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The Four Hearts

By Gregg Tyler Milligan

Along with the poem: *These Chains*

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### These Chains

I was born into bondage, not like that of the slave, but that of abuse. There I spent my childhood and youth – long into adolescence wrapped in chains of physical, emotional, and mental torment. From my natural surroundings and the lives of the people around me, I drew the impressions that would later become rage, addictions, and the inspiration of my soul.

It was then I had faith. From the window of my heart I could see Mt. Zion and longed to climb its jagged gray face in hopes of reaching the peak of salvation. The dark forest of pain I traveled would then be worth the wait. How could I have known that what lay before this mountain of mercy was razor-like limestone that cut deep into my emotions long before I noticed. Until that moment of recognition, the effects of abuse had brought with them an obsessiveness that sometimes appeared casual, at times exciting and erotic, but never peaceful. Each time I tipped the bottle to my mouth, ingested a large quantity of drugs, or lost myself in a frenzy of promiscuity or pornography, I was farther away from salvation and closer to needing mercy.

Throughout the years my addictions have taken on many forms, like a succession of massive buildings far off in the distance, changing shape and color before my eyes. At times, the cravings are small and all I need to do is look away. Then there are those that force me to stare into the sun, blasting shadows against crumbling brick – in the distance a snowy peak of momentary joy awaits. It is here, yet again, I lose myself during a night of compulsion only to emerge with the overwhelming weight of guilt. The silence within is only occasionally broken by a half-hearted plea for understanding, and the words – “forgive me Father for I have sinned.” There is never a reply and the quiet crushes me, making it hard to breathe.

Like now and when I were a child, I am isolated. The few visitors to my world usually arrive uninvited and those with an invitation are never allowed to dwell for very long. My life is either monotony or over stimulation, never an easy middle ground. I am always interrupted with anxiety, worsened by traditional demands or popular holidays. As a boy, the songs and dances of Christmas held a special place within my heart – now that feeling is gone and in its place is skepticism.

Each and every moment I am at war with the memories of insidious maltreatment and the fear that I am losing. At best, my view of life has developed into something uniquely innocuous – the direct result of so much pain. Although I daydream about saving the world along with myself in the process, I sometimes feel it isn't possible to do one without the other, which makes it even more impossible. This is such a primitive world, one where we continue to stand by while so many suffer and suffer while so many simply stand by. Within our culture, it is not even considered shameful to be a bandit, and I wonder if it has always been this way.

For what I have endured and survived, I have paid nothing in return of the favor. I practice a rudimentary skill for which I am paid, but make no contribution to the preservation of my soul or yours. I am wrong in this and the mighty current of remorse has carried me away. I need to fight with the honor of a brave soldier for what is right, but there are still so many illusions. I have become too angry for all the wrong reasons. Addiction has stolen my strength and tarnished my purity – if I were ever pure in the first place. I admit before you, if only on paper, that I have lost my way. And yet, how can one lose their way if they'd never had a direction in which to travel? But I did and it now seems so long ago.

Some days I go about the business of war against the demons left for me to best, hatched long ago in darkened caves of physical torture and molestation. I don't understand this war, but still need to fight. I commit acts of vengeance and counterattacks against myself, not to do evil, but only to hide somehow my shame and strength. I don't enjoy the sympathy of people, therefore I ask for no assistance. It is my prison, though originally built by other hands. When I am finally freed I ask that you not weep, for there is no stigma attached to me. I am no hero or brave man, but if I reach the summit of the mountain that has escaped my grasp in this life, I hope to be revered as one. In that hour your words will matter not, because I will be in a long peaceful sleep with the whisper of time no longer a concern.

There are so many sins upon my soul that I am afraid to even pray for clemency. I still seek to destroy my captives both living and dead. The vendetta remains the custom in my pitiful kingdom and the only respect I can muster is if I am able to wipe away the blood left from the murder of my innocence. Indeed, it must be considered a crime in

Heaven and tribute in Hell to be an avenger. I have been betrayed and this offense will not go unpunished, even if the reward is three times less the size of the pain with which I am now burdened. If law reigns in a better place than this earth then I say a man should be respected for his strength and be scornful of society's injustice.

I go on as if to lay blame with another, but forgive me for I have slipped again. I blame not those who influenced my decadence. I am a man and must accept responsibility for my actions regardless of their beginnings. To stand or kneel for what I feel is a stone dropped squarely on my back leaves me with a savagely beautiful feeling, but this does not last long. I am always surrounded by the unnatural setting of people who possess a certain primitive hatred for truth. When they have good hearts, they try to listen and always weep when I tell a tale of sexual and physical misconduct done unto me. I don't blame them, but my stories are always tapered and so much information left out. The tears build behind the thin membrane of my eyes and I am embarrassed. It is best to let sleeping dogs lie. Perhaps that is why I write in a way that tells the truth, but only indirectly, or perhaps I am not only sparing the reader's heart but mine as well.

Oh, but this is not my world and never will be. Mine is a simple home that has sort of a biblical chastity about it. Within it, I would be alone but never lonely. I would not feel compelled to look away in order to avoid someone catching a glimpse of my eyes and possibly knowing what I was thinking. I could then lay my head against my forearm and cry without another's compassion or confusion. It would then be only me and God – the way it was after each horrible incidence. On occasion, I would feel His hand upon the nape of my neck while my knees were pressed against my small chest and my arms wrapped protectively around them. He never spoke, wept, or stared. It was how He looked away and within me at the same time that soothed my soul and allowed the recent events to drift into oblivion as if they never happened. I am no longer a child and have since put away childish things. Without them, I have forgotten the face of my Father and the touch of His hand.

There is one advantage that comes at a very high price – wisdom. This immeasurable gift was given to me by my oppressors. My education, then, was extensive. I am thoroughly acquainted with and suffer for the many lessons. I want to give them back or lose them altogether. The aspiration of the latter has developed into many paths. I have

learned how to make music with voice and hands and have delighted some with folk songs, hymns, ballads, and every now and then, a lullaby. I have studied hard and worked even harder resulting in professional triumph, which makes me smile, thinking about my humble beginnings compared to now. It has its rewards of monetary gain and symbols of success made of wood, metal, and paper. No matter, I am still haunted and find the ghosts of my past are more alive than me.

I have taken a great liking to scripting my emotions, but my fondness may never equal my ability to arrange the words. It is in my humble opinion that my love for writing shall be greater than the skill in which to do so. It was my wish that I scribe a whimsical but tragic story about my life. It seems ridiculous that anyone would care to read yet another story of abating hope and victory lasting only a moment. We shall see.

I wonder if what I have already written has the strong consistency that might be desired. When I read over the words there seems to be too many unexpected passages, which may give the impression of hasty transitions. If so, it is because I am hurried as I often am when speaking from the heart. It is my intention to get it down as fast as possible before I change my mind and turn to a more unhealthy alternative. There are and have been so many of these to choose – passed on by an endless lineage of tutors. I further yearn to proclaim my defects are more than generously compensated for by my many virtues, but I dare not add to an already growing surplus of lies.

As I inch along this life I hope to make a great contribution to mankind – a discovery of sorts that began over two-thousand years ago – reminding people we are not forsaken. But first, I need to discover this for myself. My progress gives no cause for worry because I am preceded by much greater representatives of faith than I. So my duties are divided between the work of earthly responsibilities and the toil of my past.

I continue to deal with the subject of pain only the abused can understand. In waking and sleep I see the villains touching me where they should have never ventured and clawing at my skin, removing its epidermal layers as if they were only powder. These thoughts have roots like the redwood and grow as ivy – once only a green stem with featherlike leaves, yet with a second glance it is a twisted mass of tangled foliage

choking out life as it clings. From far away, I have always thought ivy looked majestic and beautiful, but from within the place it madly grows, it has always felt like a tomb.

Although these things I write appear to bear my heart, I still run from the dragon that stalks me. The words I pen help. Although I am ashamed to admit the depravity to which I sometimes subject myself, with writing there is no guilt or shame afterwards. The decadence is an escape that becomes more brief each time, though if I am to be honest, my addictions have always been a short trip leading to nowhere. Like the slaves that fled Egypt – only to trade one desert for another.

The cruelty has changed me. My conception of man and nature is fundamentally merciless in character. However, as an adult I am now emotionally more mature and I remain the same guarded individual burying my true feelings in hallowed ground. It is rather difficult for me to judge the merits of mankind when I am not worthy. Instead, I shall rely on the weight of my actions as a substitute.

I wish to say that what I write now is one of those actions. It is my desire to describe, with vigor and the power of craftsmanship that I am burdened with, the memory of yesterday. I have yet to find what relevance this has to the structure or betterment of the world but perhaps you will know. I can tell you it all started with La Madre [the mother], but not why.

I am growing both tired and restless and will not be able to write much longer – maybe I will find the strength later. As my fingers click the keys the memories are coming back too quickly for me to fend off without much effort. But, I do not want to leave you with a feeling of desperation. I have suffered as an abused child and adolescent, but my spirit is not weak – it grows stronger. Until only a few years ago, I could not speak about those terrible things let alone write them down. I am becoming a painter of nature regardless of compulsions less satisfactory for a better man. This is a great improvement. I do not uselessly waste my vivid colors when depicting a fresh mural of reliance. The nature in which I describe has the simple, broad lines of ancient landscapes, as it has their chaste purity and majesty. It is a lively nature in perfect harmony with God and mankind. It is a representation of my sentiments and spiritual awakening. It is a pilgrim's sojourn home.

Yes, I have sinned and still cling to the rage and dissolution taken from those who beat and raped me. This will last a lifetime. But I am slowly departing from the old ways and ascending toward a healthier path, sometimes on a speedy horse and other times crawling on worn and tender knees. Unfortunately, the provisions I take with me on this journey must be acquired along the way. At times, I miss these necessary attributes of knowledge and wisdom and sometimes I overlook them on purpose. The faith I speak of often appears to be a greater shelter for those not suffering. Again I admit that I am a descendant of my founders and they have passed on a profligacy I wield as a spike – often thrusting it deep within my own heart. The hope that I am one of many from a single unity, which surpasses the tie to my abusers, helps a little. However, my heart's shutters are closed – unable to believe this all the time, extinguishing my fire of trust in a Heavenly Kingdom.

What perspective will I take today in order to see my way past the drudgery of duty? Perhaps telling myself that all people are plants, germinating in the soil of this earth planted by God. If so, then we are all peasants with primitive sensibilities and modes of thought, but something within all of us is of a grand and glorious stature with its origins in a monumental being of love and kindness. Or perhaps we are just theatrical puppets, fusing realism with idealism. I will not believe this. Look how different we are in terms of good and evil. If we had strings there would not be the impression of being incontestably real. It is this real goodness I strive for.

I do not belong here. After what was done to me, I will never feel I am part of this earth. In order to compensate for pain, I have always kept myself far removed from the battles of the day, but I am continuously drawn into the fight. I belong to the past, but I am trying to respond to my own time. To give back, if you will, a better part of me so perhaps you may cope with the transgression of abuse and neglect – so you will not take your life as I have often pondered. What I write now is another attempt to slow life down long enough for you and I to understand why we are here and to simply catch our breath.

I was born not only into bondage but in the belly of a lonely woman from the seed of an angry man. Thrust into the midst of the world's uproar I was to find my destiny. Even

today I say it should have been different. I should not have always been what I am – a child, then a man, becoming impassioned about memories of beatings while calling for God in silence. However, all along I believed my oppressors could have been better than this and no one but themselves prevented them from achieving God's reign on earth. Everything was and still is hatred, blood, and pain; but, perhaps, everything will be conquered one day by means of love and good will. These last words reflect my answer to life and a vision I am trying to pass on to you. It is a serious and profound vision with a faithful cast. It is frequently sad, but never pessimistic. I believe that forces of good will ultimately triumph in the struggle of life. Until then, I am ruined.

Right now I wish to share with you a single memory that has come to mind while writing. It is about my mother. I remember she wore a turquoise broach that always appeared much too large for her frail and emaciated features. As a child I thought this was a magical amulet so one day I examined it while my mother slept. I was delighted to find it had a clasp and immediately opened it. My heart broke to see it contained only dust. When I think about this now it strikes me as being somewhat profound. Yes, all that was there had been ashes. My mother had destroyed her life and was an obstacle to her children's happiness. She had taken her own life by slowly drinking herself to death. What lie in the broach was a clear representation of her life – nothing more than a few granules of sand. I quickly closed the broach and went to the room in which my mother now slept. As I quietly watched from the foot of the bed, her thin breast moving up and down, I thought I stood before the body of the most miserable of human creatures – whom I could not stop loving even for an instant – in spite of so much physical and emotional pain. I also knew within my heart that I would have died for her. I often wonder years later why among those ashes there did not lurk the spark of a luminous and purifying flame. And I often wonder why I still love her.

I pray that all these words will form a road that leads to a place of depth and sympathy to deal with our past and human problems in general. I will never tire of listening to the legends of the brave knight who tames the dragon and spares its life. All of life's mysteries, conflicts, and anxieties lead me to an eternal longing for salvation. This bondage I speak of is mine, but I wish to reduce my sentence by offering you an open hand of hope. Not to do so would be a crime against truth and art. I have come to know the human heart and its problems are everywhere the same. No matter how we suffer –

we do endure evils brought upon by others and ourselves. So, I will continue to write of my past and hope for the future. I will remember that basic human nature and all its vicissitudes are painted in the most brilliant colors and, more important, we are here to unveil our hearts to one another.

I will not limit myself to the addictions in order to forget, the words in order to write, but to speak my mind and touch the sleeve of your shirt if only you would allow me. In doing so, I will reveal the struggle of the abused and man's worst, leading to the high density of our spirit. I will not pass you without noticing – for you and me the road leads to God. For this reason, I believe in rebirth and new beginnings in spite of the degradation forced upon me, which I have practiced in moments and hours of weakness. I know we are frail, but it is possible to reclaim the land so it becomes fertile.

The last of my contributions will be made only after I take my final breath. I am hopeful there will be a bright ray gleaming all around me and through the darkness and human misery will shine the solace of what will become my eternal light. Upon reaching the source of this light I shall make three final offerings that will be laid at the feet of my Father – a well used and tattered soul, reverence for only one God, and these chains.

## Preface

At this age, I have thrown myself into the idealistic struggle of learning all I can about God. It has been some years and upon reflection, it is apparent that something very powerful has carried me through the harsh rain of life. I believe this is the spirit of God, which I first called upon many years ago and many times over since. It is He that has graced me with the sunny days and I hope there are many more to come.

I have not yet reached the age that I consider the prime of my life and I still have much to learn. I continue to wage war against the decadence of society as well as my own corruption. As of yet, I am not consumed by materialism or the power of money, but I must keep vigilant to avoid these paltry things.

I am by no means a scholar or theologian, simply a layman trying to offer a new perspective on our struggles as humans under the watchful eye of a divine presence. I sincerely hope to avoid casting my literary image against a background of lofty nobility or sentimental hogwash. If I do, please be kind.

There is an enormous pressure placed on all of us these days through which we must strive to sustain. This toil shreds the veil of our existence and I do not believe we are strong enough to bear it alone. It is this belief and many others that inspired these writings.

As the great drama of life continues to unfold and we become focused on achieving the trivial destinies of inconsequential desires, I want this book to speak of a faith that is lost and found within a series of pains and joys. I want to propose a pursuit

toward a more tolerant and compassionate consciousness. I also want to touch upon the difficult matter of sin. It is my belief that the battle between good and evil still hangs over the earth, clouds the hearts, and steals the souls of many people. All-consuming, sinister spirits threaten our world and it is difficult to identify those evil people.

