuff) but force is the other side the equation, isn't it? But how is seeing a force?

For those of you who watched Sesame Street, you'll know Cookie Monster. When he saw cookies, he gobbled them up ravenously. So,

let's blindfold Cookie Monster and lay a plate of delicious chocolate chip cookies in front of him. Initially, he won't apply one ounce of directed force toward those cookies. However, once his nose gets a whiff, his mind will remember (consciously or unconsciously) the taste and the pleasure of those cookies. Then he will rip off his blindfold and violently attack the plate of cookies until the last crumb is gone. He'll probably even eat the plate. It was the smell that triggered his memory, but it was his awareness of the cookies that sent him into wild-cookie frenzy. His awareness was the impetus, the force.

If you didn't follow this flimsy, yet possibly true argument, I'll lay it out in words: *All things in the universe have some degree of awareness and awareness may be what we call force.* Awareness is pushing or pulling force. I'll add that no forces are left out, whether it be the driving force to eat delicious chocolate chip cookies or the gravity that holds a planet in its orbit. All forces may be derived from awareness. And it's not magic. It may just be the way our wonderful universe works.

The awareness that humans have is clearly very different from that of a planet or a hydrogen atom. The reason is our freewill—our ability to choose. The earth can't choose whether or not it goes clockwise or counterclockwise around the sun. But we can choose whether we go right or left when we hit the sidewalk. Some may argue that we don't really have any choice—that we are preprogrammed—but as noted previously I choose not to believe that line of thinking.

And how does hope factor in here? Is hope is an attractive force like awareness? It may very well be that people were originally designed to have hope as the central force of our mind's eye.

This takes us to our next topic where we differentiate between awareness and consciousness.

## The Tree of Consciousness Sprouts

Nurse Piggy: It's too late, Dr. Bob. We've lost him.

Doctor Bob: Well, he couldn't have gone so far. He was under the sheet just a second ago.

We all know that Miss Piggy and Doctor Bob (a.k.a. Rowlf the Dog) didn't really have awareness or consciousness, but their puppeteers certainly made you laugh. What is laughter anyway and are there any other species capable of it? Laughter is most likely special to us because of our consciousness. In most cases, laughter is a spontaneous reaction when our morality or our sense understanding of the world is tested. I think the reason the Muppet's joke above is so funny to me is because Doctor Bob and Nurse Piggy or so dimly aware of the concept of death and dying. They take death so lightly that they can make a bad joke about the death of a patient. Why does it make me laugh? You're more than welcome to analyze my mind if you'd like. I expect that it simply jars my subconscious understanding of right and wrong.

In bringing up the loaded word *consciousness*, I'll begin by explaining my usage. I am not using it in a sense such as, "He lost consciousness." I am using it in the sense that implies having some level of understanding of right and wrong such as, "It was his consciousness that made him a crusader for justice." Consciousness in this usage implies that there is a complex awareness of the morality of an event or an action.

Earlier, I implied that there is a curious co-dependence between freewill and justice. Without justice there is no need for freewill and without freewill there would be no need for justice. The same thing applies to consciousness. The existence of morality depends on the existence of 'someone' who can make a choice in the matter. Without morality there would be no need for choices and vice versa. When we

make choices, we are basing those choices on some sort of system of value judgments of what we think is right and wrong. Consciousness is simply an awareness of what is right and what is wrong.

Interestingly, In Genesis the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is sometimes translated as the Tree of Consciousness. Without knowledge of what is right and wrong, humans would still be aware of our surroundings and relationships, but would we have consciousness? Interestingly, Eden was a place where man had choices, yet we didn't have the knowledge of what is right and wrong. It wasn't that right and wrong didn't exist, people just didn't know about it. We were inherently good, so knowing the difference wasn't necessary.

Most of us would agree, except the deeply antisocial personality or the philosophical word-smith, that there exists some sort of right and wrong in our world and that we make choices based both on a deeply-ingrained sense of morality or common sense, and socially-constructed criteria of social ethics. And not always do we make the right choices. Sometimes we clearly, stubbornly or brutally make the wrong choice. Anyone who can look at one's actions even partially objectively will see that sometimes we do what we sense is wrong usually for our own selfish desires. But let's not go there, the point is that consciousness depends on knowledge of right and wrong.

I doubt that a dog has the form of consciousness outlined above. He knows that if he wags his tail and is cute, he'll get a dog biscuit or that he'll have a warm house to curl up in. He will probably even have specific affections toward certain people for complex reasons, but I doubt that he understands the Golden Rule like we do.

