

CURIOUS JOURNEY

A big picture look at our story.

*“Eventually, all things merge into one,
and a river runs through it.*

*The river was cut by the world’s great flood
and runs over rocks from the basement of time.*

*On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops.
Under the rocks are the words,
and some of the words are theirs.*

I am haunted by waters.”

- Norman Maclean, A River Runs Through It -

*The cover is a large acrylic painting which I did a few years ago.
I was a fine arts major in college and have spent most of my
art life in the changing world of commercial art.*

*Family life, business, and general busyness eclipsed my
painting interests. Shortly after completion I was asked to
give it to a refugee center in our city.
That makes me smile - however long it is there -
and wherever it ends up.*

CURIOUS JOURNEY

by Dave Nadler

I regret that I did not get to meet you,
because I'm sure your journey has been every
bit as curious as mine.

But then, perhaps, we will tell stories together one day!

The old man breathes rhythmically as he contemplates what has happened in a few short days. He had just turned 80 and the idea he would now be standing on the precipice of his last days was inevitably shocking. As his interior world absorbed what was occurring around him - the concerned visits from his children, good friends, the hospital chaplain, and his vigilant nurses - a deep recognition welled up inside of him.

He has spent the 38 hours since what appeared to be a stroke with some heart complications - if he understood what he is hearing - sorting through his perceptions and trying to focus as he breaks in and out of the medications which have been prescribed for his comfort. He cannot deny it. Everyone around him is positive, but the agitated concern is unmistakable. This must be it.

There is a randomness to his thinking which is a chaotic blend of resignation, numbness, and fear. If only he could grasp what this all meant. The concept of being "ready" had certainly been one he had considered periodically. But his life had been full and busy, and these were things he was sure he could put off until another day.

He tried to arrange everything into some sort of order. The events of his life. His mom and dad. His dear sister. His two sons. The loss of his wife. His retirement. Traveling. It was now a nondescript ball of string - wherever he pulled, something else triggered, and he was left in a revolving door of memories, thoughts, and concerns.

And so the old man clenched his hands, struggled for breath, and slipped quietly from this life into the next. His story, just like my story and yours, had reached its final day. And the tapestried elements of his life are now "etched forever into the great river of timeless raindrops." Where all stories find their ultimate destiny.

STORY



Little captures our imagination more than a good story. What about a great movie that draws you in and inspires your replay button - hours and even days after you have returned to your own every day!? The “classics” endure because they are able to cross-culturally ignite minds over multiple generations.

A real modern tragedy exists in that we reject our own stories as “average” or “too ordinary” to matter to anyone else. We are robbed of our sense of wonder at an early age and slip into a tepid mediocrity created by special effects, highly paid actors and actresses, and million dollar ambient budgets. We believe we have nothing to offer because we have come to believe that story must be dramatic and “big” in order to matter. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Each of our stories is the REAL story, and the special mark upon each one of our lives is of huge human value. Our story is one that unfolds with uniqueness, beauty, and meaning – whether we believe it or not. It is time to become story-tellers once again. It is time to listen, laugh, cry, and experience one another as we impart our uniqueness within the isolating world around us.

FIRST MEMORIES



I think I can remember spitting peanut butter back at my grandmother from my high chair. How someone can hate tomatoes so much and consume buckets of ketchup each year is a mystery to me. I love nuts with a passion, but whip them into butter and you can put them on the shelf with the hummus.

As the oldest of seven kids growing up in north-central Wisconsin (that's about 50 miles straight east of "the Cities") I remember lying on my back in a field containing magnificent pussy willows, watching wispy clouds race across the spectacular true-blue sky. It must have been spring, because I distinctly recall the feeling of slowly absorbing moisture from the thawing tundra as it seeped through my t-shirt onto my skin. It was good to be alive!

An old bum named Philip lived about a quarter of a mile down the road in a patchwork shack. I would never call him a bum now - but that is what we called people back then who lived in shacks and peed out of the window. He fed his chickens road kill and traversed his world on a bike with rag patches wrapped around the tires. I remember feeling a strange, fearful attraction as he spoke in wild-eyed conviction about whatever subject. My visits were cut short by parental intervention when I persuaded one of my cousins to share eggs and some mystery meat Philip had prepared, something I felt my cousin needed to do without culinary participation from me.

I dropped a hammer out of our tree house onto my neighbor Danny's over-sized Baptist melon one day. I think I was retaliating for his launch of my underwear into another tree earlier that morning after we had spent the night in a tent. Danny's family seemed to be a strange people, and years later

I swear his grandma probably had sincerely prayed for my bankrupt, debauched soul. Danny taught me my first lessons in theology, and explained to me that Daniel was a superior character and name - in that David had fallen into sin in a big way. Like many Wisconsin Lutherans, I knew "God had given His only Son" but such theos of the heart was lost upon me. So I resigned myself to my inferior spirituality and my less than stellar name. I had often asked Mom and Dad if I could change my name to Bart Starr Nadler, but they just wouldn't give in. Thank God – today everyone would think of Bart Simpson when they met me.

Grandpa Gil died when I was pretty young. He had gone to school to be a pharmacist, but out of family necessity had returned to run the family's neighborhood grocery store and meat market. We lived in an apartment upstairs and I believe I can still smell those sides of beef as they were brought out of the cooler, cut and then chopped into braunschweiger, steaks, and hamburger. He and Grandma Roey divorced when I was quite young, and I remember asking her years later in the nursing home why it had happened. She looked at me with tears in her eyes and said she didn't know. I just figured his life was a big disappointment and that is why he probably drank himself to death.