For our times, faith is infinitely necessary and we desperately need a reformation of humanism. We mustn't forget the debt we owe for an immeasurable sacrifice made over two thousand years ago. Throughout our physical lives, God gives us an abundance of gifts in addition to the absolute quintessential bequest of everlasting life.

Some will write off what I say as pure mysticism. It is the new millennium and many consider an unseen spirit a fantasy. However, to this I say, you do not have to believe in God to admit the bible is a magnificent and useful book. If you find my ideologies obtuse, then perhaps you can use them simply as a source for intellectual exchange. Eventually, you may feel there is a bit of truth in what I write and find there exists a lineage of mankind tracing back to God the Father.

I am hopeful for all of us and believe, although we rise slowly, we still rise, and in doing so, come to realize the brilliant sharpness of our souls. Each passing moment is another chance at refinement and under the creative genius of God, we will entice our compassionate hearts.

It is difficult to express the deep feelings I wish to write down, but I desire to help strengthen the faith that unites all people to a mutual understanding.

Before I began the journey toward greater understanding, I thought it would only prove disastrous to dig deeper into those guarded places in the very recesses of my mind.

I would no longer enjoy the comforts of my ignorance. However, I became bored to merely eat, sleep, and trudge along the common path of existence.

I was not so blind to the fact there were so many others like me. They were content, but not happy. The pursuit of happiness through materialism only offered bitter failure. We knew our rights, and this quest was only one of them. It was the intent of our forefathers to provide a guide to happiness, not a guarantee. Intentions have destroyed many things; this is only one of them.

No matter. With distress, I found that before I had made a decision, the journey had already begun. If I discover how to control my spirit, I will no longer be of this earth. I will join the dead and, hopefully, be reborn. It is about this new life I eagerly read and write. This new heart will overcome the fears of life after the anxieties of death have fallen away. A quarter heart, which now beats within my chest, will one day merge with its awaited trio; The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. We will be together again, as we were before I took my first breath of oxygen. My stay on earth will end and I will rejoice in the new beginning I refer to as The Four Hearts.

Bring on the rivers of my past as they etch and tear at the banks of the years and cut deep grooves into a perpetual learning. Shallow in places and deep in others are my waters, which flow toward a greater ocean. I will not become lost in this vast sea, but meld within a bigger union of rivers, lakes, and streams. Although these waters may be weak and nearly dry by the time they reach this ocean, it matters not. Once there, all called by the same name, the rivers grow powerful again. Aren't we all like a river? Do we not twist and turn throughout this land, struggling to attain a foothold where so many are lost? Distrust, power, and greed cloud our waters, destroying the inhabitants within

the current and those that once grew along our banks. But what of the human rivers that only live to nourish others, defending themselves against the minion of pollutants that would otherwise taint the clear water? These are the rivers that make it to the ocean. These are the waters baptized in the belief there is a sea that welcomes all who struggle. I am one of such rivers of faith who belong to an ocean of hope.

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## **Chapter 1**

When I decided to choose the path of higher consciousness, my spirit received much attention. Up to that point, I spent my entire life pursuing a quick fix of peace whenever and wherever I could find it. For quite some time my very aim in life was to seek solitude. This attitude certainly did not make me an advocate of peace or goodwill. Instead, my quest for personal peace alienated me from others and myself.

I try not to blame myself for these desires. The world is difficult and I seek shelter from its misery. As I mature, however, I will argue that hiding from mankind has no reward. Civilization cannot bloom without the participation of caring people. Our delicate tapestries interweave with one another. We are linked and it is therefore necessary that we value each other as we value ourselves.

In order to receive the peace I seek, I must extend myself to you. I must surpass the common belief that material value has more worth than human kindness. It will then be possible to contribute to the multicultural bouquet of all living creatures. If I can anchor my beliefs on the foundation of God's love for all of us, my faith will flourish today as well as tomorrow.

Although I am grateful for the opportunity to grow spiritually, extending myself to others and putting my faith in God has resulted in many trying experiences, both physical and emotional.

It is difficult to deepen my faith because God is an inclusive term. To show faith in God, we must not only believe that God exists, but we must also love each other.

“Love thy neighbor”<sup>1</sup> refers to all people, not just the ones you care for most. The result can and will be painful.

Offering love toward God rarely result in feeling tangible love in return. How often do you truly feel a divine presence in your life or an actual hug from the Almighty? Offering love toward each other is even more risky. By our nature, we are a very guarded breed. As it is, the light of love rarely makes it into our hearts. Typically, the effort to love anyone is compounded by the problem that they or we do not feel worthy of love.

Throw in the fact that nothing seems to hold any spiritual value these days, alongside our copious amounts of money and materialism, and it is easy to see that this is a truly difficult world.

Still, I do not feel we are doomed – quite the opposite. There is still a huge spiritual culture, and regardless of our increasing consumptive nature, we are a grand creation with spiritual hope. It simply is a matter of choosing God as the genesis of our salvation. From this choice, we can then begin to formulate our divine spiritual package, which includes the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I submit one other piece to this puzzle: oneself. I refer to this collective heavenly quartet as the Four Hearts.

There are numerous excellent reasons for the belief that these hearts must beat to the same rhythm of faith and understanding. Many different people and organizations have scrupulously examined the doctrine of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but its power has never withered. When we add our individual consciousness to the wondrous power of the Trinity, we will know a spiritual glory beyond all comprehension.

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 19:18

For the whole of mankind, faith in God is a choice. Regardless of culture or reputation, we all have the same spiritual opportunity. In the matter of God, we are all literally created equal. And as equals, we all have the same chance for attaining the Kingdom of Heaven. I am not speaking from the viewpoint of a poet or philosopher; I dare not call myself either. But, I can speak from the perspective of a human being who has seen the face of evil – at times in his own reflection – and yet emerged stronger and more compassionate. These qualities would not be apparent if it weren't for the true goodness that creates the foundation of my soul. With this, I say we are all of the same groundwork, primarily turned toward a greater meaning, reflecting the hope of the world surrounding us. Of course, some of us take longer to realize this than others.

At a higher level of consciousness, I am rarely concerned with images or exterior situations. I have developed a more introverted nature, sensitive and aware of how I fit into the web of creation. The delicate link between each of us is principally the extent in which we begin to serve as mirrors of God's image. Our heart, or soul if you wish, is then working in tandem with the other three divine characters, which make up our whole being. God, The Father of all creation, The Son, God or Jesus who came to save the world and died for our sins, and The Holy Ghost, which is the light of God that lives in all of us. I believe the sum of all four hearts is simply love. This love is a spirit that also meshes our doubts, sorrows, and a deeply imbedded faith in God. God asks that we give Him our whole being, not just our best attributes. How can He work with just a portion of the puzzle? I believe God's usual subjects, those that capture His interest, are those of us who struggle with faith. Like a good parent, God is patient with the child who has the most difficulty with issues of the soul. Of course, He does not forget the righteous, but

understands the unrighteous have a greater need of salvation. Written in the scriptures, Jesus said, “I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, God is not finished sculpting our intangible beauty.

We suffer while making our way through a most difficult world, filled with danger and chaos. However, this world is also abundant with human kindness, appearing in the exuberant colors of all races and creeds. I know that my words now may seem useless if you suffer. We are part of a creation best suited to express ignoble feelings and ideas, so we often turn toward sadness. Yet, I too suffer and find that even more reason to believe in God’s gift of salvation and His amazing gift of eternal life. I wish to join a new crusade that believes we are profoundly thoughtful – our souls revealing themselves as a rainbow after the rain – beautifully colored, tender, and inspiring to all who look upon it. I hope our petty advantages over one another and our skills of manipulation become less enticing. We are so much more than that, full of splendid feelings and dignity. There lies waiting an extremely rare union of subtle reflection within our hearts. Rich in hope are the thoughts we hide beneath thick outer layers of pain.

It is necessary to emphasize one characteristic encompassing the alliance I refer to as the four hearts. Once we chose a path to foster this unification, we will expose an inquiring and remarkable mind that will not accept feelings of divine abandonment or failure. You can reach a level of consciousness in which it seems impossible to know more. Here, I truly believe, you will find evidence of mankind’s mystical destiny and that you are an important part of it. We all have an undeniable responsibility to help one

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<sup>2</sup> John 12:47

another reach this true spirit of existence. Acting in the light of God's message to the human race, we have the glorious honor of saving one another.

Before we can save one another, we must first understand one another. Due to the vast differences from one person to the next, this extremely difficult task takes a lot of patience. We first have to believe that each of us possesses value. This is a competitive world and we are often confused when it comes to recognizing the worth of another human life and establishing our own. We live in a "one up" society where if we give up our place in line it would be as if to say "you are better than me." However, we cannot all be first nor last. There is a place for all of us no matter how many people inhabit this earth. God says, "many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first."<sup>3</sup> We can give up our inconsequential place in line and still be great in the eyes of God – maybe greater. Isn't impressing God more important than impressing our fellow man? Our ability to share this earth is essential to peace. Where there are established boundaries they eventually lead to war.

Another name for understanding is compassion. God calls all of us to this duty, not just the philosophers or religious leaders. As such, we must provide for the betterment of mankind by nurturing our spiritual excellence and placing the highest value on human life. We do not usually try to comprehend another's feelings or faith unless they agree with our own. This results in a lack of understanding and forms the basis of fear. It is true that we are afraid of what we do not understand.

Take the concept of religion for example. It is so often misunderstood that people are willing to commit murder in order to prove their religion is the only 'true' religion. I

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 19:30

do not see how this makes sense. The most celebrated religious leader in history was Jesus Christ. Never did He choose murder as a way to convert a non-believer to Christianity. Nor did He wage a religious war against those who did not share his ideology. Instead, His crusade was peaceful. He came to us as a servant, not only for God but also for man, humble and lacking wealth or political power. Jesus was full of compassion. We were in desperate need of understanding and that is exactly what He gave. In return, He took nothing – except our sin.

It is difficult to understand each other for many reasons. Religious beliefs only complicate this effort. We view those who disagree with our deep-rooted spiritual beliefs as challenging. Somewhere along the way, we choose prejudice, hate, and violence as the methods of promoting our ‘supreme’ form of religion. Again, this does not make any sense. Jesus asked that we love thy neighbor, not harm them emotionally or physically if they don’t agree with us. With so many religious orders, how can we determine which one is the best? The answer is the religious order that accepts all people, no matter their race, color, or creed – the religious order that places God above all things. To do this we must labor to reach a higher level of understanding. Despite the numerous exploitations of scripture for profit and influence, the teachings of Jesus still shine through for those who truly seek peace. If you embark upon this difficult journey of human compassion, God promises a lasting achievement.

I speak of the difficult task of accepting one another, but I wish to make the following admonition. There are those who have turned and will continue to turn from God’s grace. These prejudiced and critical people are evil. Do not accept or tolerate them. If you know them, stay as far away as possible. Do not let them stain your light of

faith and wisdom. For these people, it is too late. The bible says, “there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”<sup>4</sup>

When I refer to extending human compassion, I am talking about those of us who reach for the hand of God. We must help these people, and in doing so, we help ourselves. Lend yourself to your brethren who struggle to rely on God’s Word and you will be a veritable hero to us all.

I admit freely that the work of helping others is a monumental task. It will induce painful rejection in one form or another. Many do not want help, or above all salvation. “For many are called, but few are chosen.”<sup>5</sup> God beckons us to Him, but few want to go. The thorny patch of learning and the sacrifice involved certainly isn’t appealing. However, the reward is infinite peace and love. For this end, I say it is worth the risk.

Where do we begin? First, assess your own heart and determine the work that lay ahead. Start by being patient with yourself. Understand that, like God, you have many faces. Of course, we are not perfect, but believe in God’s promise that He will never forsake you. In doing this, you will start to build a foundation of trust that God will help you along the way. Whisper to Him, “I’m coming home,” and He will hear you. Once you’ve learned compassion for yourself, then branch outward to others. God will transform your journey – filling it with empathetic presentations to the world. Your judgment will become more acute and non-discriminatory, but you will know how to separate the wheat from the chaff. Before long, you will give back to mankind – life itself.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 8:12

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 22:14

There is a concreteness to what I say – a firmness that society cannot shake. The decision to give the highest praise to God alone will make all other options unambiguous. I have come to know that with God as the nucleus of any route, whether by human intuitive imagination or careful investigation of the facts, He will turn our spirits into a living picture of creative valor. Recognizing this power within each one of us will bridge the gap between misunderstanding and wisdom.

Open your mind and heart to the possibilities of eternal life – a soul that can live forever. Remember, faith is the mother of hope. Indeed, in a world where seeing is believing, this is difficult. However, detached objectivity is reminiscent of God's calm greatness, and we would do right at least by trying to believe in Him.

Difficult situations can easily sway our character, but this does not mean we cannot achieve faith. We will never boast the obedience of Son to Father. But God does not expect this of us. There was only one Jesus. The faith I write of does not take extraordinary skill. I can attest to that personally. However, it does take spiritual growth, which means abandoning the old and stubbornly held belief that we are not worthy. Only God can write the names in the book of life, but who is to say your name does not already exist? We all have a purpose. For some that may be to serve their fellow man honorably. For others, there may be different callings. Regardless, under the sovereignty of God, a fundamental belief in the future of mankind must begin by acting in the preservation of peace and the origin of compassion.

With every situation involving another living creature, we must ask ourselves, will this cause hardship? Are my intentions honorable? The reward for an uncompromising eye is always false grandeur. Our needs must be practical so we can

offer to others the necessary freedom to live comfortably. It is an illusion to believe we must conquer in order to gain freedom. Peace at any price is war.

If this book ever makes it to print, some will criticize and say I am carried away by passive judgment. They will assert that occasionally we must pay for freedom with blood to preserve the very essence of free will. I do not dispute this claim as a last resort. But, all too often we reach this decision long before it is necessary, and for the most trivial of reasons. Revolutions are often nearsighted. By the time the last brave soldier dies in battle, the captains have long since lost sight of the goal.

I am not an advocate of always turning the other cheek, nor do I glorify brute power. Instead, I believe we must aim to achieve that power that serves the goals of all people, not one sect or country, as peacefully and practically as possible. It is still one world.

I hope to add a fresh note to the pursuit of higher consciousness. All too often, we overlook the ethical powers of man. It certainly would be nice to watch the evening news and hear of how the small efforts of one human improved the life of another. It would greatly contrast the usual display of individual malice. I know there is good in the world. God did not build His creation on sand. He forged it from His perfect love and tied us together with a common righteousness.

The evil in the world is a powerful spirit. There are those who consistently choose the path of least resistance and fall from grace. They live their lives condemning all that is good, intending to force others into a pitiless vortex of pain and suffering. I have no compassion for these people and ask God for the moral energy to cope with

them. At times, this is a prayer of vengeance and it is then shame ravages my soul. Still, it is an indignity I can live with.

I hope I've shed some light on the unity shared through God's existence in all of us. When we come to realize that with God, anything is possible, we are plunged into an abyss of incomparable potential for genuine virtue. We then become sharp and clear outlines drawn by the Master's hand.

Be not too harsh with yourself, we are young soldiers in the fight for salvation. I pray you find within yourself an astonishing combination of qualities and learn to be a fine representative of God's creation.