It seems to me a shot in the dark to guess whether or not planets or other grander-scale systems have consciousness. Most would say that shot is easy and is an unequivocal, "No, don't be absurd." I will say that they do not seem to have much choice in their motions, and thus

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even if they have an awareness, applying consciousness to them is a bit far-fetched. They follow extremely precise patterns and have for a long, long time. Even larger-scale systems, such as galaxies, have such beautifully-defined and mathematical structures and they seem to follow very closely to a pattern. Following defined patterns, would seem to indicate a lack of consciousness since the patterns lack variation. A lack of variation in pattern may demonstrate the inability to choose. However, one could argue that they do have choice, but they always choose to follow the pattern defined for them. But again, let's not get sidetracked.

For some reason, we are special organisms in the universe so far as I can see. We seem to have a grasp of right and wrong and have a choice in the matter. Most of us feel a sense of right and wrong. Some would argue that this sense of justice is simply complex reactionary forces that are no different than that of a dog. I beg to differ. No pun intended. I believe that we do have consciousness and there was a particular point in our history in which we became enlightened for better or worse. And this particular point was when history began.

This moment was also very important because it marked the point when we began building our own tree of knowledge. One intriguing part of consciousness is how it relates to knowledge. If we didn't have knowledge in the first place, we wouldn't be able to store up understanding of right and wrong. As foretold, the seed of the forbidden fruit grew in us, into something quite explosive.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

Genesis 2:15-17

## Introducing the K-Bomb

To understand how we gained consciousness, I like to look to Genesis. One thing to notice is that after we gained consciousness by eating the forbidden fruit, we were told that “in pain [women] shall bring forth children.” What’s curious here is that one of the reasons that birthing children is painful is due to infant head size and even the most ardent of evolutionary biologists would agree that not always did *Homo sapiens* have big heads. The development of our puffed-up heads most likely correlated closely with our gaining of knowledge and the development of language.

Now at the same time, it’s important to look at what we know about natural and human history to understand how we gained consciousness. What jumps out at me is *fire*. In ecology, fire is the beginning of the successional cycle on so many landscapes. In a forest ecosystem, fire clears the way in an old-growth forest habitat and allows for the forest to grow again. Without fire, early successional species wouldn’t exist.

Regarding mankind, there was a point at which we took fire and went with it. How that happened is anyone’s guess, but it certainly was a pivotal point in our history. At that point we learned that we could harness power, which was probably a huge ego-boost. Could it be that harnessing fire was the beginning of our ego itself? Whether fire was the forbidden fruit is not something I know, but the power that we gained from it helped to drive us to where we are today. And most assuredly we now possess the ultimate fire-stick of all—the nuclear bomb. In all the life history of this planet, if there has been a fiery maelstrom as fierce as mankind, I’d be surprised. But please, don’t let nuclear warfare frighten you. That is my last intention. There’s really nothing to be afraid of in a little bit of nuclear energy. The

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progression of human history cannot be stopped and man's firestorm will run out of fuel. Thank goodness. Just like with forest succession, this once-upon-a-time firestorm will be a refining fire. Yet again, I'm getting off topic.

So, 'poof', we gained consciousness and after consciousness emerged, it sure couldn't be put back in the box. Our language increased. Our knowledge increased. Having babies started being more painful.

But what is this knowledge stuff anyway? The information scientist might say, "Oh, it's just stored information, everything from data to stories and to language itself." So it is, but how does that connect to what we may have learned about awareness as a force?

Knowledge is simply stored potential energy, or one could say it is stockpiled awareness. It is like a negatively-charged ion just looking for date with a positively-charged ion. If awareness is a force, then knowledge might just be a big bang waiting to happen. May I call it the K-bomb?

Since we store our awareness, visions, perceptions and feelings in a multitude of different forms, this knowledge is just force on the shelf. Try to recall in your memory a time when you ate a picnic lunch on the grass.

Notice that you are extracting this bit of knowledge off your memory shelf and turning it into a vision and recalling a past period of awareness. It is now in the near front of your conscious mind. How far to the front of the mind depends partly on how powerful that event was for you. If it was a good memory, then you might get motivated and pack up your family and go to the nearest park. If it was a bad memory, you'll make sure you don't do that again. If it was a good memory, note that the vision 'pulled' you to do it again. If it was a bad memory, it 'pushed' you away from doing it again.

It is important to add that memories may also be irreparably distorted or extremely dim depending on how the mind has shuffled or ignored the information. And not only do we store knowledge in our memories, but they may also be stored in writing, art, architecture and even the landscape itself. All of these forms of knowledge pull us, compel us and motivate us. They may also push us, drive us away, make us pace back and forth, idle us, or cause us to be couch potatoes. But they make us *do* something.