I was about 10 when a couple of older neighbor boys tried to get me to experiment sexually. I ran home about a quarter of a mile and never hung out with them again. Somehow I knew that taking my clothes off in a field, while fascinating on a dare, was just a little too weird. About a year later, I was visiting a friend who collected piles of comic books like the Hulk. He let me look at his copies of Playboy. Good old Playboy! How often over the upcoming years I would come to appreciate its' role in my liberated sexuality. I had begun to have my eyes opened to what was cool (cynical reflection dripping with sarcasm here).

Seven kids in those days meant you MUST be Catholic, and I've got to tell you, I almost converted just so I could say

“oh yes, we ARE Catholic, thank you.” My Mom says that after three kids everything is chaos, so whether you have four or ten – it doesn’t matter. This reasoning did not work on my wife, who was willing to carry three bowling balls to full term – but no more. My Mom was pretty and blond and wore pedal pushers. She is one of the nicest people I know. Every night I would pray: God bless Dad, Mom, David, Lisa, Joel, Amy, Jeanie, Alan, Connie, and Freckles (our Springer spaniel), and all my aunts and uncles and cousins, grandmas and grandpas, and everybody else in the whole wide world. Amen. I got to where I could do this at the speed of light, and kept doing it until the eye of Sauron and the teen-aged years over-shadowed my soul.

At thirteen I went through the process of “confirmation.” This is where young boys painfully memorize John 3:16 and hope to God they are “confirmed” so the spiritual process can be over. I am sure it is not as painful for girls, who seem to have a more natural flair for the spiritual. I remember singing, leaning against a pew, and looking up at a stain-glassed window (surely a Sunday) and experiencing an overwhelming feeling that there really was a God, and that I might serve him some day. I think this was the first time I heard the Voice, but I allowed the feeling to quickly pass. After all, I had only recently become the center of my universe, and I was obsessed with every part of it. My Mom used to come in my room and grab my big toe and torture me until I would get up and go to “church.”

We moved from Wisconsin to Aberdeen, South Dakota when I was about 14. I say “about” because I can only remember three actual dates. I have mastered my wife’s birthday and our anniversary. The raging of puberty is bad enough, but moving was tough. And I swore that when I had kids I would never, never, never move while they were in school. This is a promise we have kept. By the time we relocated to the big city in Iowa I was sixteen and free-falling into self-absorption, and my self-life was in full bloom. As high school was completed and moved on to college I had

immersed myself in the politics of me. I would do anything for anyone – as long as there was something in it for me. This sounds sad, but in my many years of unraveling people's problems, I have run into this phenomenon incredibly often. It is necessary to define our separateness from God in order to have any hope of finding Fusion with His heart. Why in the world would good news mean anything to a soul who does not believe there is any bad news?

Many of the sensations, smells, and feelings of childhood still come over me in waves, although I must admit this is becoming more infrequent. One hot summer day, six or so of the paperboys in our small Wisconsin town collected \$1.75 to give Ronnie Melrose, if he followed through and ate a night-crawler. Sometimes I will think about this and recoil at the gritty memory of Ronnie making good on his dare. The feeling of my dad's hand as he ran it across my butch haircut. The first girl I ever noticed and how she made my stomach feel like red jello (without bananas in it). My little sister turning purple, biting my dad's finger as he tried to open her airway, and the amazing projectile after he succeeded. My amazement to realize that there was a world outside of my family – a world that was inviting me to experience, grow, and find my place in the story.

I am dropping parts of my memories on you, hoping you will see that I am pretty much like you. Change our names, town of origin, and personal experiences and we all share an exhilarating uniqueness along with our shared humanity. Some people never move beyond their own obsessive circle of self - and this is sad. I can see God's hand throughout my life, moving His circle of reality like a huge light over the edges of my soul. That's what this book is about for me. Attempting to communicate this vast, gracious, personal Light Who is trying with all of His heart to communicate to my alien soul. Trying to guide me out of the arena of self and into a world of liberation, fulfillment, and ultimately - Fusion.

I believe there is a deep me, and a surface me. There is an essence of me and then the colored wrapping that I allow others to see. The wrapping dominates when we are young and fashions either bondage or freedom as the choices and circumstances of our lives unfold. The Voice offers to rescue us from futility and steadily bring the “deep me” into harmony with something or Someone greater than ourselves. Philosophically this “Fusion” changes my surface self - and hopefully penetrates my world-view. Spiritually, Fusion begins to overtake my “deep self” and culminates in a decided change of heart.

By now you probably have sensed that I was a true child of the 60's and 70's. An exciting time to live! But through all my unfolding experiences, I have intentionally sought answers to questions I can carry with me to my last breath.

THE HEAVENS



I am sitting at a retreat center on the edge of the Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The reddish rock formations are incredible as they push upward out of the rocky green terrain, towering over my head and reaching up to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. When you spend most of your life in the Midwest, mountains capture your heart-awe much as the oceans do. I swear I have watched sunrises and sunsets where I am emotionally overwhelmed to the point of ecstasy – something I work hard to rationalize and suppress before I am seen by anyone else – yet the experience saturates my soul with a transcendent, timeless beauty.

One of the things for which I am grateful is that through all of my upbringing and much of my adult life my sense of wonder has remained intact. I say this because I have seen this beaten and squeezed out of so many people as they reflect upon and try to get their hands around the emptiness they feel inside. John Eldredge says this is a gift from God, and that I should be grateful to have not had my innocence and sense of wonder cut short. I feel I must agree with John because he is a kick-butt guy, and he might hit me upside the head with a kayak paddle if I don't buy in to this part of my masculinity. But isn't life without wonder a colorless companion? Doesn't the unknown eclipse the drab imaginations of mere rationalistic thinking?