There is a boundless ocean of love just waiting for you. This is still safe ground in which we tread. God has not sent The Son to judge the world – not yet. He waits patiently for us to call His name and find the true nature of our existence. There is great work before you.

I truly believe, in the light of God's love, we possess the soft beauty of limestone and are as perennial as the soul.

## **Chapter 2**

We have an opportunity to help ourselves and each other reach a higher level of spiritual enlightenment – not by force, but through understanding. We must focus on gifts of compassion – from one person to another and one nation to another.

I do realize it has been, and will continue to be, a long struggle for people to gain an equal place within this world. Often, we fight this bitter struggle to the death. However, we can change the course of mankind using less destructive means, which will lead to a more serene and united end. Let me now take this opportunity to express my views on an alternative role of human existence.

While evolution continues to progress along, our paths are seldom straight. However, we are pushing forth nonetheless. Initially, primitive instincts propel men and women onward. Eventually, we become more cognizant of our surroundings and develop a higher level of consciousness. Hardship usually delivers this increased understanding. Pain can beget wisdom, whether you are looking for it or not. It is a matter of choice – do you want to learn from experience? If you decline, you will undoubtedly repeat the same mistakes.

Some learn quickly and convert what was once pain into greater understanding. Before this can happen, it is critical to accept responsibility for our actions. Too many of us live in a “gray area” between right and wrong. It is a no man’s land, inhibiting the ability to make clear decisions and leaving us to blame others for our mistakes.

Only after we accept our faults and forgive ourselves, will it become possible to forge ahead. The gift of forgiveness is greater in some of us. For those blessed few, they can see far ahead to the new paths where humans can grow mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

While forming our consciousness, we begin to learn that both good and evil exist and are equally powerful. With regard to good and evil in this world, how can anyone feel at ease?

It has also become more difficult to know what is truly good or evil. The information we are given seems to do more than confuse rather than explain. Adding to the perplexity is the human ability to justify anything and everything. Why are we so willing to set aside our sense of good and evil before approaching any given situation? Is it because we are afraid we may find the truth to be more painful than the lies? Are we afraid to find that we are the one who is evil? We are so quick to judge one another and say, “He is wrong,” or “she is obviously guilty.” The effect of this quick judgment turns our hearts and minds into cameras with the lens cap still on. Before we make a decision, it would be wise to assess the situation with an open mind – to be indifferent to prejudice and the associated ugliness. First, try to find the beauty within yourself or another human being before casting a stone.

Consider our primitive consciousness. There is no doubt we have evolved. Much of our progress has been for the better. We certainly do not burn witches at the stake any longer or believe drilling holes in our heads will release the evil spirits that make us ill. From our point of origin or creation up until now, a divine being has guided us. Each generation has its problems, however, the path toward greater glory has not ceased. It

may be your opinion that there is now more evil in this world, however, there is also an obvious presence of faith in God. Millions of people still pray and believe in His promise of everlasting life. For those of us who continue traveling a path of Christianity, is this purely a mechanical choice or something more robust, deeply imbedded within our souls? Do we pray and believe in God because that is how we were raised, or do we really feel something inside?

I know personally, there have been many instances in my life that support a most wonderful and invariably shocking truth – God does exist. It is important to note that for me God does not exist because I believe He does. I chose Him as my savior only after a great deal of deliberation and harsh understanding. In any case, I am not going to wait for an answer to know for sure. Instead, I will live my life as if God does exist and loves me more than anyone ever could.

What I write now is not a revolutionary idea with regard to faith and the existence of God. Handed down through the centuries is the belief that God created us from dust. I should quickly add that, regardless of the fact we choose to believe in God or not, it does not change whether we are moral or immoral. I know many people who believe there is a God, but still choose to live a life of iniquity. From time to time, I am one of those people.

However, the belief that God is within me guides me toward a better purpose. I begin by making simple decisions that draw on an example of Jesus rather than my personal wants and needs. I do not advocate crucifixion, although sacrificing one's safety for the sake of another may be necessary at times. To idly stand by, while another

person is suffering or in danger, is appalling. Put down the damn video camera and help me. I am suggesting that we should give instead of receive.

Countless examples in my past clearly demonstrate how extending myself to another has left me feeling warm. I encountered a spiritual freedom and a rebirth of new possibilities. Many doors seemed to open up and I was filled with a knowledge brilliant like sunshine. It was as if God Himself were speaking to me, letting me know I had made the right choice. Anytime I have given unto others, my gift has always come back to me in a variety of pleasing ways. At times, after giving freely to another, whether it was in the form of time, money, or love, I felt less trapped in a world where opportunities seem to be limited.

It appears that we live on a battlefield without a sense of justice. All we have left is our faith in God, life, and each other. Within our soul, we carry the infinite resource of spiritual assistance. Have you ever asked yourself, what is my purpose in life? Well, it is my opinion that our mission here is to simply trust in God. In doing so, He will give us all we need to save one another.

Humanity has a tremendous struggle on this earth. I live with this daily. For some, the sky will seem a softer blue and the air warmer. Life may be happier and more beautiful for these. Perhaps it is. But remember, in time all things pass and then they are gone. What then will you say when your days end? Will you say you did your best? Knowing you have not always trusted God's plan nor agreed with it, but you have always called His name? Let your perseverance provide a beacon along your weary way. From coast to coast, there will be choppy water, sharks, and the like. Yes, there are dangers that lie ahead. However, there are also grand moments that will pierce through and bring

happiness to many. Be true to what is right and just. This is honorable. Your spirit will weather the storm of many years of work, lit by a divine purpose. Press onward toward heaven and nothing will douse your soul's fire.

We will be lured with many charms and shiny things that pass for wealth and power. They will be pebbles compared to the mountain you will gain with human kindness and understanding. Put these characteristics first. Let prejudice and greed be warnings to a frightening path. Our courage to live on and, at times, live without will strengthen us – never weaken. I am afraid too, but we must not turn away from God. He is the foundation of good and all things fundamental. We will find our confidence with Him through the most tragic events. Although humans bathe the earth in a flood of pride and gluttony, God fills it with hope and love. Let your belief in yourself and mankind be the proof.

Regardless of my sins and the sins against me, there lies the conviction within me that life is a gift and God is good. We all have our shortcomings. These greater deficiencies sometimes mortally wound and kill others. There is no compensation for this on earth except through the grace of God.

The pain will be intolerable. Our instinct first tells us to take vengeance. This is natural; do not be ashamed. Yet, before you lash out, think of how wonderful you are. Know that you are so much better than that. I believe that if humans were not essentially good, we would have destroyed this world long ago. It is the dark aspects of life that make us stronger. Look past the horrors of this world and find the dewdrop gently resting upon the leaf. We are like that spec of water, fragile and easily blow from our resting place at times, but still so necessary for life. The leaf would die without the rain.

I tell you true that our soul is more than a sensation. It is real. Come with me on this procession toward celestial brilliance. Let us help one another promote all that is sound and noble.

## **Chapter 3**

When speaking of good and evil, some say that salvation is already predetermined. Those people believe that God has written your name in the Book of Life before you were born, when He first created the world. Hence, our fate is sealed. This is a flimsy belief to say the least. It is analogous to believing you have already lost before playing the game. We know as much about our fate as we do the mind of God. Let me assure you that you have all the tools within yourself to reach the stars. You are truly good. God is patient and the world is what you make of it.

Unlike many things in life, it is never too late to develop your conscience or soul. You need not worry about being in the prime of your life. How often does society give us countless opportunities to fail and try again? If you continuously show up late for work or steal from the cash register, are you given more chances to improve? No.

This is because businesses base their value system on money. Rightly so, a business will not be lucrative for long if it does not arrange its values and needs around making a profit. This value system benefits us by providing a steady income that allows us to live in a world where money is essential.

However, when we fail to follow the rules passed down by God, He does not fire us or forsake us. God continues to feed our souls (our spiritual heart) with the knowledge necessary to make the right choices. He also gives us strength to endure during times of trial and tribulation. The reason is simple. God is in the business of salvation and the

assets of this business are priceless. We are so precious to God that He will give us infinite chances up until our dying breath.

Life itself bears witness to the value we each hold in God's eyes. Look around you. Look at all the things we have to use and make our lives comfortable. All of God's creations meld within a harmonious pattern of necessity and importance. There is a microcosm of life within a microcosm within a microcosm. Over ninety-percent of the ocean has been undiscovered. It is a beautiful world in which we live, but God has given us even more. He has promised everlasting paradise. After this world, we are to live on in spirit, forever and ever. Why would God give so much to us when we seem to do so little to return the favor? It lies in the mystery of creation itself and it all began with love.

You may turn the question over in your mind, "Why does God love me so much when I fear Him more than I will ever love Him and I sin against Him and my fellow man?" Try looking at the reason in this light. Think of a parent and a child. The child grows to be intolerable, in trouble with the law, and succumbs to a terrible drug and alcohol addition. You, as the parent, are angry and very frustrated with what your child has done, not only with their life, but with yours as well. The child persists and falls deeper into addiction and self-destruction. All you can do is watch in shame and horror while this terrible state of affairs plays out right before your eyes.

Years go by and now the child is a grown man or woman. This adulthood magnifies their problems. By now, your adult child has been stealing from you in order to support their addiction. On occasion, they have beaten you in order to take your money. Eventually this results in an arrest and conviction. Jail has only made matters worse.

Months have gone by since you have last seen your son or daughter. Part of you is relieved, but another part worries about them often. One day, you return home and find your home broken into. You have a feeling it is your offspring and upon entering the house, you find your assumptions were correct. There they are, sitting on the edge of your bed – the very bed in which they were conceived. You notice with absolute horror that they are holding the barrel of a handgun in their mouth. Tears are streaming down your son or daughter's face as well as your own. At that moment, you forget all of their transgressions against you and the problems they caused. You forget about their sins. All you want now is to take them in your arms and weep. You no longer see a grown man or woman, but a scared and lonely child – your child once again. All you want more than anything in the whole world is to save them.

Now keep in mind that you are just a human. You are not perfect and can use no more than ten-percent of your brain. Your abilities of control and power are limited. Yet, you would feel nothing but love and compassion for your frightened and suicidal child. It doesn't matter how he or she had gotten to that point. It no longer would concern you that they destroyed their own lives as well as yours. You simply would not care about these trivial things. All you would want for them was salvation and you would freely give it.

This is how God sees us. Now, think of God as a perfect being, capable of so much more than you. Call His name. He will come and forgive you.

To receive such a reward of absolution, we must be of exceptional importance to God. Thus, regardless of any hesitation in choosing a path of higher consciousness, God is still there in the process of our formation. There is no end to our development. Each

day on earth is yet another opportunity to grow. If you fall today, then tomorrow is another day. As long as we do not quit searching for the answers, God will not ignore our labor. The pursuit of a higher spirit is definitely a life long process, becoming more active as we grow older. I imagine this has a lot to do with the attainment of wisdom and spiritual growth normally gained over time. The works of an older individual in the course of developing a life around God often reflects a unique and youthful energy. This offers proof that a force comes from within and the power we can draw from it is infinite.

Again, I say that you are never past your prime to call for God's assistance or believe in His mercy. Choosing a higher path of righteousness does not mean you have to sell your property and give the proceeds to the poor. Many quietly worship in their own way by being both gentle and compassionate with themselves and others. There are many ways to worship, but there is only one God.

Over the centuries, many men and women have made significant contributions to humankind and sacrificed their lives in the name of God. I will not mention them specifically for fear of undoubtedly leaving out someone very important. These people did not have special powers given unto them by God. They did not walk through walls and if cut, they bled like everyone else. The esteem in which we hold these gracious men and women is quite appropriate due to their undying faith.

See these individuals as guides, not preordained candidates for Heaven. You have the same potential and divine gift as they. Oscar Wilde once said, "Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future."<sup>6</sup> Upon repeating this quote to a friend of mine, he replied,

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<sup>6</sup> A Woman of No Importance, Act 3

“Wasn’t Oscar Wilde a drunk and a womanizer?” If my friend is correct, I feel this fact makes the quote even more believable.

We are all worthy of salvation. In order to receive this gift we have to stop limiting ourselves by putting pride first. Without humility, we will not even begin to understand the merits of salvation. Our points of view will remain shortsighted, having no distinct beginning or end. Let us cease putting so much emphasis on material value. There is no break-even point for life. When we see one another as commodities, we diminish our real worth. Each living thing is an equivalent of the whole. May we tune our consciousness toward a more meaningful purpose. Perhaps then we will vigorously restore the soul of a child.

There is little doubt this book will receive criticism. I will not yield to any of the usual customs of hate and misunderstanding. However, I will also not retaliate with cruelty. Instead, I welcome condemnation so that conceivably those who disagree with me may be charged with walking down a different path. Perhaps when they set out to disprove my beliefs, they will find the songs and traditions of their roots playing a melody of hope.

We are all free to choose our destiny. This choice alone should inspire you to look deeper within yourself. Here you may find an undemanding offer of a new pilgrimage. It will be within the gleaming plains of your soul that you will find the Master’s Hand at work.

You are one of many chapels still under construction. In the instant that it takes to breathe, you will imagine hope. Remember this and incorporate it into your everyday life. Then God will have given the world yet another Shepard.

By my own admission, I find the words within this book to be simplistic. I think to myself, “how interesting.” For an instant, I am fooled to believe it could be so straightforward. While linking together the chapters of this book, with their scenery, memories, beliefs, and expressions of daily life under the guiding hand of God, I remember how difficult it actually is to live these words.

The value of this book is not in the subject nor the imagination displayed within it, no matter how interesting I try to make it. It is within the deep pastures of my meaning that exist at the edge of faith. We are children of God and our spirits will return to Him set free upon a flying wind. Before that day, which will come to all of us, it will seem as if we are far removed from His mercy. We are not.

Until then, find that forgotten rhythm you once knew as a child. Chisel away at the layers of intolerance so we all may see your true beauty. Love yourself and your neighbor. There awaits a breath of golden deliverance that will give you new life. God wants all of us to find Him, standing against the breaking waves of a distant shore.

There is work to do in this life. We are born into a difficult world and the fruits of our labor will propel us toward a brighter light of dawn. It is possible to improve someone’s life regardless of the trouble we all face each day. Spontaneous works of kindness are not required to show love. There are many ways we can make the world a better place, quite simply by doing nothing. Speaking purely from a reflective nature, I can recall when it was best I walk away rather than lash out. I chose not to partake in an activity tailored from personal gain, greed, or hatred. We can detach ourselves from the cruel and stupid ways in which people behave. In doing so, we then join another more meaningful and peaceful group in silence.

Another roadblock to understand is the act of judgment. It is our very nature to judge. I agree it is a necessary form of rule. Without judgment, we would have no order. I am not referring to the form of judgment that embodies our justice system, but personal judgment. Without having all the facts, we unjustly judge others and ourselves.

Few facts we have about any given situation present a gripping picture of what took place. However, we seldom bother to find out the truth. We forget that behind a forest of lies a glistening body of water may rest. If we do find sufficient cause to punish, I believe the penalty should be swift and just. There is no need to celebrate or chant vile words at the guilty. Isn't it more nourishing to evoke a prayer for the condemned?

What I suggest is not easy. I must even call myself into question. When my actions fuel the fires of hatred and disgust, then I am wrong. I search for a pity buried deep beneath a hardened face of stone. I too forget the sunset and the veiled twilight. As I've stated, it is a natural feeling to seek revenge and all attempts at forgiveness are easily lost. The road to God is long and sometimes ruthless. Without significant cause to find the face of God in this life, what is our direction? I will not find warmth in money or material things if I am cold in spirit. I will not wish for my cars or magnificent homes upon my deathbed. I will not remember how often I had missed work or failed to meet an organizational deadline. I will remember who I served and cared for. It will be their faces that float past my eyes and wrap around my heart.