If knowledge is really a force to be reckoned with, what kind of force is it? Let's get simple and look at a magnet. If you put a north pole to a south pole they will pull together. If you put like poles together, they will push apart. Knowledge is no different from magnetism or any other force for that matter. It's just more difficult for us to grasp because it is so intangible.

We all have a sphere of influence and this may be limited to what our bodies can do. We can use our hands to paint a pretty picture for someone to enjoy, or use our arms to give someone a hug to make them feel cozy. Our bodies do these things through the instructions of our mind. But what is the mind? The mind is the 'seeing' and 'visualizing' that goes on inside us. The mind's thoughts are a tapestry of senses, feelings, memories, knowledge and logic.

Before I decide to give someone a hug, my mind consciously or unconsciously envisions giving him or her a hug. Something in me decides whether to go through with that action. If I act upon the mind's vision, the person gets the hug. This is a simple example of how reality itself is changed by a simple vision or a thought.

But does reality change if we simply think about something? Okay, we might not be able lift an X-wing fighter out of the swamp like Luke did. But what we think about affects our perceptions of our world. It

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affects our awareness. Our thoughts are reordered and a new landscape is burnt into our mind. This affects who we are, physically as well as mentally, and it changes the way we evaluate and make decisions. It affects our perceptions of the world. Our mind is active much of our days and some of the night. Our thoughts are continually shifted and reordered and a new community of neurons is established in our head. Our relationships with others change. Our work habits change. And this can be a vicious cycle, depending on where we are grounded. If we are grounded, our mind's landscape tends to stay relatively stable. These thoughts, whether grounded or not, drive us through our own personal and collective histories. And don't think it tumbles us haphazardly through time. It drives us toward the visions of our minds, individually as well as collectively. It drives us towards the reality that we focus on. If I were to choose one word that defines what most of us focus on it would be "me."

In some cases, we have choice on which varied subjects we dwell. In other cases, we seem to have no choice on the matter whatsoever. But even in those cases, in the most extreme examples, where someone might be tortured with obsessive thoughts, we still have choices. We will always have choices in our lives.

I'll take the extreme example of being 'tortured' with obsessive thoughts. It's extreme, but it's probably common in some degree to most of us at times in our lives. It is at these times that we cycle thoughts through our head. Over and over these thoughts resurface. We may try to push them back into the recesses. Though we may not have a choice whether these thoughts pop-up into our minds, we do have a choice how we interact with them. We can hate them, push them away or get angry at them. We may also try to neuter them through reason. But none of these approaches really do any good. On the other hand, we can look them straight in the eyes and see them for

what they really are. We can look at them with honesty, repentance, compassion, mercy and love. If we learn to look at our innermost thoughts in Christ-like ways, we will simultaneously learn to look at people and circumstances in this way as well. I know, easier said than done. I've been there. But the important point is that these thoughts are a force and they affect us and our reality. And we can look back at them with the force of truth and love.

Thoughts can be both scary and alluring (push and pull), but they must not be allowed to control our will. They will be in our head all of our lives, but we must make a choice of how we deal with them. We must be active participants in our inward and outward lives.

I will add that the way I deal with my thoughts these days is through prayer, when I'm at my best. Through prayer, repentance and forgiveness, as noted earlier, we can settle the debts and clear the muddy waters of our mind's eye through Christ on the cross.

In looking back at my life, I notice that most of my conscious moments have been filled with varied thoughts fading in and out of view much like the surface of a choppy sea. The times when I have not had this sea of thoughts was when I was engaged in some extremely difficult mental enterprise, such as computer programming or some other intense focus like hard exercise. From talking to others over the years, I find that they are really no different than I am.

And please don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that we should try to control or stop this plague of thoughts. That's what people consciously and subconsciously try to do with food, alcohol, drugs, sex, work, escapism, exercise, distractions and other methods. We use these techniques to block the choppy sea of visions and thoughts. But these are only coping mechanisms, crutches that don't solve the problem, and just perpetuate and increase our sea of chaos. As we see

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time and time again, these approaches mostly just exacerbate the problems. Too often, the plaguing images and thoughts within the mind only get worse with the rational and irrational fixes that we apply. Or they may subside and emerge again at a later date, or transform into something different but equally difficult to deal with. This is a common human predicament and I believe common to the entire human race. Pure and simple, our vast array of knowledge in all its forms affect of our consciousness.