Don't get me wrong, I have not thrown my intellect overboard. I have just made room for the supernatural. And in the unexpected I have watched my mind AND my soul cross new horizons.

Have you ever noticed that all movie aliens are, for the most part, bi-peds? If God did make other species and planets

(although creating in a number of different dimensions is probably adequate for Him) I wonder what these beings would look like? I suppose they would be bi-peds because God has hands, feet, eyes, and all that stuff (sarcasm here).

Now really – be honest with me. Don't you get just a little freaked out when you get one of those e-mails comparing the size of the earth with the sun, and the sun with other stars, and stars with the galaxy that is our neighborhood?! For crying out loud, the probe Voyager that was launched in 1977 is just reaching the end of OUR solar system. My God, how immense it must all be!

I have been watching the debate about the absolute separation between science and spirituality for five decades now, and I quite frankly think it is a crock (crock: a large container of crap). Why anyone would want to castrate the sense of wonder from the human race in order to explain our lack of accountability for our lives is all too understandable to me – but why do we want to obscure the Image so clearly stamped upon this massive outpouring of intelligent, caring design?

I tell you the truth – the stars take my breath away. We have a cabin in southern Iowa where we go to retreat, hold summer camp, and hunt in the fall – so I am pretty much there off and on throughout all four seasons. Some nights I will walk out onto the deck in the evening or the middle of the night and the spectacle will bring me to tears. First of all, I cry because I wake up two times every night to pee, but mostly because of the breath-taking sight as the heavens sing to my earth-bound soul. If I am so small and the heavens so immense – who am I – that such a Designer would take notice of me?!

Consider the chances for life on this planet are razor thin. Recent calculations indicate the probability of another life-giving planet within known space are almost non-existent. In just the last two decades Hubble observations from space have exponentially expanded our understanding of the

sheer immensity of what is “out there.” Added to this, recent science on how privileged our planet is to have a transparent atmosphere, allowing sustained life and giving us an ultimate “window” into our galaxy and the immense expanse beyond!

Even as I write, discontent among scientists with traditional theories on the origin of matter, evolution, and creationism splits the intellectual community. While there is censure and anger over what needs to be protected, many are simply unable to turn a blind eye to new science or a reconsideration of dated theories education has built upon since the 15th century. Intelligent Design is being revisited by those who are uncomfortable to embrace either Darwinian or Creation theories. And it appears the desire for open debate is being suppressed. Scientists are losing their jobs because they will not deny new science in favor of ideological sacred cows. All the while the average, educated American moves blindly in lock step with unproven but commonly taught “science.”

The heavens play a significant role in my process of Fusion with my Creator. Their unanswered questions of immensity and my subsequent smallness make me let down my guard and whisper “I am here” to the Designer. Even in my childhood, as I watched the northern lights dance upon the Wisconsin sky, I could hear the soft Voice calling me – “David – I know who you are.” To deny this intrinsic design and beauty in the galaxies - let alone the Voice written upon my soul – is the single greatest tragedy of mankind.

I choose to leave my home hibernation several clear nights a year - away from city lights. I sit and listen to a Voice so ancient that the mountains and oceans of our world youthfully tremble over such majesty. The heavens are a gift to the earthbound, and a key to the Fusion that longs to overtake a human soul. And that is just new discoveries in the macro. What about the river of data pouring out of the micro, even down to the building blocks of life itself?

Earthbound souls (there are billions of us) cry out for

transcendent meaning. And yet it is commonplace to leave this earth totally uninformed of such radical truth from the scriptures:

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.

And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, although He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist...’

- Paul, follower of Jesus, Acts 17

I carry the knowledge there is a Living God with me to my last day, and unashamedly make room for faith within my rationalistic psyche. There is simply too much evidence in what has been made to avoid an investigation of authentic faith.

AMERICANA



Grade school began each day with the “pledge” to the American flag. The principal would announce over the loud speaker, and every person in the school would place our hands over our hearts and in unison we would stand and say, “I pledge allegiance, to the flag, of the United States of America, and to the Republic, for which it stands, One Nation, under God - with Liberty and Justice for all.” This used to give me goose-bumps all the way up my back. Together with my positive experiences in scouting, it never dawned on me that there were people who thought our country was less than great. This all changed for me in the early seventies.

When I was 19, the Vietnam war was in full swing and incredibly unpopular. I didn’t feel right about working around my low number in the draft lottery (like heading for Canada) so of all things I joined a military police National Guard unit. As my long hair hit the floor in a basic training processing center, I sincerely wondered what I had done. Over the next eight weeks I lost six inches from my waist and looked like a laundry sack tied in the middle. I can still remember eating my mess hall meals in the ten steps it took to get from the serving line to where we dumped our trays. My drill sergeant would stand and eat my dessert while I did sit-ups and push-ups. For the next six years I rubbed shoulders with sheriff’s deputies, police officers, and other guys in law enforcement (a real mind-blower for me).

My military experience helped me in several ways. In basic training I thought I was going to lose it. Never before had I been in a situation where someone had complete control over my life. Yet I survived. Getting to know these men made me realize just how hard it is to be in enforcement. I learned

a great respect for the authority they wielded and why such oversight was necessary (in stark contrast to the “pigs” I had heard so much about in my longer-haired days).

The other good thing that happened during my time in the military is that I became a grown-up patriot. The sense of gratefulness and pride I feel at an event as the national anthem is played is hard for me to describe. Over the years I have had the opportunity to talk to veterans from several wars. I used to watch my father-in-law’s nerves activate as we asked him about missions over Germany, as well as old friends found and lost. It has become impossible for me to minimize these sacrifices made in the past, as well as those which are being made by thousands of families even as I write.