The basis of my existence is love and the purification of my soul. Each action of compassion is another movement toward this purpose. My efforts are slow at times, and occasionally they seek to restore inconsequential successes and desires. This is not how I want people to know me. There is a giant at work within all of us. He wore a thorny

crown to lift the burden of our sins. His word is alive and holds the light of a thousand suns in all of us.

It is easy to misplace our priorities in our minimum timetable world of burgeoning responsibilities. The idea I am suggesting is to continue to remind yourself what is important. Kick this idea around in our hearts and minds. Review its principles, sharp contrasts to worldly things, and subtle lyrics. This concept is the antithesis of despair – the luxurious flowering of fantasy with a mystery both intense and intriguing.

My idea lacks originality, but offers another expression of a very old belief. You will need a lively imagination and a most refined sense of hope to believe. Humanity is universal, retaining a singular understanding of creation – we are all from the same life source.

The struggle between pious duty and opportunism will continue – an internal conflict as ancient as the battle between good and evil. The volume and discipline of your conscience will win out in the end. If it is to praise God and give back to the world, then you are truly blessed. Otherwise, life will force you to bear the fate of bad choices and consumptive behavior that will only lead to loneliness. I've yet to hear about someone pleading to spend one more day at work before taking his or her last breath.

There is a lasting value to the decisive belief that God intended us for a perfect union of souls. With this foundation, you can still enjoy the material pleasures of life along with the spiritual. Always keep the material satisfaction in check – do not place these things above life itself. It is much simpler to obtain a new car. As of yet, we haven't been able to trade our lives in for another model – although at times, the thought of it is quite pleasing to me.

Our most innocent (and most wise) trait will ever be the notion we can continuously improve upon ourselves spiritually. We are noble people who have not mastered the art of revealing our inner most beauty. At times, it may seem important to steal the neighbor's significant other. Keep in mind, we make mistakes. No one leaves this earth without a flaw.

Nonetheless, if we remember that our rhythms of understanding can never attain the pinnacle of perfection on earth, we may not be as hard on ourselves. Friends often tell me that I need to remember this.

The content of our character will allows us to reach greater heights of spiritual discovery. Life is a brief adventure and death is forever. Excel as much as possible while you are moving toward the end of this natural world and believe there is another seashore on which you will stand. That beach will be perfect.

## **Chapter 4**

If you're like me, then you are probably wondering what assurances you have that there is a God. Or, even if you believe there is a God, you may wonder whether He will grant you access into the kingdom of heaven. To this, I will say that there have been a number of rich and inexhaustible miracles over the centuries from which to draw as proof. Consider also the miracle of birth that I touched upon in an earlier chapter. Lastly, some rare people concentrate in themselves a spirit of benevolence so great that they have changed the world. Since our human potential is not that powerful, this divine strength must come from another source. I believe this deeply ingrained well of concern for mankind is God.

There is an abundance of literature describing missionaries who survived years of constant interaction with severely contagious people, yet never contracted the diseases. Who protected them? Why? I believe it was God in order to strengthen our hope for the future – to show His mercy. These stories are tender and moving. We feel empathy for those who suffer and for those who sacrificed themselves for the suffering. Where does this feeling of compassion come from? Again, I say God – He lives within us.

Many demand more evidence than the good deeds of others and the declaration of miracles. We are a “seeing is believing” society. One can argue that showing sympathy for the oppressed or ailing doesn’t prove the existence of God. We can also add that the youthful work of a man named Jesus was just a brilliant portrait of a philanthropist, not a savior. It does appear incredible that God became mortal, lived for thirty-three years,

then died as a human. The scripture describes a perfect man in every way. With a humble demeanor, He traveled from town to town preaching a message of love and forgiveness. It is easy to debate whether or not he was just a good man with a great idea. But why was He so willing to die for it? I've had some good ideas, but none for which I was willing to die.

It is also important to note, when Jesus was accused and crucified, there is no written assertion of a heroic defense. Rather, the bible depicts a man who accepted the punishment handed down without resistance. Further, while He suffered a slow and painful death on the cross, Jesus silently said with great conviction that what He has done has been for all mankind. He has forgiven our sins so we may be with Him in heaven.

If the life of Jesus is true, it is inconceivable that a mere mortal would have the power to achieve this without breaking down or changing their mind in the end. Humans are quite resourceful creatures, but the story of Jesus describes a super human. Regardless of whether you find any spiritual truth in the teachings of Jesus, it remains a remarkable way to live.

Here is more proof. Do you really believe we evolved from a one-celled organism swimming around in a pond? I can see how the human race has evolved over the years and in that regard, I understand and accept the theory of evolution. However, I believe we started out as humans.

It is not difficult to conceive God as humanity's origin if you look at a map of the solar system. All planets and stars are in perfect alignment. The sun is far enough away from the earth to prevent it from consuming us in fire or even parching the soil. Yet it is

close enough to provide the necessary life sustaining energy in which to live. The sun's position to earth is ideal.

I hope these examples provoke enough thought at least to consider – maybe there is a God. In further exploration of this concept, think about the human spirit of survival and ambition. Many people under the influence of evil have found a love that was once lost and accomplished a series of brilliant exploits. We have all read the stories of the human condition or experienced them ourselves.

We often find ourselves drawn to those who ravish in their faith and incorruptible rigor. These beautiful characters with devout dependability are intriguing. We hope they are our neighbors, friends, and co-workers. We feel good to be around them and find a somber attractiveness in their character. Do you know who they are? They are and can be you.

Even with all of this said, I acknowledge I still have not addressed the proof of God based upon the “seeing is believing” rule. Undoubtedly, we cannot see gravity either, but we know it exists. I am not trying to be sarcastic or willfully avoid the question of verified substantiation that God does exist. I am only presenting certain facts at my disposal in order to help prove my point. Whether or not you believe is up to you. That's why they call it faith.

## **Chapter 5**

We live in a world where it is dangerous to express anything resembling faith. Let us revisit the point regarding murder in the name of God. This tragic form of rebellion does not serve any cause. No one has ever been converted by witnessing the death of a non-believer. What does this have to do with religion? Do we kill all who oppose us? Are we too ignorant to understand that we may differ in faith, but still live on the same planet? This blatant refusal to accept people of different religions will only encourage hatred. Only when we tolerate all religions will there be peace. There is a clear attractive trait of personal gallantry within a person who sees with an open mind. I do not agree with many things, but I know I am capable of differing with a courtly grace and cheerful casualness. I try to ask myself, “Who is the action hurting?” If the answer is “no one,” then I simply walk away.

When speaking of tolerance, there is another issue typically categorized as either white or black. It is the issue of abortion. I am cautious to discuss the subject in the first place, but it is a perfect example of two sides refusing to understand each other. I would like to make it quite clear that I am not advocating “pro life” or “pro choice,” but rather exposing the methods used to dispute the two options.

The debate has led to the merciless destruction of human life and property. How will this behavior save an unborn child or ensure individual liberty? When you use aggression to deliberate your point, you undermine your own attempts of influence the other party.

If I dissipate my energy in the form of protest, it is not the least bit chivalrous. I taunt and shout mantras of vile hate and retribution because you are not doing what I would like you to do. In this role, I will be effective in getting only one point across and that is judgment.

Do not quarrel or use violence against someone who is unwilling to follow your doctrine of beliefs. A person who is reluctant to adapt to another's way of thinking is not the anti-Christ. When you feel challenged by another's will, ask yourself, are your private interests supporting the public good? We all have justifiable needs, but imposing them upon another will not help them into their proper light. I most certainly will not listen to you if I am afraid or angry. I can guarantee that if this is the case, all the energy put forth in exercising your desire to change my mind will be futile.

The high objective overall for all of us to remember is peace. As children of God, we have the ability to disapprove without attacking. I would be more willing to hear your ideas if you held my hand and offered me a kind word. I could then tell you that the serpent and lion frighten me and right now I need a dauntless soldier not an accuser. It would then become possible to see your sweetness with jollity and courage. Perhaps then, I would subscribe to your opinion and we may possibly rescue one another.

## **Chapter 6**

People often say that the weakest part of any human being is his or her willpower. I easily agree, remembering my own addictions and compulsions. You will not accept the advice within this book if I do not call my own personal problems into account. At times, I am weak and far from admirable.

When I try to assess a character fault or strengthen my faith, I sometimes turn to self-help and spiritual books. Much of the time, they make me feel despicable. At the least, they leave me feeling unworthy of the riches of heaven or incapable of developing a higher consciousness. When this happens, I slip the book into the drawer, never to take it out again. There may have been a helpful message within the pages later on, but I will not allow myself to find it.

I hope to avoid this mistake with you. If what I write makes you feel unpleasant then this book will be disastrous. My goal is to unite us, not drive you away. If I come across condescending then you will only build a wall around whatever it is I have to offer. I wish to remind you that we are all in this together and there is much happiness in the world. The transition throughout any journey is a slow process and extends far beyond what we can see. I want these words to inspire and enchant, not to lay blame.

In order to help one another combat our inherently harmful characteristics, we need encouragement. I alone do not have the willpower to stop a bad habit or start a better one, but with the love and guidance of others, it becomes possible. Yet, first I must agree that I am worthy of assistance and above all forgiveness.

God tells us that we are worthy. Our failures are imminent as well as our successes. However, it is difficult to move from the point of desolation to take that necessary step forward to recovery – whatever that may be. Therefore, I am positive that God believes in us and patiently works on us to form a marvelous people.

This takes place every second of our lives. Within each of us, He has placed a wealth of pure and true emotions. Some are often troubling and others are amazing, but all of our emotions are equally grandiose. It is what we do with these feelings that stretch the boundaries of good or evil. The choice is essentially ours alone, but not without the guidance of our soul.

We all know the difference between right and wrong. Often before we make a decision, especially if it is a bad one, we feel something deep inside. This signal rarely gives off an alarm exhorting us to stop dead in our tracks and think things over. Instead, it is a more subtle message that tends to drift into our minds. I believe this subtlety is God – never pushing – simply offering quiet encouragement.

He does not reserve this divine assistance for the virtuous alone. You need not fall to your knees to feel or hear God's word. It is for all of us because even the most vile of humans have a soul. The question becomes whether or not we listen to the voice of God or reason. What is right and just beats within our bosom like a distant tambourine. Whether we are overcome by grief, adulation, or engaged in deadly combat – the voice of God always gives rise to other behavior alternatives.

Since everyone has this power within himself or herself, there is nothing to limit our potential for greater spirituality. Neither our enemies nor oppressors can take our soul from us. We may give it up freely, but with God, we can regain it, stronger and

more liberated than before. Many of us have masked our conscience, refusing to listen. No matter, God is still there, waiting with open arms.

There is a great historical truthfulness to what I say. Think of the men and women who God chose to perform a duty. They were like you and me, full of pride and passion. They were not free from sin, but the Lord charged them with mighty tasks. When you begin to see how wonderful you are, take heed, it may awaken the hallowed spirit within you. Like flowers that rise from the soil, you will grow and join a trinity of wisdom.

If I may make another suggestion to you while you pursue a better understanding of God, keep your sense of humor. You'll need it. The jovial nobleman we remember – those full of rage we avoid. Bring pleasure to the table when possible. I understand this is only one of many faces we may wear at any given time. It is a personal declaration I am working on as well.

Fear seizes all of us and we tremble before difficult encounters, but once we look to God for help, we will find the peace to get us through the moment. We can never eliminate our fear – it is a natural and necessary emotion. It is what we are afraid of that deserves careful consideration.

For example, is it pride that we refuse to give up for fear of humiliation? I agree, it is a painful experience to be humbled, but there is a basic need to ground ourselves in order to feed the soul. We need to know we require growth before we look for growth. It is only then we become capable of knowledge and true feats of courage.

There will be mishaps past, present, and future. Some at our hands and some at the hands of others. Finding our way out of these predicaments is moreover a matter of

faith and resourcefulness. In turn, we must tether these attributes to a belief in something greater than us, watching, waiting, and never deserting.

Before our eyes, we develop into better humans even though we will retain our old faults. Keep in mind, without these shortcomings we would not learn. To explain, allow me to present a worldly person, somewhat average, but thoroughly original – a model of the modern individual, nothing more or less.

This person is very diverse. Though their talents may not seem apparent while passing from one day to the next, add faith and spontaneity and you'll notice a delightful change. At first, they may make minimal sacrifices in pursuit of enlightenment and then the man or woman begins further self-analysis. Perpetual indecision plagues them while debating moral issues. Happiness seems to be lost to panic attacks and exhaustion.

This represents only the beginning of a spiritual journey. Along the way, there will be elation in the form of profoundly religious experiences. They are often short-lived but that is because there is so much work to do. C.S. Lewis describes the pain involved in growing toward God with an analogy of performing construction on our souls. Lewis explains that God is busy building a palace within us regardless of whether or not we are satisfied with the existing cottage. God wants us to be happy and knows what is best for us. Again, like a good parent, God remains faithful to His parental responsibilities.

More often than not, I've asked that God just leave me alone, exclaiming that I am satisfied with my current character. However, God will not listen. He continues to chisel away at the sculpture of my soul. His hammer marring my soul and the pain of further understanding causes me to scream out and curse His name. With this, I can even

picture a gentle face staring down on me with a somewhat polite and mischievous smile. I then think of God humming a child-like tune, "I know something you don't know."

I invite you to see yourself as an exquisite work of art. Let go just a little and allow God to fill your aching void with blissful possibilities. Reflect upon the time you not only drew a picture of God holding your hand, but you genuinely believed this to be true. I tell you it is true. Regardless of your faults, God needs you. Your life may be abnormal, excessive, or perverted, but He calls us all home. Believe in another chance regardless of the sin. It is never too late to try again or reconcile with God. If He can cure the dying and resurrect the dead, then surely there is salvation for us all.

You are a modest flower growing at the base of the cross. We are a precious people torn between confidence, egotism, love, and pride. At times, we are a bundle of contradictions but still sustain a moral sense.

We all are a splendid musical drama with God as conductor. There is a great epic within you, playing out for all eternity. Don't worry if you will never be a saint or Christian martyr. You are just as important and necessary to this world. Continue to fight the good fight, finish the course, and keep the faith. Your life will unfold on to a field of glory.

## **Chapter 7**

For a long time now, I have noticed people's attitudes about life have changed. Primarily, we no longer accept death as a natural part of life. Growing numbers of individuals are opposed to the possibility of not only dying but also growing old. Science is continuously producing anti-aging remedies that attract the attention of the entire civilized world.

In our society, antiques rise in value as they grow older, but people do not. In some instances, people see the elderly as a burden and a draw on the rest of us. This is far from true. The aged are rich in history and we should consider them artistic treasures. They often exhibit a sweet, gentle manner and a willingness to share knowledge. Why aren't more people fascinated by the beauteous words of wisdom that they can take from someone who has been on this earth for quite a few years? The cycle seems to repeat itself – the older generations were obviously younger at one time and probably just as likely not to listen to an elder.

Perhaps it is the fear of death that causes us to avoid a person closer to the inevitable than we are. It is no secret that there is an expiration date in all of us. Death is imminent. We continue to try to conquer the grim reaper, but in the end, we all die.