Let's now look at Newton's Third Law of motion: "To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." Like Newton's First Law (inertia), what was placed in motion at the very onset of our becoming conscious beings has plagued every last one of us, because it has been a chain of 'reacting' events, just like Newton's third law describes. So, when you have a disturbing thought or someone causes you pain in your life, if you fight back, your reciprocation will just cause the dominoes to continue to fall. Likewise, if you just build a castle wall around your emotions, mind or body, you will just cause others to build bigger walls around theirs and so on. The other option would be to rationalize the pain. And that's probably the worst thing we can do. That traps the pain into ideas, thoughts, words and writings. This intensifies what I've called the K-bomb, where the broad, general pain is packed densely into a mental or social algorithm. It inevitably will beget future suffering. In the case of society, the K-bomb manifests itself as wars and injustice, which breed yet a bigger societal K-bomb.

For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion against God and the man of lawlessness is revealed –the one who brings destruction.

2 Thessalonians 2:3

## Diffusing the K-Bomb

Practically-speaking, I'm not sure if the K-bomb can be fully diffused. But if it explodes in your lifetime, you don't need to be destroyed by it. We've all already been hurt by it. It's been sputtering like a pot of rice left on high for quite sometime. But let's define the K-bomb a bit better before we look into how to deal with it.

As I understand it, knowledge is a force and make no mistake it is a powerful one, more powerful than anything human hands have made. Knowledge parades itself around as truth, but it is not. Knowledge is our human projection of what is truth. We twist our own perceptions of truth, our own choices of what we think truth is into *our* knowledge. And because of this, our knowledge becomes tainted. It is no longer truth. And since knowledge is paraded around as truth when it is not, it is just a lie.

Lies are always self-detonating. My lies have come back to haunt me. That's the way lies work. Remember the fire triangle: heat, oxygen and fuel. Lies work the same: heat, untruth and truth. Just add a spark.

I've said that thoughts can be packed tightly in rationalizations or even in social systems. I should be a bit clearer on a topic as important as this, because thoughts are what the K-bomb is composed of.

The warrior must justify his actions. Every human is a natural warrior. We are warriors in defense of our egos. We must keep our 'self' alive and strong. It's all about me, right? Some of us fight with actual physical means: fists, guns, swords and bombs. But most of us fight with words, ideas and thoughts. In our local circles, we may cut emotional supplies that feed our friends and family to combat a hit taken from others. Toward outside circles, we develop cliquish techniques, social standard, religions and even massive governmental

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and economic structures that are meant to protect our local and collective egos. And we have been doing this since day one when our consciousness first sprouted.

The point is that we justify the thoughts that disturb our consciousness in various ways. I really don't want to get into examples of how this happens. When you have a thought that disturbs you, see how you justify it or what you do with it. But when we justify these thoughts, we shove it places: maybe into an ideology, a political platform, a concept of what is socially normal, or the simple philosophy that says, "Well, I can't do anything about it, so let it be." Every philosophy, human social system and human government is a structure meant to contain, protect and support the K-bomb.

How do you diffuse the K-bomb if we can't use psychoanalytical techniques, drugs, friends, government, philosophy, or even religion for that matter? It may seem like your hands are tied. This is the ultimate dilemma of mankind. It's the Catch-22 of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And the dominoes have been unstoppable since the first flick.

As a Christian, I believe that the K-bomb is why Jesus came to the earth. He is the ultimate intervention for this problem. He came to save us and transform us with God's love, truth and mercy. Jesus outlines some bomb-diffusing techniques as clear as a bell in the Sermon on the Mount. "Love thy enemy" being one of the most important. But make no mistake, it is the person Jesus that does the diffusing.

But since you may not be a Christian, it is essential that I explain the concept behind it. Our internal lives are essentially no different from our external lives. The only difference is that our will is inside us, not external to us. Out of the will comes our choices and our choices are

manifested in our reality. What begins inside us moves outside of us. The force we talked about previously is initiated by the will and the dominoes begin with the flick of our will and fall outward. Because our will is burdened with weight of consciousness (the knowledge of good and evil) we become slaves to that consciousness. How exactly we become slaves is not something I understand. I can only see the results in my life to know that it's happening. It may be that since we understand that evil exists and we inherently fear being destroyed by it, we develop means to protect the ego. Ironically, in doing so, we bind ourselves to that process indefinitely. We become slaves to production center of the K-bomb.

So, how do we get free from banging on the ironworks of the K-bomb? The species of man had to be set free from this. We were all bound to the bomb. No one had the key. It had to be an outside intervention. I point to the love of God in Jesus Christ. It is through Jesus on the cross that the bomb is diffused.

## **What Does “Hope Springs Eternal” Mean?**

Let's suppose that it is true that what we dwell upon inside our minds and hearts does affect reality. Could this be the fundamental force that causes life and death?