The world is a dangerous place. I am grateful to live in America. I am thankful for my freedom and thank God for the privilege to flourish in a free society. I hope our leaders will continue to protect our freedoms in the future. I am concerned for my grandchildren.

There appears to be a serious leadership vacuum all around us. Rejection of law has opened doors best left shut, and corruption of heart is leading to sliding ethics of epic proportions. The proposition someone would aspire in life to become a man or woman of God is rare. So we experience leadership without the underpinnings of law or character. I am concerned for my grandchildren.

As the world has changed and my faith in God has grown, my confidence in humanity has taken a hit. My observation is that the human solution is not social, political, or economic - it is spiritual. I have long ago given up the idea that mankind is evolving upward. We are just as needy as we have ever been, perhaps just a little more sophisticated.

This is one factor which drives my faith, and is a distinct turn around for my 60’s brain.

IMPERFECTION



I don't really want to write this part, but it would be unfair of me not to include it, inasmuch as my curious journey, like yours, has contained its share of disappointment. Perhaps being an "oldest" I have felt greater compulsion to "fix" things that don't go quite right. I call this "older brother syndrome." There **MUST** always be a solution.

When my youngest brother died at the age of 19 in a car accident my ideas about life, God, and what was "fair" really were challenged. When our youngest son was diagnosed with multiple heart defects and had to undergo two dangerous surgeries by the time he was 18 months, My wife Burney's and my beliefs were sifted in very painful ways. When my only daughter's boyfriend of her college years took his own life, deserted my little girl, and left her in a pool of agony, I think I had come to the point where "fixing it" was just not where I was able to live my life any longer. And when her firstborn daughter Rebekah died only hours after she was born, I finally got it. There are just too many things in life that cannot be fixed.

Each of these heart-breaking events drove me to places I did not want to go, and each time the Voice told me things I did not know. As He dealt suffering into my life, He continued to open my eyes to His world – a world where only suffering can bring redemption, and only through being rescued could true life flourish.

I have been meeting with a young woman for a number of months whom I met through my youngest son's network of friends. She has been hurt deeply by abandonment, abuse, and neglect and has finally come to her wits end over the incredible energy it takes to manage her disappointment,

anger, and fears for the future. As she desperately and guardedly unfolds her story, I am overwhelmed with sorrow over her pain. At the same time I am filled with hope. The same Heart who observed her years of imposed struggle is the One who even now is whispering to her searching heart. I am more accustomed to the Voice, so I do my best to help her to hear. “Julie, I am here. I have come to rescue you. You have felt lost, but I have never left your side. It is now time for you to come and find your purpose – your rest – your ultimate journey, your identity, and your destiny.”

You and I could recount many stories of imperfection. The times we have let others down or hurt them either intentionally or unintentionally. When we have been discounted, hurt, swindled, and even attacked. There are basically three directions we can go with hurt: we can become *embittered*, we can construct a labyrinth of *denial*, or we can wrestle with the absolute monster of *forgiveness* and come out the other end of the battle at peace. Peace in the knowledge justice belongs to God, “getting even” is a trap, and that imperfection is not unique to my life alone. It is a sad part of the fallen world in which we live.

We are, for the most part, unsteady travelers of sorts. We put on a good face, choosing to confidently size up our lives and push forward. We do so through the good times and the bad. But there are nagging questions at the edges of our minds: “Is my life counting for something?” and, “am I finding significance?” and, “Will I be missed when life is finished with me?” In times like this I have experienced Fusion as the Living God has disciplined, stretched, and comforted me. Imperfection has become my friend as deep strength has often been resurrected out of my human weakness. It is the sheer imperfection and uncertainty of life which pushes me to places I simply will not go on my own initiative.

Today I have just returned from taking part in the funeral of a 16 year old girl who grew up intertwined with our

lives. This seemingly senseless death (she was broad-sided by a fire truck as she was going to a mall) is touching thousands of lives as we all attempt to sort through our loss of Erika. Tragedy is a choice no one would choose. No one. And yet God uses loss and imperfection as a door into this uncertain place. The angry ask: "Why would a loving Creator allow such unjust sadness?" The fearful: "How can I possibly feel safe from this kind of tragedy happening to me or to someone I love?" The hurt: "How am I supposed to go on carrying this kind of pain?" And there are also those who live in denial about tragedy, life and death, pain and suffering. Each are ways of dealing with our personal grief.

In times like these we can walk bravely through the door of suffering and imperfection and find the heart of God. We can also shut down. Or we can embrace denial and detach from the bigger questions. My tentative, reluctant walk through the door of suffering has served my soul well each time. I'm actually not sure I have become any braver, - just more informed about life.

Perhaps you have had your share of disappointment. Someone who should have know better may have exposed you. An apparent friend has let you down and hurt you deeply. Or your dreams have been cut down to size by the reality of this imperfect world. All are part of the fruits of living in a fallen world, exactly the kind of circumstances which either can harden us into a protective shell or cause us to reach out for rescue.

Perhaps it was the consumptive-paced nature of my early years which accelerated my recognition I truly needed to be rescued. Or just God being gracious. Either way I have found a way to be free in the midst of imperfection. And even though I regret some of the circumstances of my life, I have found peace through authentic faith. And I long for you to experience this same freedom!