However, there is a message of great importance that many of us forget – we change form, but go on living forever. I personally have a stake in the concept of everlasting life. I hope to go on living after my flesh is no longer able to sustain me, basking in the light of God's love. It would be absolute bliss to never get sick or feel

aches and pains. We've all had days when our bodies became a mass of dull pain as we lumbered about the house with an illness. Not to mention there is the emotional, mental, and spiritual anguish we suffer. How wonderful to be free from these ills.

If I am to be completely honest, I must admit that I am still fearful of death. It is still the great unknown. The thought of all physical capabilities ceasing to function is frightening. I also know that after I die the development of my mind and body is no longer possible – only the development of the soul.

Therefore, I try to concentrate on learning all I can while still alive and well. In the belief that the spirit lives on, I feel we can do many things to prepare and improve our soul. The body may perish, but the soul will go onto another realm of existence.

We are all strongly influenced by new medicines that prolong life. I personally find medicine to be an amazing contribution to the world. It provides us more time to spend with loved ones, and if we choose, more time to improve ourselves. This is no accident. I believe God has given mankind the knowledge to sustain and lengthen life so we will be happy and have enough time to learn the meaning of life.

Isn't it possible that the Father admires our work on this earth and meets it with love and forgiveness? If so, we must accept death as an absolute and prepare for it, not pretend it doesn't exist.

The natural end of life is a time of great spiritual tension and one can easily believe that the material things that surround us will remain permanent. We live in an instantaneous and disposable society where it is a matter of clicking a button to replace objects of small or great value. At times, we become absorbed with the game of wealth

and power. We then are comfortable with our liberties, taking them for granted. It is simple for us to ignore the possibility that anything ends, especially human life.

All material substance is disposable and its value easily calculated. The value of life is not. Would you venture a guess at how much money your child is worth? However, legal organizations have broken down the worth of each human being, reflective of a sliding scale. They factor the age, sex, color, and earning potential of a person into their appropriate value. This boggles the mind. Our legal system has seemingly accomplished what years of science could not – what we're really worth.

I wish not to offend our respected legal representatives, but we cannot place a dollar value on human life. No amount of money can eliminate the grief and loneliness that results from death. I understand that the monetary range placed on a person within the justice system is to reflect the punitive damages one may receive for their injuries and suffering. I disagree with the ideals of this particular system because people often abuse them. This exploitation, however, is another matter entirely and I do not wish to address it in this book.

Returning to our fear of death and aging, people place an overabundance of stress on our external lives. Humans obtain immediate gratification from those things we can see, hear, feel, or touch. It takes much more effort to find satisfaction in matters pertaining to God and our soul.

Nevertheless, if we embrace the notion of the soul living beyond the flesh, it becomes possible to enjoy the aspects of the physical world, natural and man-made, even more. Believing in the gift of everlasting life provides somewhat of a relief. While we suffer, it helps to know there will be an end to the misery. We all endure great personal

misfortunes throughout life. The idea that we will be free of this anguish one day offers enormous consolation.

I am not suggesting that we give up on life and wait for a peaceful death. The fight for life must go on – we should not waste this gift. We must all be passionate patriots, making not only our lives better spiritually, but other's lives as well. In doing so, we become extremely important to the sensibility and compassion of this world and the world does indeed become a better place. At the same time, we are becoming more at peace with the demise of our bodies.

Similar to our physical needs, there is an essential requirement to feed the soul. No matter how disillusioned by possessions we become, there is nothing more important than the fulfillment of the soul. I can be quite certain that God does not accept cash or credit.

When I question my own feelings toward death, I find what I fear most is the death of a loved one. Whenever I lost someone very close to me, my ardent nature always interfered with my faith. Embittered by my own loss, I found it difficult to be overjoyed with the thought they were in a better place. I wept and pleaded with God and in the process, disregarded any sacred cause. My anger toward God blossomed abundantly, although I knew it was only the temporary result of torment.

As I've said before, spirituality is a long and painful journey. Death may be the final hurdle of life, but there will be many before it. I also have to remember that there is a quality to death, not only characterized by my belief in God and His power to give me eternal life, but also by His ability to help me cope with the loss of those close to me. Again, I must submit that this is not at all easy. A violent hatred for God accompanied

my best friend's suicide. At the time, I strongly opposed the glorious idea of an undying soul and unity with a divine spirit. Yet in time, my faith was renewed and God yet again carried me to the point where I no longer felt desolation and anger. Memories of my friend still sting to this day, but a renewed peace has replaced the despair I once felt at his death. I can now evoke a belief we shall meet again.

In some cultures, there is a jubilant celebration when someone passes. This unique perspective requires some examination. Why would there be an expressed enthusiasm when a person has just died? One would expect at the very minimum a certain sadness. I imagine this culture rejoices that the person who expired went to meet his or her maker after a long delay of separation.

Regardless of our bitter feelings about death, there are a great many advantages to the possibility of a new world or proclamation of a holy kingdom. In this court, there is no prejudice or adversaries. This alone is good news. It echoes the feelings deep within our souls.

Death also brings about the closeness and compassion of others. While we grieve, relatives, friends, and strangers passionately extend themselves to us. During this time of regret and loss, their true character prevails, full of expressive splendor. Yet another example of how people exhibit the sweet, soft melody of human compassion.

As we dance through this life toward an obvious end, there will be many transformations, not all of which fit into a harmonious pattern of higher consciousness. I don't blame anyone who fears death and directs their life toward tendencies of the more physical world. We are trying to make sense out of something mystical and the queen mother of the inexplicable. Though we continue to purchase the anti-aging creams and

place more and more value on petty objects, we are still part of the monarchy known as the kingdom of God. One day we will pay homage in this celestial place. Consider the opportunity that lies before you to go as a better human being.

Perhaps over the years, our exterior needs will become more inconsequential and we will slowly come to the realization that God is writing His script within us. Any additional time on earth is most assuredly a blessing. Through God's grace, He has given us this postponement of death.

We all reserve the right to pursue whatever it is we desire in this world and at our own pace. Yet, what we do on earth does matter. Remember we are the carriers of God's light. One day this radiance will shine before Him. The conclusion of our lives is likely to be yet another beginning. Let us open our hearts and minds to the gift of eternal life and prepare as best we can for this luminous flight.

## **Chapter 8**

In the search for God, there are many paths to consider. Organized religion is understandably the path chosen most often. There is already an established doctrine of rules and regulations to follow and there are many religious groups from which to choose.

The ability to choose any religious institution that makes you feel most comfortable is a wonderful opportunity. It is only when there is a clear line of dissention drawn between the different religions that we get into trouble and cause conflict.

There can obviously be a diverse approach to religious study and still believe in one God. If we take the time to understand another's religious practices, we may find there is little difference between our own. We would quite likely confuse one particular religion with another.

If we attack another church, we forget the genuine religious sentiments expressed by those who worship. Remember, Jesus spoke of a unified approach to religion based upon one church.

There are limits, however, to unconditional acceptance. When I speak of spiritual freedom and worship, I do not advocate anything satanic. This is a poisonous devotion and I believe Satan is a real and powerful spirit. Clearly, not more powerful than God, but given the opportunity, he can damage one's soul. Satan is the herald of an imprisoned culture and the enemy of any discipline that approves natural rights. Worshipping Satan is as noxious as the absence of God.

If with God all things are possible, then without Him all that remains is chaos. Nothing nurtures this message more so than the landmark Supreme Court decision of Murray vs. Curlett. This was the case where the Supreme Court prohibited prayer recitation and bible reading in the nation's public schools. Madalyn Murray (O'Hair) lodged the initial complaint in 1959, opposing the practice of bible study and prayer within the Baltimore, Maryland public school system where her son attended. Madalyn Murray and her son were not Satan worshipers, but they were devout Atheists. She felt the school's curriculum infringed on her First Amendment right to freedom from religious ceremonies.

Although I do not agree with removing prayer, bible study, and any reference to Christianity from our public school system, I understand the constitution protects the freedoms of Madalyn Murray and her son as well. It is my belief that these freedoms can comfortably coexist if there is a conscious consideration of both. With this said, the decision to remove God from the school system was a poor one indeed. Without any foundation of God available, those who are forming their beliefs will flounder for an anchor of honorable idealism.

Before 1963 and the Supreme Court's decision, the principal problems with students in our public school system were running in the hallway, talking too loudly or out of turn, chewing gum, not using the waste basket, and fighting. After 1963, our public schools are plagued with rape, molestation, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol addiction, extortion, suicide, and murder.

It doesn't take an altered state of awareness to see the vast differences. Make no mistake; I am not stating our public school system has declined due only to the removal

of prayer and bible study. What I am suggesting is that this decision did more harm than good.

Without a foundation of fundamental spiritual maturity and education, all hope is lost. The world alone cannot answer the difficult questions of existence. What place do I have on this earth? What is my value? What is the purpose of this struggle? Where will I go after I die?

Thousands of questions will go unanswered, leaving only a feeling of bewilderment. It is no wonder we concentrate on bigger and more expensive material things to satisfy us. It is also no wonder that crime, addiction, and suicide have increased dramatically over the years.

It seems we require an idealism so pervasive that it meets our every spiritual, mental, and emotional need. I believe only God can do that, and through faith in God we can learn to accept all that we endure. During our pulsating and strenuous lives, we look for answers. As a result of faith in God, we can find this guidance in palpable and direct forms. At the least, we may discover the strength to find peace in those things we do not understand.

There will be those who differ widely from what I say. They will exclaim that an Agnostic or Atheist is just as capable of appreciating the gifts this life has to offer. Perhaps they are correct – I do not know because I am neither.

Therefore, I will not claim that if you do not believe in God, your life will be more painful or unhappy than if you did otherwise. My explanations are purely to suggest an expansion of faith to those who do believe and to offer an alternative to those

who haven't found happiness in their disbelief. From my personal experience, this has helped me deal with the world at large a lot better. Nothing more and nothing less.

Keep in mind that if you do feel a void in your life, not easily explained or forgotten, maybe there is a reason you haven't yet considered. It might just be a heavenly song brimming with love and singing your praises. Perhaps it comes from a spirit patiently waiting for you to call His name. Regardless of your viewpoint, you are still part of valiant creation belonging to a light than can never be extinguished.

## **Chapter 9**

I preface what I write with the admission that I am not always a full-fledged believer in the divine. If I ever received a glimpse of a heavenly appearance, I can guarantee you that not only would I believe one hundred percent, but this phase of my life would end as well. However, I have not met all periods in my life with a valiant march onward, believing God was at my side. Throughout the dangers and misery I have encountered, I often imagined an empty throne where a formerly benevolent God once sat.

I tell you now that it is all right to lose your faith while the toils and deprivations tear away at the fabric of your soul. We struggle to accept the cup of sadness. Through this process, we can learn to appreciate life and a renewed faith. Without a doubt, tragedy will find most of us, and our manner of acknowledgment may be in the form of revulsion. That is fine. Our greater qualities leave traces of honor though for the time being they are hidden. Eventually, we begin to write a new verse within the song of our life. In this cycle, our creator draws together a tighter bond between a child and their Father.

These are not my own thoughts or words. The very language I employ comes from another source superior to me. If I pause long enough to reflect upon my successes in life, I will see there was a higher order in progress. All of us are merely extensions of God from our most treasured moments to simple tasks performed in a day's work. It is our responsibility to share God's gifts with the world. An unimaginable power varies the

gifts He gives us. Since bygone ages, we have been the messengers. I feel that without God, we are no more than foolish chattering monkeys.

When we thank God for our triumphs, the instinctive feeling of bliss reminds us of our true purpose in life. We are to share our joys and provide comfort to others in need. Humans are quite phenomenal in every aspect of our being. We are a complex computer, electrical system, and biological wonder – all connected by an unseen aura of pre-eminence. If we use our minds and bodies as instruments to assist others, we are completing a holy declaration sent by God. It is true that until we share our grandeur, it is not a gift.

I do not write these words to take over the fields of another, but to help replenish a bountiful crop. Many great men and women have written or spoken the very words you are now reading. So many generations have passed and will pass again, but if we give nothing back, they will be no more than an element of mechanical survival. My contribution is part of an embodiment of this marvelous experience we call life. I say again, we all come from the same teacher.

It is also through the tenderness and charm of others that I come to share with you. I certainly could not have felt the elevation of my spirit if it weren't for so many charitable people. Until we all stand together along the banks of the river that will purify us from sin, I ask you to join me in this pilgrimage to share our gifts with one another.

Among the qualities of mankind, the act of kindness deserves special notice. It is an unusual trait that takes much effort. At times, and with immense patience, we must forego our own problems and reach out to others. Knowing how difficult this is, I am in awe when it takes place. Ethical stimulus battles with our everyday problems and busy

schedules. We are not always good-humored individuals. I personally admit to a coarse wit that at times is downright vulgar.

Compassion, if repeated, helps all of us in the broadest sense of the word. Our pains to help one another are far reaching and continue to propagate beyond the limits of our own understanding. If we choose to be stingy with our time, money, and love, very few will benefit including ourselves.

The path to righteousness does not mean giving all of your wealth to charity. Rather, share just a portion of what you are able. Or, simply try to show some genuine sympathy for the unfortunate. At one time or another throughout this difficult world, we might be these ill-fated people. Our condition would only worsen without the aid of humanity.

The belief that we are worthy of not only human kindness, but also God's love is put to the test when we are in need. When the question is whether we deserve, the answer is always a resounding yes. Love of any sort should not befall the popular alone. There should not be a hierarchy of worthiness based upon wealth, power, appearance, race, color, national origin, or community standing.

Of course, this concept is idealistic. I've often heard and said, "In a perfect world..." However, this is an evasion of the truth. We can be fair and peaceful in an imperfect world. Yes, there are those who are more deserving. They have been deemed more worthy by their self-sacrifices. Yet regardless of your contributions to the world, you deserve basic human rights. These rights may include your last rites or last meal – depending upon what circumstances have taken place to bring you to this end.

What I speak of is not philosophical wisdom, but common sense. Even the most cursory observer can relate to the golden rule. If we try to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, we will reproduce with astounding accuracy the most minute rewards of life. However, the gift of observation alone must begin with an openness to God's word. Clearly, we reveal our personal characteristics, imagination, inner consciousness, and temper moment by moment. The nature of these human traits can and will improve when our hearts become part of the landscape fashioned by the delicate creativity of our soul.

I quote again, "Many are called, but few are chosen."<sup>7</sup> Herein lies our responsibility to exercise our calling. Though at times our attitudes toward one another may be brusque, this does not preclude us from exhibiting some tenderness and delicacy every now and then. These qualities may not be a heartfelt emotion when distributed, but someone may receive them as such.

Many of us do not clamor for affection and kindness from other human beings as a child would. Much of the time, we simply want to be left alone to live peacefully. We cannot attain the peace we yearn for unless we realize that although we may march to the beat of a different drummer, we are all equally essential. My needs are just as significant as yours and visa versa. We undermine this philosophy, and our attempt at peace, when we put our needs before another, or assume rather pretentiously our wants and desires are more important. Testament to this fact is standing in line at the grocery store or that hell on earth known as rush hour.

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 8:12

I am an idealist. I wish not to come across as anything else. My convictions rest soundly on the belief that even the most prominent community, state, or country would die without its residents following a strict set of laws along with a sense of duty to one another. I also acutely believe that God must be first. The uncompromising person, which has no regard for others, brings about disorder.