We are taught that things grow because they take in the necessary chemistry for growth and things die due to various reasons, one being old age. But let's dig deeper. I'm looking for a universal reason for life and death.

What's your general vision for your life? Can you remember back to the life-vision you had when you were a child? That's certainly a difficult task for most of us, and in fact, it might not be possible based

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on our personal pattern of brain development and also due to our current state-of-mind. But I expect that many children have a general awareness of life and growth that drives them into adulthood. Of course, I'm generalizing. There are certainly children that die young who have had a deep sense of life and growth and there are elderly people that have a general sense of life and living that is held to their grave. These exceptions only emphasize what I'm trying to say.

Yes, in biological terms living might equal a beating heart and death might equal no pulse. However, when I talk about life, I'm speaking of a vigor and vitality, a *sense* of life and growth. Regarding death, I'm talking about a sense of futility and purposelessness as being the driving force that points us toward a death more real than a flatline. These are mindsets and states of awareness common to us all.

Since I'm beginning to feel that a person's central awareness is a fundamental force that drives a person's actions and life, it seems to follow that this force is what drives a person toward life or toward death. This force drives us onward in our existence. There have certainly been times in my life, as I look back, that I seemed more zombified than a living person. My internal awareness was futility and despair rather than embracing the true joy God.

Since I don't particularly believe that 'no-pulse' equals death, this force drives us through life and also beyond the grave. This force is generally a mindset of our present perception of existence. What is your present mindset? Where will it take you?

This is why hope is so essential. Hope is the mindset of the living. Life is eternal, otherwise it wouldn't be called life, would it? Life cannot die, can it? The opposite mindset is the mindset of death.

Many have been on their deathbeds and have been in the mindset of life. And there is where they truly discovered what hope springs

eternal meant. We can do the same without being on our deathbed. And there we find vitality, joy, truth and love. But this path, the path of hope, was only opened for us through Christ, because without him, we live in the mindset of death.

The mindset of life doesn't fit all that well with any of the worldly traditions. Does *life* feel at home with the conservatives? Does *life* feel comfy with the liberals?

I certainly don't feel at home in any of those circles. I feel the best fit with the misfits and children out there. I also feel at home in the wilderness, but even there I know it's not my true home either. I feel a familiarity which is akin to home with my family, but there too, like the wilderness, it is a fleeting home, rarely so comfortable that I'm at peace. I suppose one of the places that I feel most at home is closing my eyes and singing the gospels and the Psalms with other Christians, but that only happens regularly once a week. Again, like family and wilderness, it's fleeting.

I will venture to guess that mental depression in all its forms is simply a manifestation of homesickness. We're homesick for life with our Creator. And if we're not in some state of feeling homesick, we should ask why we're not. Have hope, we will—*we must*—get home. There is no other option.

It is in the mindset of life that we will encounter life and he is person named Jesus. Home is where the heart is and my heart is with Jesus.

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.  
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Traditional Irish Hymn

## “We Go Home!”

I took a nap this afternoon and woke up after having a profound dream. It was short but simple. I felt no lingering, tingling nostalgia afterward. It wasn't that sort of dream. I was more awake and alive than ever. The dream seems deeply prophetic of a time to come—a time when our joy will be complete.

The factory in which we were working had a deep, stuffy, closed-off and gray feeling. I was with just a few people. In particular, there was one older man and a boy who was wearing glasses, both of whom I didn't really know. I'm not sure why we were in this building together, but we all had been working for a long, long time in some sort of industrial setting. We were captives.

All of a sudden it became obvious to all of us, because of some unknown profound event that we had been liberated and set free, not just the few of us but an enormous number of people. There was no questioning the certain fact that we were slaves no more.

The old man had the same thought as me. He spoke first and asked, “What do we do now?”

And the boy answered quickly in great jubilation, “We go home!”

And through the power of those words, song broke forth into the dream instantly in a perfect, bright rendition of Copeland's *Hoe-down*. The boy led the way outside into the bright day, where the multitudes were skipping and marching along toward our hope—our great joy. The power of the dream pulled me into consciousness. I awoke happy.

My room was quiet, but my heart was still singing. The song danced in my head. I knew the tune, but I couldn't figure out what the song was until I found my wife and hummed it to her. She got Copeland

right, but I had to search through his music online until I figured out which piece it was. And interestingly enough, the song was composed by Copeland from an old Irish tune brought to Appalachia called *Bonaparte's Retreat*. How happy Europe must have been when that war was over.

I do wonder if John of Patmos knows that song as well. Is he humming it for us? With John and all the saints, we say, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Come. He is our only hope.

But whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ.

Philippians 3: 7,12