SOLITUDE



I am standing at the bottom of a very steep hill next to a frozen river bed waiting for the buck of a lifetime to cross hairs with my rifle. Not five yards over my right shoulder two deer come bounding down the hill. They have been running. One is a full-grown doe and one a yearling fawn. The mother ventures out onto the ice and looks back at her inexperienced offspring, unaware of my presence as her labored breath sprays foggy clouds in the cold air about her head. Slowly the yearling steps onto the ice, one hoof at a time, and then clumsily slips and clatters behind his graceful, more experienced mother. I am almost laughing out loud I am privy to such a rare moment...and just that quickly they are gone.

This is going to sound weird, but I have spent days on end, from sunrise to sunset, observing these vignettes which happen all the time and few people ever see (not many people are crazy enough to sit outdoors this long waiting for something to happen!). There is a rhythm unfolding with each segment of the day, and something almost other-worldly about so much quiet over this many hours. The misty, frosty cold just before the sun begins to rise. An all-day snowstorm, sparkling like a million diamonds as the sun goes down in the deafening quiet of eight inches of fresh snow. A pair of fawns frolicking in the snow, unaware of my presence as their playful interaction unfolds.

I am really grateful for my exposure to all things outdoor. My father grew up fishing and hunting, and instilled in me a respect and love for nature. I have countless awesome memories and experiences which I now share with my own kids and grandchildren.

In my times alone, particularly in some outdoor pursuit, I find a kind of rest television, music, yard work, or electronic entertainment just don't seem to provide. We are bombarded with noise from morning until we close our eyes at night, but the messages of creation are much more subtle and soothing to me.

I wanted to paint this picture because such times have been a real help in my quest to find Fusion. I find my mind is clearer, my heart more malleable, and my emotions more sensitized when I allow for this kind of event to occur. There are just so many voices competing for my attention – the ones from inside of me as well as those from without. Humans were made to be, in part at least, reflective, and we need to allow time for our minds, emotions, bodies, and even our spirits to rest.

The only other thing I have found to be effective in providing this kind of catharsis is the rare occasion I am able to forego food and engage fasting for two or three days. This adds the dimension of bare-wired emotions to the mix of my reflection, and helps me to clear away the familiar and embrace things unspoken.

People make the world go around. There is little doubt about it. However, solitude makes me good for others. Sameness ensures I will trivialize the value of my human network of relationships. To not speak or hear another human voice for a few hours can expose hidden parts of my soul. Cutting through the clutter of the noise of the tech-rich human experience can amplify reflection. To listen to a distant thunderstorm build, arrive, and rumble into the distance can add urgency to my willingness to experience deeper personal engagement.

The next time you prepare for the day and check yourself in your mirror, take a moment to gaze deeply into your own eyes. Look beyond your outside self to your soul. Can you see it?

GOD STORY



Old wall hangings were called tapestries, and years ago these decorations were works of art crafted by skillful hands. They were woven into intricate patterns and stitched from the back, like sophisticated needlework. On the front were beautiful patterns and colors, often designed by an artist and executed by craftsmen. On the back, or “work” side, were thousands of string-ends which were cut and embedded as each part of the design was woven. On the viewing side they were beautiful, emerging works of art. On the “work side” they were an unrecognizable, chaotic mess.

The Voice chose story to communicate with the human race because His story had to transcend any one century or individual culture. In this sense, all of our stories are being woven into a meta-story or “big-picture.” In God’s world no one is unimportant or impersonally connected to the Story. On the war side of the tapestry we experience love, pleasure, difficulty and pain. But the front of this work of art is alive with radiated life and glory – waiting for the unveiling of eternity.

It would make sense if you were God – and were not bound by the strictures of time – to make a lasting statement about Who You are. This would be especially true if one of Your primary goals was to be discovered. This is what the Voice did when He created the heavens and the earth. As He spoke the stars into existence, He planned this visual story right down to the last detail. Whether supernovas or DNA strands, each layer tells a part of the Story.

It would also be quite effective to give your Story to someone who would care for it with great passion, and make the Story available to the world. This is what God did through

the Jews. He embedded His Story within a people and through them gave His greatest gift to the world – eternal life through the shedding of His Son’s blood. The Jews were special in the sense that God set His affection upon one man (Abraham) to bless the entire human race. The Jews were not superior to other human families: they were the Father’s chosen instrument to carry communication of the Story.

As your story and mine unfold, we are no different than a child growing up in 3000 BC in Egypt or a grandmother taking her last breath after a long, full life in Spain in the 12th century. Our shared human story is filled with creative uniqueness as our Creator stamps His image on each of us. Just as He knew the moment our journey in this world began. He has appointed a day for it to end. This is one of the advantages of life outside of time. The years simply have no impact upon the Living God. And our stories are either connected to this meta-story or they are not. We face either significance or futility based upon our Fusion with this greater Story – and this Greater Heart.

Your story is intimately intertwined with that of your Creator. What you live for, how you look at life, and what you come to believe in your fleeting years all contribute to this greater Story. It is what makes us significant. It tells us what we were created with value and a huge capacity for enjoyment. We are either experiencing Fusion with this Story or we are adrift. What we think, what we do, and who we become are all indispensable parts of the Story which is being woven into the tapestry of time.

The bottom line? You matter more than you can possibly imagine. And there is ample evidence to suggest the Writer of this great Story has not only spoken through all which has been created, He has actually shown up in human history to tell us about it.

THE LOAD

Philosophy – Spirituality - Education

“When I look back on all the crap I learned in High School – it’s a wonder I can think at all.” – Paul Simon

What a philosophical, theological, and sociological mess. Instead of “evolving upward” as we have been taught, it appears the opposite is true. With greater sophistication comes more refined oppression. We mistake the unfolding whirlwind of knowledge for personal significance in the story.