As a participant and observer in this world, I've noticed we all have a tendency toward pleasure. However, pleasures are empty if what we seek infringes upon the will and rights of others. Do not confuse the pursuit of pleasure with someone harmlessly exercising rights we may disagree with. In these situations, we must advocate self-discipline and respect. Rather than purporting total surrender of your personal values, I advocate the courage to disagree calmly.

Further, try to look at any situation from a variety of angles. We are all unique and independent as humans, and can continue to learn from one another. Often, this knowledge is unexpected and unpleasant. C.S. Lewis was quoted as saying, "We learn from experience – and Oh God do we learn."

We cannot accomplish anything I have suggested without a strong conviction to humanity. Whether an atheist, agnostic, or Christian, we must each possess a bit of sincere hope for the future. Humankind will not survive if we are solely devoted to our own needs. Whether we like it or not, we need one another even if it is in the most fundamental way. Therefore, we must be ready when we are called upon to help another – giving credit to God, country, and ourselves.

## **Chapter 10**

Touching some of us, causing great discomfort and at times death, is the issue of crime. This particular subject requires serious consideration. It is a strain on our justice system, extremely costly in every aspect, and it destroys lives. Crime also leaves in its wake an absence of equality.

In this new millennium, we have seen how wealth, power, and race have played a key role in determining an individual's innocence. This sends a very clear and disturbing message to the world. A serious illness has befallen the justice system. I must admit with immense disappointment, we have unquestionably forgotten the face of our Father.

There are those among us who will commit crimes and then hire representatives of equal or less character to protect them from paying their dues. If this mockery of truth wasn't enough, we have witnessed members of a jury accept the baton of deceit – becoming easily swayed by greed and prejudice. The circus within the average courtroom sickens me. Indeed, is anyone measured by his or her true merit? Some humans are so determined to avoid responsibility, they end up selling their souls instead.

The world has always been plagued with crime, but now there seems to be prestige attributed to getting away with the deed. There are book deals and movie rights sold to glorify the criminal, not punish them. The appeal process takes years and is riddled with more cost and loopholes within an already battered legal system. There are many who are not even satisfied with mere acquittal. They demand freedom from any stigma and ultimately receive a large sum of money to soothe their pain and suffering.

Attempting to excuse their transgression, these individuals explain that they were not fortunate enough to grow up in a carefree and loving home. How many of us are denied this blessing yet still adhere to the rules and regulations that make up our society? I say many, including myself.

With the exception of the mentally handicapped, I find it difficult to understand or excuse any violent crime committed by normal human beings. I cannot say with good conscience that it is acceptable to murder another in order to take their passions. Or, to rape someone because you have a problem with dominance? I do believe there is still hope for those who commit crimes, regardless of how heinous. However, these criminals must approach the road to recovery and salvation with humane actions of love and integrity. These qualities live in the hearts of all of us.

I have not always observed the rules and have done wrong against my fellow man. The narrow scope of my actions served only me and I gave no value to another's feelings. In doing so, I was profoundly mistaken. It was fair that my actions were called into question and obligatory that I accepted all responsibility. Many times my initial response was to deny culpability, proving again that I was only human. Eventually, my better angel revealed himself and I took the proverbial medicine, which left a bitter taste on my tongue, but blasted my soul with a feeling of freedom and morality.

I wish not to lecture and preach ethics. Truly, that would be the pot calling the kettle black. I merely hope to unveil the unmistakable humanism of sin. Of course, I have committed many of my own sins. However, I call all of us to acknowledge with courage this ingrained iniquity and accept the consequences of our actions.

Avoiding the practice of truthfulness will lead all of us away from our creator. We cannot emphatically develop a lifelong path to higher consciousness by defending our faults, only by admitting to them – and at times, this may be only to God.

As we travel away from the belief that our lives have meaning as part of God's creation, spiritual contentment will no longer inspire us. As a substitute, we gravitate toward more immediate enjoyment and material ownership. If we cannot purchase satisfaction with wealth, we take it by any means necessary. The nature of our product advertisements fuel the belief that without money, we do not matter.

There is a time mentioned in the bible when the injustice and inequalities of the world will change. In the Book of Revelations, it states that the Lamb will come "and he will rule with an iron fist."<sup>8</sup> I believe He will be both fair and just. There will be no dream team of expensive lawyers or legal ambiguity. There will be no tolerance of crass and ugly lies as a defense. He will deal directly with uncouth behavior and smother long monologues of pompous and lofty opinions. His sole purpose will be to maintain harmony.

As I've proposed earlier, punishment is necessary but must be fair, swift, and respectful. Even though the rude and illicit manner of some individuals occasionally offends me, I know I must put my personal feelings aside and allow justice be done. Although, I may not agree with the legal system nor believe in it, I still do not have the right to impede its progress. This is so, regardless of how slow the wheels may turn – at times, even grinding to an abrupt end.

With respect to crime, in most instances I feel we are in need of a miracle in order to change things for the better. Perhaps this thought alone aims me in the right direction.

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<sup>8</sup> Revelations 19:11

A miracle may first begin as an admirable idea. Putting the onus on myself, I can utilize the gifts God has given me to achieve this divine aspiration. I have to be an example of integrity first and then help guide others.

Though it is not easy, I must remember that I cannot force anyone to agree with me. Some may choose to lean toward crime and refuse to accept responsibility for their actions. Yet, I must maintain a peaceful and righteous attitude. We need to strive for a gracious simplicity in the way we deal with those who have broken the laws of our community and country. We should place greater emphasis on human decency rather than retribution or arrogance.

Even so, tolerance to the point of looking the other way is ridiculous. Only fools and thieves do this. I advocate total accountability for all we do, ensuring in a peaceful manner that we respect the law. If we are to be faithful to a chosen nature of disobedience then we must pay the price for our crimes. At the same time, respecting the rights of those disobedient is always required of the just.

The following belief will most likely offend some religious feelings, but I feel death is a righteous punishment for certain sins. We should carry out the execution with an orderly system of justice, not vengeance. If you are within the unfortunate circumstances of this plight, I ask that you look to God for clemency. If you find yourself on the other side of the looking glass as a witness to the execution, have mercy in your heart for the ill fated.

Despite the crime we all live with, I continue to thank God for the many joys He has allowed me. I still believe this is a beautiful world and I am so glad you share it with me.

## **Chapter 11**

Highly competent men and women have debated the question of forgiveness. Essentially, who among us is worthy of this gift? Are the worthy recipients bearers of great and unusual qualities? On what respective merits are these blessed individuals weighed? After serious consideration, I have found there are three distinct sources from which this exoneration is offered: oneself, mankind, and God.

Despite our insightful originality and singularity of the many talents we possess as humans, we still find it difficult to love ourselves and therefore accept our weaknesses. Someone has said, and it is unquestionably true, that we are our own worst critics. I can attest to this fact.

The reason for the difficulty may be that forgiveness requires so much internal strength. The act alone is very different from any other form of expression involving absolute willpower. It takes an optimistic character and unconditional patience. On a good day, this is both rare and difficult. In order to forgive, we are literally “turning the other cheek” and saying, “it’s okay to strike me again even though the first time hurt like hell.” We are injured emotionally, spiritually, and sometimes physically. Afterwards, we have to yank upon a delicate and secret string to evoke a mysterious vibration of total amnesty. If you are like me, your first reaction when pondering this act of absolution is “No Way.”

However, we hope others will forgive our trespasses and allow us to continue learning from the experiences. This is certainly a shallow nature and riddled with

hypocrisy. If we are not willing to forgive another how then can we expect forgiveness? Again, if you are like me, you think, “Who cares – don’t want to deal with it.” However, I must deal with it. Following my own advice, I have to agree that I cannot accept forgiveness unless I forgive others.

I am in good company. It would be an unusual and non-existent human being who has never sinned against another by the time they reached puberty – often long before. That said, if transgressions against each other are so common, then why haven’t we perfected the art of forgiveness? I can only speak from experience and say that it is because the lesion from the sin against me has not healed. From this same token, I imagine Jesus asking, “How can you ask your Father to forgive you when you are not willing to forgive your brother?” In return, I say, “Because Lord, I am not perfect” and before I finish the sentence, I already know my reply is avoidance. I know within my heart I possess the marvelous disposition of tolerance without being perfect.

It is the voice of my soul that tells me to forgive, but I struggle to find the strength to do so. I have to ask myself, to what degree can one have a moral life without forgiveness? Throughout the day, as I move in and out of my ordinary tasks, all is well until someone overtly or accidentally violates my space. When the latter occurs, I try to find the secret depth of my being and call up the power necessary to forgive the offender his or her trespasses. Admittedly, the well in which the clear waters of mercy exist remains hidden in a bewildering pool of reluctance.

Further, let us not forget that forgiving another is nearly impossible. Without an appearance of sincere remorse, it takes an act of God, literally, to do so. The God I speak of is within the vague regions of our inner self. It is a great step, indeed, to acknowledge

that God lives in all of us and with Him, we can learn to forgive others and ourselves. This understanding can take a lifetime to attain and is often quite laborious. Hatred and indifference will cloud our minds and hearts, leaving no room for pity.

For me, the act of forgiveness is so difficult that I rarely pray for the strength to exonerate another. If I do find myself asking for this, my prayer hardly passes beyond the point of sincerity. I feel as though achieving the ability to forgive is akin to a glimpse of an inaccessible distance. I then agonize over ever reaching my true home, wondering if it may be impossible if I cannot learn to forgive another. However, outside the limits of our earthly experiences, we can attain the power to offer leniency to another. Again, I must submit that the possibilities are endless through God.

It is heartrending to read the words Jesus spoke while dying, nailed to a wooden cross – “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.”<sup>9</sup> The force of this man is impossible to comprehend. God’s demonstration of grace while we persecuted and murdered His only Son leaves me speechless. During the times in my life when I’ve taken refuge in a quiet moment and thought of the crucifixion, I feel both love and shame. The love I feel is because God gave His only Son for me. He was subjected to a vile and tortuous death so that I may live in peace and harmony and one day receive the kingdom of heaven. I feel humiliated by my unwillingness to forgive those who have never even come close to matching the transgressions against Jesus. Yet I am pretentious enough to ask God for sympathy. How true the words seem to me then, “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 23:34

I can only offer up what I know to be true in my heart. We cannot only take refuge in the fact God will forgive our sins. We must try to forgive others and forgive ourselves. Humans are known for their blades of hatred and lack of empathy that destroy the gardens of hope. However, we are also known for our flowers of compassion, which bud even in winter.

I feel it was God's intention to demonstrate His patience and affection for us when Jesus asked the Father to forgive His children. However, how can we forgive and in doing so free ourselves from fear and loathing? Other than reflection, patience, and faith, I have no other answer. Just give yourself time to heal – do not conclude our ability to absolve is a lost cause. I would also suggest that during this time of learning we avoid those who continue to sin against us if possible. Above all, do not retaliate. This will only influence an already eager reaction to harm and bring forth a fatal end. I understand it takes unbelievable control not to retaliate, but if we are unable to forgive then let us push from the oppressor and simply walk away. Or, at times run as fast as we can.

We also mitigate our ability to forgive by feeling that we are assuredly the victims of some transferred aggression. Often lost to obscurity is our understanding and acceptance that we may be equally responsible. I do not believe that seeing any given situation with an open mind destroys our freedoms. Yet, in several dramatic situations, we find ourselves ardently sticking to the notion that not only have they wronged us, but also we are totally without blame.

The ability to step back and take a deep breath contributes to absolution. Any spontaneous act, especially made under duress, will bear unpleasant manifestations. I believe that regardless of whether you believe in God, quiet deliberation is essential to

making not only a good decision, but also to the possibility of forgiving another's indiscretion. I further believe that the strength to forgive must come from a power beyond normal human capabilities. I push this simplicity to the depths of understanding whenever I think of those with whom I am most angry. Lacking the influence of God's spirit, I cannot and will not uncover the principle of mercy that hides within the shadows of wisdom.

It is essential to state here that I do not feel God will refuse to forgive us if we are unable to forgive others. As it is with many of my sacred beliefs, I feel God is more concerned with the act of struggling to forgive than the end result. To some degree, we are excusable because we are humans and in many aspects inadequate. The belief in an understanding God helps breathe a sweet respite into my soul.

While formulating our perceptions regarding the extent of absolution, we will from time to time invariably give up. Rendered onto us is only a transitory break in gravitation toward our goal. However, it is the act alone that calls forth a poetic beauty within any human being who tries to forgive another. This pays homage to the old adage, "Don't be too hard on yourself." Learn to forgive yourself and you may find it easier to forgive others.

In the midst of our existence, there will be injustices against us and visa-versa. If we possess a sincere thirst for truth, and I believe we do, we will embark upon that never-ending voyage to forgiveness and understanding. We will pass through many stages of spiritual development along the way and briefly reach the summit of insightfulness. This time on earth is a procession of sliding steps toward a rarely experienced grip on obedience.

I believe God is always present – forgiving us “as we forgive those who trespass against us.”<sup>10</sup> None of us will escape remorse. At one point in our lives, we will all be the intruder. When this happens, there will be a cold breeze and brush of thistle that passes across our conscience. Forgive yourself and press forward with an earnest attempt at making right what it is you have done wrong. Remember, it is not what we do, but what we do afterwards that will free us from the foreboding disaster of apathy.

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 6:12

## **Chapter 12**

If we look back on past ages, we will see that time itself has not changed, but has persistently marched onward, despite tragedy or triumph. And like time, there has been little transformation with respect to good and evil. The battle rages on and the day has long since passed when we have been asked to choose sides. From the point of view in which God exists, we have had the opportunity to learn of His word and believe it to be true. Not every day will confirm God is real. But as far back as history extends we can find an emerging assurance the origin of our creation came from, at the least, a powerful entity. There will be many people after this generation and long into the future that substantiate this fact.

Inherent in all we feel, there is a distinct emotion that differentiates between good and evil. This is proof alone that God lives. Yet, is it enough that we believe God exists or do we also have to choose between good and evil? There are many people who believe in the Holy Father, creation, and that Jesus died for our sins. However, they desire to live a life of deceit without concern for humanity. As such, I argue that not only must we believe in The Father and The Son, but we must also try to live a good life in order to nurture the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost or soul is the very seed of salvation that will bring us back to God. Whether the seed comes alive and grows to be virtuous is our choice. Free will is a double-edged sword of deliverance. We may allow the seed to remain dormant, purposefully eradicating its light, or we may tend it with diligence and discipline.

There is a great discrepancy between choosing to follow the path of God and ignoring the fact you have a soul. I am not stating that if you choose to be an agnostic you are damned. Again, this is not for me or any of us to claim. Where the soul is concerned, I am not worthy to pass judgment on another human being.

However, I do believe that acknowledgement of God alone is not enough to develop a higher consciousness. We must also trace the progress of our faith by trying to follow His teachings. Our individual efforts determine our progress in any direction, whether it is good or evil. There is a tremendous difference between blind faith and the constant search for answers.

Based upon this point alone an agnostic who strives for proof will have many more opportunities to learn about God than one who is simply content with his or her indecisiveness. The same goes for the Christian. The person who questions and studies their religion will deepen their faith while the person whose only thought of God occurs during the ‘mandatory’ weekly worship, will stagnate their faith.

A keen observer of mankind would see a vast uniqueness in those who believe in God and try to follow His word. Their characters are truthful and kind. They are grounded and have a keen sense of fairness. On the other end are those who use God for power and profit. These evangelical extortionists have low dispositions for they do not “practice what they preach.”