Educational bastions have got to be the epitome of arrogance. To think that mere information processing prepares a man or woman’s soul for what we encounter in life is an absolute load (this is exactly the same as a crock, but much larger). Put aside the politics of higher education for a moment and just focus on honest thinking and valid pre-suppositions for learning. In all of my years of school (which seemed many), I can remember precious few teachers who gave a flip about the interior world of their students. Often as not I was exposed to the humdrum processing of information or the supposed opportunity offered to absorb the insights of the “expert” – for the privilege of becoming a non-thinking clone.

I suppose all of this is our own fault for worshipping education and not seeing the proper place of learning and its role in our Fusion with our Designer. Don’t get me wrong, I think education plays a significant part in resolving much human misery in the world. And I am quite sure being a teacher is a maddening task on many levels. I am just unclear as to the benefit of separating intellect from the part of us which is our eternal compass. It seems we are setting ourselves up for failure. Attainment and/or achievement with no ultimate purpose makes for an empty shell.

I heard someone say recently that political correctness will be the death of America. I think they may be right. In my lifetime political correctness has taken root, flowered, and produced the empty fruit of secular progressive religion. While some of the tenets of politically correct thought are helpful to the human family, the religion of secular progressives is sometimes illogical, mostly intolerant, and often a band-aid on real issues of life - where healing surgery is needed.

Religious people are a curious lot. We are the epitome of dichotomy (I love to be able to use words like this – it makes me feel intellectually secure). We embrace mono-theism on the one hand while the other hand shapes the Mono into our own images, allowing us to live one way in our hearts and another with our bodies. What bliss to call upon icons, vain philosophies, and baal-likenesses of the gods we fashion to rubber stamp our belief systems, whitewash our proclivities, and to cover our naked souls. The very nature of idolatry (the worship of baal) is that he was a huge god with many faces. It was not uncommon for baal to have hundreds of faces, one for each village and even for each home.

The new reformers, bless our hearts, are a true study in devotion and simplicity. We have all the answers, have crafted a plethora of formulas, and hobbitishly embraced marketing to the soul. In many cases we have exchanged the invisible for the visible, the sacred for the pragmatic, mystery for the “rational.” We champion slogans, tolerate immature or inaccurate theos, and are unwilling or afraid to pay the price Jesus’ Kingdom spirituality exacted from both leaders and followers in the first century.

And I wonder – does anyone really read the Bible anymore? Honestly, critical thinkers understand no living person in any century would ever write a book like the scriptures - and if we did – he or she would paint the human race in a little better light. And IF there IS a God, how would

He choose to communicate with humans over many centuries, within many races, and to many cultures? I am not even sure we give ourselves permission to ask real questions anymore for fear of their implications.

After pondering this I have concluded that “story” would be the best way to communicate the essence of truth to mankind. Apparently God already thought of this, but as in so many areas I am just catching up. Every possible methodology has flaws, and story is no exception. But if you want to capture imagination – do it in story.

This is why movies and books continue to motivate us – they assemble emotional words, mirror and enrich our thoughts, and flesh out the longings of our souls. This is exactly what the Voice did by giving us the Bible. It is the story of thousands of lives who were given the opportunity to know our Creator. In one sense the Great Story is still being written, and Kingdom hearts are right in the middle of the plot! Your story, for better or for worse, is a part of an eternal story being woven into the great tapestry of time.

When I think back to my high school and college friends (many memories haunt me to this day), I think we were all looking for something genuine or authentic. This was swept away by a tide of necessity, attainment, recognition - and for many, disillusionment.

I am hopeful for younger men and women. I think you want your lives to be genuine – to be connected. The isolating impact of materialism and social and familial disconnection is not lost on you. Will you have the inner courage to revolt and insist on substance and connectedness? Time will tell. You are still in the early stages of your story.

AROUND OUR TABLE



When I met my wife, the process of Fusion had just begun to ramp up for me. A few weeks earlier I had begun to hear Jesus' Voice. I was really lonely and asked God to give me a partner for my life, and then I crossed paths with this blonde, mini-skirted beauty. Years later I was looking through some old childhood photographs of Burnadette. She is about five years old and is sitting on her parents' front porch feeding a doll with a bottle. For some reason this photo captures the essence of my wife. I would never have seen it in our early years, I was much too self-absorbed. I keep it now to remind me of the soul with whom I am sharing my earthly life. I save it now to keep myself grounded.

I owe our family life to my partner. She is the nurturer who made the houses in which we have lived a home. There were years where she wept because of the way she was looked upon with condescension for not being a career driven, self-fulfilled woman. How could anyone find significance caring for three kids, a husband, and a dog? We didn't have much to say to critics at the time, but I have a lot to say now. I am really quite weary of enlightened people who pull out unsubstantiated values and untested principles and impose their condescension on others.

Women who shoulder the role of nurturer should be prized and honored as the best that a woman can become. Period. I have come to value many of such kind women as providing the true foundation of life. Because Burnadette was willing to set herself aside and serve our family, we have reaped riches beyond anything pop culture values could attain or would even recognize. I think she would tell you she has received everything back and more. Men and women who step up are precious to God. After all, "there is no greater love than

when a man lays down his life for his friends.” Our table has hosted thousands of real-life conversations. We have laughed uproariously, cried together with friends, we have spoken and received hard words, and have given and received words of comfort.

Our children grew up wide-eyed watching these conversations and animated laugh-a-thons. I wouldn't trade what has happened in our home for any array of earthly possessions. My house and my heart would be an empty shell without Burnadette. She has embraced the life of a nurturer with all of her heart, and I love her dearly for it. Her heart says welcome long before the invitation leaves her lips. And that has fueled my desire to protect and provide.

Because I am a driven worker who is willing to “give it up” for my ideals and my work – it was easy for me to spend too much time at the office. I came home late one evening and Burnadette explained to me in quiet and definite terms that we were going to need to keep the dinner hour sacred in our home. One time each day we were going to be together, face to face – despite counseling, appointments, house remodeling, hunting excursions, little league, swimming and volleyball practices – whether it was 4 o'clock or 7 o'clock – the family was going to be together. I had no idea how profoundly this would impact our family.

Parenting (of any aged children) is all about connecting and remaining appropriately connected throughout the unfolding stages of life. Dads providing security for daughters. Mothers building up and then letting go of their sons. Brothers learning to respect women and care for their sisters. Sisters navigating the male ego and learning what it means to bring out the best in a man. Girls learning what it means to become a woman of substance. Husbands loving their wives through thick and thin – giving them the grace to unfold, mature, and bless others. Wives providing loving respect to their husbands. Families built upon ideals and values which can carry to succeeding generations.

As I now watch our grown children open their lives to others I see my wife's imprint of grace and hospitality on each of them – and now being delivered to our dear grandchildren. I am deeply grateful to have a wife who has learned gracious hospitality – and lavished kindness around our table and in our home, without partiality or thought as to what was in it for her. In all of this I enjoy the great privilege of individual friendships with all three of our now grown children and their chosen life-partners. Each has become a part of our circle of friendships. Each of them respects me (which they learned from their mother) – and each of them cherishes their mother (which they learned from me.)

I can't help but wonder if many of our current family issues with ADD, ADHD, etc. aren't somehow connected to the cultural shift in the family. Lavish, accepting love and vigilant structure is pretty much the biblical prescription for raising kids. We have enjoyed the freedom to love our kids deeply and to discipline them consistently. In this we have no regrets. Nor do they.

While this chapter may sound a little syrupy and indulgent, I wish desperately for young men and women to see what CAN BE if you devote yourself to building life upon relationships and not upon mere attainment or self-promotion. If we make it our goal to experience Fusion with our Creator's heart for our lives – His plans for richness, peace, and love which many would give their whole world to obtain – we find a worthwhile treasure to be pursued, even at great personal cost.

CURIOUS PEOPLE



One thing that astounds me about life is that no two people are alike. How can there NEVER be two identical people – over all of the centuries? Written in our DNA is complexity and individuality – humanity is an endless stream of uniqueness. People are incredibly interesting, and the less self-centered we are, the more interesting we become.

In our years in the people-business we have met some truly strange – and truly wonderful people. We are sure you have as well. As for the strange...

We once met a man who could talk the paint off of a barn. I am not kidding. You could begin with any subject - he was well-read and knew tremendous amounts about literally anything, anyone, and anywhere. All monologue. There was no amount of dynamite that could break his endless stream of self-conversation. To top it off, God had given him the gift of monotone. He is king of talk in our minds, and his reign has lasted to this day. Sometimes late at night, we huddle together, remember, and laugh maniacally under the protective shield of the covers...

Picture this: we are sitting in our living room being given a passionate presentation on the fact that ancient Egyptian men, when they tried hard enough, were able to produce milk for newborns. Outside of the creepy unnaturalness of even discussing the subject, can you imagine being passionate about this? These are just a couple of stories about the weird - for purposes of illustration. Most of our “weird stories” will be buried with us (you don’t know who you are). 😊

We have also met our share of toxic people – those who do what they do for personal gain and to make themselves

look good in the eyes of others. They use people and discard them like old clothing when they are finished getting what they want. As the toxic show their true colors (they are impossible to avoid) we have learned to be prayerful and to not become embittered at what was taken from us. Forgiveness is God's gift to the world, and whenever we apply it in our difficult relationships, our hearts are the better for it. Probably the best hedge against toxic people is for me to remember how often I hurt people on my journey. It is good to know that God will make all things right and that justice is in His compassionate hands.

Humans are a curious lot. The unloved daughter who struggles to love her own children, the self-absorbed man who cannot see anyone but himself, the uninvolved father who craves love he cannot now have and still finds difficult to give. Billions of people and just as many stories – and each of us living in a circle of stories never occurring before and never unfolding the same way again!

Compassionate people bear the image of God better than almost anyone. We have had the privilege of walking with many truly selfless people. They absolutely live for the approval of God rather than the recognition of men. Deep in their hearts they are able to weep and empathize with the trials of others. They rarely need people to perform in order to be good enough to receive their care. People simply have value to them, because people have value to God. They are gentle, humbled souls and will surely inherit the earth.

A “tradition” among those with whom we walk our life-path is to celebrate milestones: birthdays, anniversaries – special occasions. One of our friends (let's call him Bill) was being treated to a string of memories from his grown children, his friends, and some siblings. As the birthday cards were opened and stories exchanged, it became quite clear God was blessing Bill with a picture of how God has used him to influence others in quiet yet very direct ways. His secret?

He takes an interest in people (no matter what their age, sex, or background) and is able to connect with them and love them for who they are. He loves others without judgment. After decades of loving in this way he has made his dent in the world. Some men would give anything to hear the kind words coming from the mouths of these appreciative, love-filled friends and family. All because he discovered a small part of who God made him to be. Bill is one of the most courageous men I have ever met.