There is also a realism when it comes to faith in a higher and divine spirit. All things seem to add up and make sense. There is a sense of eternal justice. This belief allows a person to maintain a central focus regardless of how terrible life may get. They

also have a strong consideration for the possibility of brighter dreams and fulfillment. I myself hope to identify with these people.

In contrast, those who choose evil appear to be lost. They wallow in emptiness – missing the concept of heaven's bliss. Among them are the miserable and unsatisfied, the cruel and stupid. Life is nothing more than a comedy, yet they do not realize the joke is on them. They rape, murder, and molest – not due to a lack of education but a lack of spiritual knowledge. Their ill-fated lives are nothing but torment and confusion. There is no social class, race, or nationality in which evil discriminates.

I submit that we are all candidates for the wealth of good and the poverty of evil. And at times, I feel as though we are pawns torn between two mighty forces – if you will, a battle for our very souls. I picture God and Satan watching and waiting for a human to make their choice. Regardless of whether or not this is fact or fiction, I have chosen God. I made this choice not only because God is more powerful than Satan, but also because a feeling deep within my gut told me He is my true Father. I am also exceptionally sure that God has saved me many times when Satan only laughed at my misfortunes with insidious amusement.

In choosing either path, we will reach a conclusion of acquired wisdom or idiocy. We are all extensions of Christ in spite of whether we choose good or evil. The choice is a modest beginning to the intensification of the human soul.

When we take into account all the forces and circumstances working against us from birth until death, it is a steady fight to achieve righteousness. It is even more difficult to attain the truth if one subscribes to wickedness or turns away from the light of salvation. Our attempt at faith in God and avoidance of sin is in all respects abnormal. It

is the way of pain and exertion. Often we don't even know if we are right and discovering this fact may take decades. If we choose goodness, we are forced to find numerous solutions to difficult problems when it would have been easier to take whatever we want, damning the consequences.

Rather than a particular outlook or opinion, I hope I've shown virtue and critical insight into the advantages of choosing God and morality. Therein lies a penetrating consideration when debating the loss or gain of the human soul. I have walked the path of life's squalid side, limiting the objective of my own true nature – goodness.

During this time, it was nearly impossible to uncover the necessary route to a better life. I did not want to look beyond my own selfish vision. I was an observer of opportunity, never partaking in the grand things. Beneath our skin is love and hate and we either honor or blame. As I've said many times, the choice is ours to make.

God has given all of us a divine gift of imagination and perception. If we listen to this intuition, we will prosper to a high degree of veracity. It is the choice of a lifetime and beyond.

## **Chapter 13**

I am pleased to be in a position where I may give recognition to God – it is a testament to how He blesses us in variety of ways. Sharing your blessings with others is a conscientious and deliberate act of love, and it is exhaustive. I have concluded that when God blesses us, it nearly approaches a divine ending, but until we pass these holy sanctions onto others, their qualities will dwindle.

The process of serving God or mankind has no prescribed standard but seems to rest upon tiresome work, which leaves us frustrated and lonely. Then why would anyone take it upon themselves to give freely of their love and compassion? I feel the answer lies within a particular blessing conferred upon us. It comes alongside a distant feeling that God is calling us home, and it is His desire that with the bestowment of a divine gift we use it to bring as many to Him as possible.

Further, God's gifts are unconditional. There are no set terms of acceptance. If we choose to squander our talents and use them selfishly, we do not awake the next day annulled of our previous abilities. Even when we give no consideration to Him from whom these blessings come or to whom they might truly belong, God just keeps giving. This display of patience arrests my attention and I find it difficult to comprehend. Would you continue to provide gifts to another if they lacked appreciation or wasted them? I know that I would not. However, unlike God, I am not a perfect father.

We have all heard the phrase “Count your blessings.” I have often overlooked these divine gifts, not realizing their worth until much later. It is only by continued

perseverance that we learn to recognize and appreciate the blessings offered to us. In a real and full sense, we are children of God and often take for granted the assistance God continues to provide.

Irrespective of our religious faiths, or overall aim in life, God persists in His charitable contributions to creation. The Lord rains on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Our admirable master provides His children with a never-ending assortment of blessed support. He has given us a soul and, in spite of the evil we may do, God does not take it back or renounce His promise of salvation. Instead, He waits until the bitter end, offering countless chances to turn our lives over to Him. We have the opportunity to be the prodigal sons and daughters of our Father. I strongly believe deliverance is the greatest gift of all.

God harmonizes us into a complete being, musically balanced, combining both grace and power. As I've stated earlier, I speak with a borrowed tongue. Writers greater than me have said these words. However, they need to be said again and as often as possible. The purpose is faith and an affirmation of the word of God, sharing His donations.

The same holds true of favors extended by other human beings. We must pass these on as well. We should render a gift unto another as a reproduction of compassion. The gift itself may not be unique, but as we extend it to another, it takes on a more meaningful sense.

Here we see another view of the world, one that is in direct accord with God and each of us linked. Throughout the interchange of blissful and torturing phases of our

lives, we can reflect upon when others have come to our aid. They seem to give rise to the truth of God's intentions for the world.

When we do open our hearts to others, it is obvious our actions bear the imprint of another hand. Humans have a wide range of abilities, but the heartfelt sympathy offered to another is truly the work of The Father. Indubitably, the content of one's character unites with the benefactor's Holy Spirit in this deed. The embodiment of this conviction is the belief that with the moving power of God we can allow others and ourselves the full realization of rich possibilities. In the dominion of holy reliance, we are all servants of the Lord and one another. Within this monarchy, there is a myriad of princes and princesses, humbly kneeling before a glorious and munificent King.

I sincerely believe our souls long for the joyous reunion with our creator and each blessing we receive is yet another reminder that one day we will go home. Universally extending ourselves to each other, we will enhance the sphere of civilization. We are a widely separated lot, which is a deterrent to giving unto others. However, this same distinction can provide a multitude of opportunities to help one another.

The true work of our talents is clearly to reveal them to the world. Our efforts exerted to contribute will return to us more significant. Yes, "it is better to give than to receive."<sup>11</sup> Yet, hidden within this biblical quote, like a cool stream underneath an ocean, is another message. If we give of ourselves, we are also receiving the blessings and sacred inspirations from which to draw a renewed energy.

Remembering to be modest, we mustn't offer aid to others for the sake of popularity or fad. These are bogus offerings indeed. An individual's offering should be

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<sup>11</sup> Acts 20:35

a quiet impulse toward the restoration of one's soul and the soul of another. Trust that God easily traces the source of your donation. I feel it is the spirit of the offering in which God is most interested, not the offering itself.

God reads our hearts and knows our intentions. He attributes the depth of our love for one another before we carry out the act. We do not always have the strength to extend ourselves and therefore must take time to regenerate. Do not worry. God knows your future and the capacity in which you will bring forth His word. Consequently, our Father also knows how many brothers and sisters you will be bringing to His kingdom. We will continue to liberate each other from the bondage of hopelessness. Let us nurture the blessings given from above and to one another. In doing so, we revitalize the blood of sacrifice sustained within the veins of all mankind.

## **Chapter 14**

There is a need to spread God's message throughout the world, however, I am disgusted when people exploit the message for power and profit. There are some religious revivals that require cash up front before you can partake in the so-called holy event. During the course of these exhibitions, they may collect even more money. I fail to see why the name of God is so pricey.

Several men and women have used the name of God to acquire status and wealth and in recent years with greater frequency. There are many more religious shows on television now than ever before. Evangelism is big business and business is better than ever. The backdrop of these shows alone could feed a neighborhood for weeks. In addition to the gaudy and expensive furniture and fixtures, there are the garments and jewelry the show person wears. The finest clothiers tailor the evangelist's suits and dresses. Their jewelry bears the mark of the most popular name brand and is every bit as flashy as it is costly.

Lower than the consumptive evangelists are those who charge money to 'heal.' They use deceit and trickery to take your money and leave you with a false sense of hope. I blame not only these charlatans, but also those who believe in them. Where is the common sense in all of this? Jesus did not require currency to perform a miracle. There was no turnstile set up at the base of the hill where He preached. The disciples did not work the crowd. Through Jesus, God lived and His love was free for all who so desired

it. Salvation will not cost us the tangible things commonly used to barter, but the infinite value of our soul.

The evangelical circus clowns who scream through elaborate public announcement systems tell us they are the conduit to God. Through them, they claim God works His miracles and they can easily wipe away your illness. All it will cost is a small donation. To make our lives easier of course, if we cannot attend the spectacular religious event itself, we can watch it from the comfort of our homes. Not to mention, due to the marvel of technology, you can now purchase the book and cassette set, complete with illustrations, and autographed by the speakers themselves. Of course, it is a limited time offer and we should not hesitate to call now and order. With just three easy payments, we can be on the path of total enlightenment. With great confidence, I submit to you the following – it is a sham.

There is a doctrine of faith that states God exists in all living things. If we believe this, we can see that the only thing necessary to serve God and walk His path is to look within ourselves. The phony religious leaders will not remove your struggles or grant your prayers – only God can do this. Remember, it is through hardship we find the face of God. Each difficult situation strains our faith and sometimes it seems lost under the pressure. Gradually, we will establish our trust in God and fossilize our spirit.

The answers we seek extend far beyond the range of earthly wealth and false promises. Believe in yourself and God. The struggle will last a lifetime and we will have little or no control over where the road takes us. It is through Jesus we find God and all are welcome free of charge. Jesus did not wear a Rolex nor even own the clothes He wore. There are varied paths to God, but none are paved with gold and silver.

If we want control over our lives, then we mustn't give up that control to other humans – only God. Does the evangelist think of you when you weep? Does he or she look for you when you are lost? Will they turn the other cheek if you strike them? No. They are only humans, finding and losing their own path. They are not self-sacrificing missionaries living a life of poverty and fostering charity. They, like many of us, are for themselves. Give them nothing but your hope and prayers.

I say that, in many areas, we have the intellectual ability to search for God. We are both primitive and calculating. We can form firm concepts of the world and life costing nothing but thought and patience. How is this so? Because God lives in all of us and with Him, there is a prevailing reverence to the inquiring spirit. Through God, we will gain wisdom and advance our devotional worship. What matters is the spiritual desire to reach forth to a higher understanding, not the monetary contributions you make.

Do not acquaint yourself with those who use guilt to coerce the coins from your pocket. God does not use blame to call us to Him, but love and patience. Spreading reverence is still free and will remain that way.

Do not be confused by what I say about the evangelists who request money in return for artificial salvation. It is a good thing to donate to charity and help others less fortunate. Please do so with a peaceful heart and silent tongue. However, do not give into arrogance, boasting about your charitable donations. If we look into our hearts and ask God to guide us, we will know who is deserving of our money and who is not.

Jesus questioned the faith of the religious leaders of His time. Many of them were more interested in the wealth and power the church brought them and not the spirit of worship. The bible warns us of false prophets. Listen to your conscience and remember

the purpose of spreading the word of God is not to make a profit, but to save souls. I agree there are seemingly enlightened and influential religious people who appear much impressed with the principles of Christianity. However, they literally do not practice what they preach.

Handed down from God through the teachings of Jesus to all mankind is knowledge. Propelled by this knowledge or wisdom is a burning spirit in all of us. This allows us to interpret the parables and know the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. Conceived in the spirit of truth is the faith that God will protect us. Regardless of our independent religious orders and sects, the soul exists and appeals to a higher source. It does not take a highly trained intellectual mind to choose the right path or know someone is swindling you.

There are no short cuts or easy answers to faith no matter how flashy or costly the delivery. Seek in earnest the revered master and true prophet and you will be rich in spirit, with change leftover. Again, faith is a many-sided dilemma with varied descriptions, criticisms, and philosophies. If we truly wish to know the Savior, then it is a pilgrimage of piety that we must embark. Along this route, there will be spurious shelters in the form of the “pay and pray” dynasty. Again, remember Jesus spread His word throughout the land free of charge. His way of life was an open-air school lacking an obligatory tuition price.

## **Chapter 15**

Often, the ills of this world cause me to dream of a far off place where I could live a contemplative hermit's life. From a grassy hill, I would sit and watch the moon's reflection floating on the waters of a vast river. Only then would I be fully able to offer God the sacred words of my pious conviction.

How many of us have had similar daydreams? We become tired of our search for refined wisdom and chastened piety. The effort grows more difficult with each passing day. We pray for just a glimpse of heaven, but if granted, would we or could we resume our ordinary lives? Personally, I would lose all interest in life and eventually starve to death.

Therefore, we move along, at times resentful, and continue trying to prepare our minds for God's word. Do you wonder, as I, if you are suited to receive everlasting life? Or, if one day you will dwell for all eternity in that most treasured house? The days pass and I am not restful, despite a mind open to receive God's high teaching. Often the reception is poor due to day-to-day problems. At times, my attitude alone does not flex to the idea there is another existence beyond this one. I am not always so anxious to shine.

Inhibiting what I struggle to feel and express, is uncertainty. It creeps into my heart every now and then and plants doubt in anything holy. It is plainly the cult of one's spiritual work to not only maintain their faith, but grow it as well. The daunting task leaves us with a feeling of restlessness, fostering more pain within a contentious soul. In

an intimidating world, we have to wrestle all that we want from reluctant individuals and it's a scurried dash toward each goal.

Where are the vast and peaceful forests of mysticism? Why can't we belong to a culture that primarily seeks the enhancement of the soul? Why is it so hard to believe peace actually awaits us? These are hard questions to ask and impossible to answer.

It is only by virtue of God's promise that we receive this gift of eternal life. However, I freely admit that the earthly scenes that play out before us offer contradict the idea of the soul's existence. And, without a soul, how can there be eternal life? We are far removed from the mysteries of the universe and therefore it is difficult to find irrefutable truth.

Still, there exists immeasurable support in nature itself, from the smallest creature to the greatest, that its origin came from a supreme essence – how all things work together and toward an all-embracing ambition to survive, not die. This spiritual power reveals itself in all living things, preordained for time without end. It is then with praise, prayer, and passionate loyalty we must offer ourselves to God. Regardless of whether we are even worthy to lay at His feet and beg for mercy, no matter how weary we may be, there is no other way to mend our beleaguered souls.

While on this earth, my gestures may not always portray that I am soaring toward Christ. Few things I do could be mistaken for a highly trained soul approaching perfection. Some people have called my personality alone into question, and I will not dispute the fact that I am ill prepared to meet the Father of all creation.

Yet I try to give others and myself a fighting chance at salvation. The path of the righteous is a strenuous type of theology, requiring a weighty love of self and reliance upon God.

Our work toward enlightenment becomes more significant, and its rewards more apparent, as the years pass. Throughout this process, the doubts that prevent us from fully appreciating this chosen path are inevitable. We should consider the cycle of losing and gaining our faith a necessary component of spiritual amplification. If it is true that fear is the beginning of wisdom, then doubt is the basis of truth.

We all have to strain through vast amounts of religious rhetoric, judging each kernel of information on its merits. Of course, it is never immediately obvious what to accept or reject as fact. We cannot verify the usefulness of any of the vast religious opinions until we first toil at understanding. Again, I ask you to be patient. It is difficult to give anything all of your attention, and religion is no different.

As an example, I once attended a seminar where the speaker talked in a soft and methodical tone. I took great pains to listen intently to what he had to say. By the end of an hour, I had a migraine headache. However, I had learned much and his words deeply moved me. A year later, I read in a local newspaper that the speaker, whose name was Elie Wiesel, received the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize. If I had not made an earnest attempt to listen to the distinguished Dr. Wiesel, I would have missed many of his poetic expressions and a superior genius of rare idealism.

The road to enlightenment is a persistent struggle in and out of darkness, which represents sporadic inspiration. Yet, the work should continue until death. The original gap between fact and faith continues to be a major limitation to spiritual comprehension.

From the Ark to the Shroud of Turin, we can choose to accept God as a real entity or not accept Him at all. I suppose we can drift through life, as some do, not giving much thought to an almighty source of love. These souls miss a deep, rich, and meaningful life revealing the intense passion and potential of existence.

After careful and critical judgment, I believe the path to enlightenment discloses itself not in bits and pieces but rather in its entirety. However, I also believe that only in the final stages of our life, very near the end, do we see the majestic picture depicting our saintly efforts illustrated. Until then, we wrestle with our hectic contemporary lives, giving thought and energies to God in fits and starts.

I would like to take a moment to briefly, yet boldly, acknowledge those select few who selflessly dedicate their entire lives to worshipping God and serving mankind. They have taken vows of chastity and poverty – a life of deliberate acts to praise God and spread His word among the world. Tirelessly isolating their personal desires of the mind, heart, and flesh – often without adequate material compensation, food, or shelter.

While this type of sacred service significantly contrasts how most of us live our lives, I don't believe that we should feel guilty others have chosen this dutiful path to enlightenment. There are many paths to find ourselves in God's good graces, so to speak. These people have simply and intentionally chosen this specific path. We should view their inclinations to serve God and humanity outwardly as examples of human compassion, not as harsh comparison to a less rigorous form of existence. These people have shown many of us hope in a world that seems to degrade before our eyes. Their endurance alone is breathtaking and it is difficult to quell the admiration I have for them.

I remember their names and faces when trying to appreciate the sacrifices that they made while crawling down unclear and murky paths of holiness.

At times, when I am particularly strong, I ponder the thought of following them toward the unknown and never anticipated goal of pain and suffering. My thoughts are often interrupted by the usual comforts of prosperity and, for the time being, I resign myself to accepting the fact that I haven't their intestinal fortitude or faith. Not yet anyway. As the harsh indignity subsides, I begin to remember again that we are all important within the framework of God's plan. I am still learning and may choose this very path of service one day.

Regardless of how different people choose to serve God, all that is important is that a person does just that – serve God. Just as there are several paths to enlightenment, there are equally diverse ways to display our efforts of faith and spiritual learning. Each of us has a job to do and many of us do it well. Within the foundation of our communal faith, we are disciples despite our level of worship and occupations. I can still borrow from the disciplines of those who lead a life of total spiritual commitment. They are but a few of many symbols we have to show us the way to enlightenment. Profound ciphers indeed. I also recognize that my own life is not yet over. Like yours, my path is long and there are many junctions. For now, still hidden from me is what I will become as I search for God. Growing naturally out of what I learn from the many human beings of this world, I sincerely believe that we are tomorrow's heroes, myths, and oracles.

Along our paths, we will falter and think ourselves unworthy. However, remember that human hopes, delusions, and sufferings are the fortunes of mistakes – we will continue to learn nonetheless. Within the struggle of free will, against what is

unavoidable, there will be enlightenment. Much of the time, we will find it difficult to accept, given that our expectations usually vacillate between a mixture of dream and reality. However, regardless of willful avoidance, the vivid radiance of wisdom will find its way into our hearts.

I've attempted to give what I believe is a careful and comprehensive summary of an average path to enlightenment and service to God. With this, I must again humble myself before you and admit that the picture I try to portray is a moving and changing representation of hope and understanding. Like you, I can only speak from the experiences that have resulted in diminutive moments of wisdom.

In any case, the core of my being remains constant from one episode of my life to the next, pulling the overall whole toward faith. I believe in all of us and know that we are a fine creation. Despite the manifestations of our pleasures and trials through this life, our spiritual strength continues to show itself. I have witnessed the face of human ingratitude and misery in others and myself running alongside despair. Equipped with all our imperfections, burdened with curse and hatred, we still accomplish gratifying tasks of love and courage.

Join me in this adventure and our fight will be victorious. Just being on the road to enlightenment is sufficient in this world. If I may be inclined to borrow another's line, "a funny thing happened on the way to heaven."<sup>12</sup> There will be quarrels among us, resulting in the loss of values and sometimes war. However, look upward to an inexorable spirit that continues to shape the powers of right and look inward to the nature of ourselves, which is to serve God and one another. The closer we get to God the more

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<sup>12</sup> Connie Breedlove, 1996

we ache and delight, but it will be within this ascent of our souls that we will avoid the pitfalls of malice and pride.

It is never too late to lessen the threat against mankind and help wipe out the decay that pushes us far into the direction of material power and treachery. This is not how God intended our world to be. Embark upon the strange quest of revelation, changing what is wrong and solidifying what is right. Your path to God will be yet another musical of existence emitting an amazing tone.

## **Chapter 16**

All is well living a comfortable life, but what are we to do when overwhelming adversity knocks? If I am to be fair, then I must write in detail about not only best case, but also the worst-case scenarios of existence. In the presence of such trials and tribulations, life challenges us to maintain a firm grasp on both reality and our faith – if we have any at all.

The true test of faithfulness is when we no longer have feet planted firmly on the ground, our heads are spinning from a massive anxiety attacks, and it is not easy to know God or ourselves. Have you ever said, “I have had bad days, but this is ridiculous!” Life will knock the wind out of our breast and the strains of our problems will seem to resonate against the halls of hell.

Time after time, these awful experiences will feel as if we have never known pain. While trying to deal with such occasions, we are always like children lost and afraid. What person lives their lives without anguish? None. Of course, there are degrees of suffering, but pain is still and forever pain. Doubtlessly there will be moments of joy later in life, but while in the hub of despondency, there appears to be no stay of execution.

It feels as if God has singled us out, chosen us among billions of others, and crowned us with torture. But He has not. Problems befall each one of us, not because we are bad people or deserving of such suffering, but because we all live under the same divine parasol.

If the experience is traumatic enough, we may even be convinced that our Holy Father has forsaken us. This loss of faith forces the best of us to bow our heads under the weight of such woe. We can now only inch along a dreary trail bearing the judgment on our shoulders, hoping we are strong enough to abide.

We all have our own way of dealing with problems, perhaps some better than others. I certainly do not claim to know the best way to deal with tribulations, but during my life I have learned some things from many others and quite a bit more from only a few. For example, when I choose God as the focal point throughout my every day issues and occasional cataclysm, I remain attentive to possibilities. Also, God will never solve my problems for me, but the strength I can draw from understanding is enough to find my way out of difficult situations. And, when I reject all potential through God because of anger or dissatisfaction, He waits for me to emerge like a blaze of light.

If you feel strongly, and in complete disagreement with what I say, especially where it concerns assistance from a higher source, my advice will only be shallow sound effects. I can only make the suggestion to call the name of God for help, but I understand even I do not always have the strength to do so. There is a good possibility that even if you do, He will not shower you with gifts and flowers, or remove your anguish. These illustrious effects may come later, but it will always take an offering of faith and the patience of time.

Those who want to link themselves to an omnipresent force will recognize the true merits of faith – not only in times of trouble, but also in the basic errands of being. I am proposing we build upon a belief in God rather than seek a quick fix to what ails us.

Wherever there is life, there will be difficulties, even in the most civilized communities. Life's harms will evoke a harsh struggle for all men and women.

Instead of stubborn rebellion, I offer a contrary approach to deal with dilemma and disaster – God. Some may rightly call this perception eccentric. However, in a deeper and more profound sense, I see it as the imitation of perfection inherited from our Father.

In past and present ages, God has granted us vitality. Its value holds the same for the future. It is our birthright – our baptismal gift.

In return, we occasionally offer nothing more than vague praise, at that only because it has no dire consequences. Hence, we cannot comprehend the gift of God's assistance. Why are we so significant? To answer this question, all one needs to do is look at precious human life in its proper light. We are extraordinary and brilliant with a meaning measured against a creation of genius.

Without exaggeration, we still find pain around many corners regardless of God's love for all mankind. During our struggles, it is easy to conclude that God's creation is rather defective. However, life is always new and therefore we have a monumental array of chances. Our lives are an epic of labor dividing us internally and among each other. We ponder many aspects, but the toil we must endure dominates our lives. It is has been proven many times over that that which separates our spirit from God and our neighbor can also bring us closer together. Those unavoidable trials and tribulations can be an opportunity to assist rather than repel. We could make a small sacrifice to become companions of one another and join in a heroic struggle, yielding at nothing.

Life protects none from interruptions in our progress. In the foreground of our work is the hope for success. We dedicate our lives to clearing fields of obstacles in our paths. The land is harsh and uncompromising. Cast before us is the weighty responsibilities of civilization. Because of this, it is quite common that within our goals and thoughts is a principle purpose of survival. We believe during hardship that the heroes and heroines are all dead and God is asleep at the helm.

Please consider this. There is always a new harvest that needs to be cultivated by the hands of many, some of which will be total strangers – but not for long. As we drift down the troubled road of plight, whether in search of egotistic aspirations or those of a more noble character, there is help from all directions. This is a rugged and forbidding soil we call earth and at the same time, an Eden. Among the animals of this world are many humans who are both ready and willing to lend a hand – you are and can be one of them.

Within the uncompromising fields of life, our fruits sometimes grow from seemingly empty soil where we did not plant the seeds nor offer any nourishment. We are at times just too exhausted and forlorn. Our defenseless hearts will break as the misfortune becomes too great.

It is then we must call the ideal farmer and ask Him to send the worthy field hands. We then become strengthened, our faith in humanity reinforced. It is quite all right to leave apprehension at the door and ask for help. God and his children will hear you. Regardless of peoples different mentalities, languages, and customs we can all offer compassion. Our purposes may be countless, but at the least, we are here to save one another.

## **Chapter 17**

Seemingly lost in the new millennium is the question of suffering. Society propels us to believe the notion that constant bliss is a right, not a privilege. The civilized world is devoid of the understanding that pain is essential to growth of the mind and soul. Subsequently, people do not recognize the curious notion of evil, which may be the cause of some anguish, as evil at all. The immediate judgment of most individuals appears to be that the person who harms another is simply exercising their God given human or constitutional rights. This perception is not only wrong, but dangerous as well. It encourages inhuman behavior and in some instances, rewards it.

Behind a long stretch of years, during which we develop into an ever-changing human being, there are periods of slow growth. These intervals are usually painful and our efforts to deal with them will dictate whether we expand our souls or further destroy them. The question on many lips today is, “What of the soul anyway? What good has it done me in my pursuit for happiness and material wealth?” I will answer these questions as such. First, the happiness your soul will bring is beyond the petty desires of wealth, power, and lust. Second, the soul has nothing to do with any of the aforementioned aspirations. It is the wealth of knowledge, the power of wisdom, and the lust for human compassion that concerns the soul. Growth of these attributes is yet another step toward God, not monetary gain.

We have heard the saying, “rich in spirit.” This is true when we can learn to accept our small role in life. Those who can accomplish this rarely attract wide attention

and if they do, it is not of their choosing. I fully admit that true happiness is all too infrequent in this life. However, while we care for our souls, there is a proportionate joy to everyday living that is more vibrant than indifferent.

My efforts to better my soul and accept the necessary suffering have been infrequent, and at times lethargic. The work that intensifies my spirituality is exhausting. However, few desires move me like that of the search for God. As with others, ambition for sacrosanct ideals plays an important role in my life. Indeed, at a very young age I wanted to do something great, and still do. What this is, I have no idea. Excited by the legends of saints, I have often thought of quests through the desert that would cleanse my soul – to one day, be with God the Father.

I'm torn between feeling piousness and vanity when I think of such things. It is embarrassing to think that I may be just intrigued with fame, only interested in etching my name in the minds of people. I hope not. I also hope that one day it may be possible to prove otherwise.

When it comes to dealing with my own suffering, I still dream of being a hermit and not a saint. My first reaction is to run from pain and quell my agony. In fact, I am most interested in pursuing a peaceful life, not suffering.

It is not natural for a man or woman to dispense of all material pleasures. And misery is as far from our dreams as possible. We find it to be a personal affront when we find ourselves in the midst of misery's awful grip. One cannot dispute the fact that being born of pain is an eloquence full of wisdom, but what a terrible price we must pay for it.

In our world full of irony, faith, and free will, the vast amount of suffering still surprises us. Our imaginations reveal visions of hopelessness and we pass the better part

of the day wondering how terrible situations could have befallen us. Suffering consumes us and we become devoted to ridding ourselves of this affliction certainly meant for another.

I have found diverse ways of avoiding pain – not eliminating it, just postponing it. Eventually, I took into consideration the reality that I will expire. I decided I would not spend the brevity of my days in denial of anything unpleasant. And God said, “This too shall pass.” It is my belief that it will. However, I will choose the fundamental characteristic of my heroes in this regard, which is that in the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, power, wealth, or God, there must be suffering. I do not live in an ivory tower of fantasy. I fix my gaze on faith of a better day, however far off it may be.

The devotion to mankind, God, and myself must live in the present with my full understanding that all of our existences are fragile and riddled with pain. Beauty is everywhere around me, and so is anguish. How we serve others and ourselves throughout human endeavors and distress is and forever will be a direct reflection of our souls as God endowed them.

I will conclude this book on the subject of suffering because within its grave experiences there is serenity and strength not yet born. We are still the most beautiful creation on earth and I am most gracious to be a part of the beloved human race. I truly believe it is through our suffering that we will find the severe purification necessary to become closer to God. We are the true sons and daughters of Him. The artist is not at all finished with His masterpiece. It is a complex mural painted with the lighter hues of glory and the blood red daubs of human misery.

There still flourishes a hope for all of us. Our work is richly instructive and all contributions made to mankind will continue to flow from luminous and delicate individuals. Yet before we can hand over these ornaments of love and compassion, there will be suffering.

Please do not extrapolate from this point that we may find the glory of God through suffering alone. I am stating that suffering is a large part of any human life and through its intense gloom, there are marvelous effects. The trials of life will wound us physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. However, there is a sublime light that spreads over our hearts and allows us to discover a new star. Let us stretch our souls toward this star as three wise men once did.

Constructed by the Hand of the Master, we are the suffering worshippers and joyful pupils waiting for the return of Christ. There will be times of agony when we do not know if this belief falls under fiction or reality. However, if you possess a sense of the miraculous, then perhaps there is yet another spring twilight awaiting you. Whatever the pit in which we have fallen, I enthusiastically believe God has not forsaken any of us.

In spite of the dispute over the human soul and whether or not you believe in any religion, from time to time you will wake to a living nightmare. We can only offer each other sympathy, and at the least, this is all that we need to share. Further, if you choose not to believe in God or the devil, then at least have empathy for others and a little concern for dignity.

I will never cherish the evening of my despair nor always be tolerant of my Master. However, with much gratitude I wholly accept the prize that crowns my existence. I am only one of billions that have received this incomparable divine honor,

which not only ensures the suffering of all men and women, but also guarantees good will prevail in the end. The ethereal entity to which I refer unites The Father, The Son, and The Holy Ghost into all humans, raising our wisdom and virtues.

It is humbly our choice to embrace this belief and apply it to every aspect of our lives. Our hearts will then find their place between the luster and darkness of the human race, surpassing the flesh and reaching toward the tempest of the soul. What an enormous toil this life can be. However, try for the moment to throw a glint of faith into the idealistic struggle to merge what I have called The Four Hearts.