Over the years we have known some very special people (often women) who have endearing gifts of faith. They believe God for good things, even when bad things are happening. They steadfastly hold confidence God has our best interests at heart, and that when the time is right, know He will move His hand. Their special contribution has helped us to learn to look at life with spiritual eyes and to live for what is unseen rather than merely what we can see or touch. These sensitive souls bear and endure hard things, believe good things, and hope for God's best – always. They are undiscovered treasures in a shallow world, and I am a better man for having been privileged to walk with such women. I have watched many men and women fold as difficulty and pain enter their lives. Right now I am seeing faces of those who have not shrunk back in the face of the tests of life - but have allowed God to galvanize intentionality into their faith. These are very special companions - dear to our hearts.

Kind and faithful friends are hard to come by. We have the privilege of a circle of friends who genuinely care about our welfare and love us even when we are unlovable. They faithfully tell us the truth about what they see, and have been incredibly forgiving, patient, and prayerful about our kids. They remember us with heartfelt interest as we encounter our milestones – both joyful and sad. I have had situations where I lost my way and did unforgivable things – and they remained loyal. Each live on principles of faithfulness and are not obsessed with what others can bring to them – but what they can give to others. We would not have survived emotionally

without these special friends. They have been an anchor in our curious journey.

We have also had the privilege of walking with some very courageous souls. These individuals hold to their convictions - often at great personal cost. They are people who realize it is not possible to have it all, so they choose in faith to embrace good things which are an investment in eternity. They encounter adversity and difficulty with grace as well as the perseverance to hold to what they know to be right. Men and women of courage don't compare themselves with others – they live principled and often sacrificial lives with very little recognition. Such men and women have galvanized us when we were weak, and carried us when we were broken. They can be counted on to have our back – and have saved us over and over again.

My memories are filled with a stream of faces - chances for us to glimpse through windows into the essence of souls who are living remarkable lives. Together our stories are being written into the eternal human tapestry that gives us ultimate meaning.

Our community of companions will never be able to write a book about how to build a big, successful, ministry or “church” (there are plenty anyway). No one will interview us about our visible, sweeping success. But we will end our days having known deeply some of the most precious people in the world.

My wife Burnadette and I cannot adequately express how these servants have shaped us, sustained us, and given us the courage to continue our own walk of faith. Each of you has been key to drawing us closer to the Living God, and invited us to the higher calling of Fusion with the Son. We would be much less without you, and couldn't be who we are apart from you.

FORGIVENESS



Letting down and being let down seems to be an inevitable part of life. Each broken relationship provides another chance to mature or to be stunted in our growth. Jean married Phillip when she was 20 years old. As their new marriage began to unfold, it became apparent that Phillip had a huge problem with alcohol. While it didn't keep him from being a successful business owner, it crippled his relationship with his wife, their friends, and with his two boys.

Many promises were made and broken, and Jean shed many tears over the inability of her husband to overcome his demons. She loved him anyway, clung to her faith in God, and did not succumb to her desire to become embittered. She and the kids were hurt numerous times by Phillip's drinking. And Jean forgave her husband over and over. She supported him when he was unsupportable. She was truthful with him when it was often unpleasant. She kept her vows and loved him through everything. Throughout their marriage Jean was forged into someone she would never have become without Phillip. Her soul grew while her life paid a huge price.

Julie's mom never seemed to get it right with her girls. She was overbearing, often unreasonable, and many times even mean. Julie and her sisters took the brunt of her moodiness, and the attention lavished upon their brother was something the girls grew to resent. Dad was distant and uninvolved, choosing to detach rather than face the wrath of Julie's mom.

Her youngest sister went to college, and for all practical purposes, never returned. Julie's other sister reeled under the weight of being unloved and made choices that sent her spiraling on a path of self-destruction. Julie's brother

eventually married, but for some reason found his wife not quite good enough, eventually divorcing at 32, very disillusioned with marriage and relationships.

These stories are a composite of a hundred more just like them. People facing the demons of their pasts – and finding forgiveness to be a huge ally in embracing human brokenness. Jean's patient love won Phillip over. Though he can still be difficult, he has learned to love Jean for her faithful care for him. She held the family together, and even today, he gives her full credit for saving him - as well as rescuing his relationship with his sons. Her forgiveness has broken the stranglehold of his self-loathing. There is freedom, where, without forgiveness, there would only be layers of crushing bondage.

Julie has slowly forgiven her mother for her hurtful mothering. Her faith has opened her eyes to her own mother's pain. This all occurred quite unexpectedly one day visiting her grandmother in one of her remaining lucid conversations. As Julie's mom's mom explained the harsh and painful experiences of their family in the years while Julie's mom was growing up, it was as if a key turned in the lock of a dark room filled with volumes of information. For the first time Julie had perspective on her mother's life – and this insight set her free to begin the process of forgiveness. She can't fix her siblings' issues with her mom, but she can love them and remain on her own road of forgiveness. Julie prays for forgiveness and reconciliation among her family, and tries to love them with as little prejudice as possible.

It would have been easy to write this part by giving you some principles and formulas for forgiveness. Fusion in forgiveness happens when you believe that there is actually Someone who does understand and care about you. For the most part, we believe that we are very alone, and no one else can understand what it means to suffer the way we do. This is simply not true. Certainly there are greater injustices than others. I would never want to minimize another person's

pain. My point is that when someone has never asked for and received forgiveness, it is very hard to forgive others. In order to be forgiven, we must believe we have something for which we must be forgiven.

Bitterness is a cruel master, laying her claim upon the one embittered much more than the one who has done the abusing. If you have been trapped by the bitterness which comes from not forgiving, Jesus is the ultimate deliverer from this kind of heart-breaking bondage.

When Jesus died He forgave disappointment, betrayal, and huge personal loss. He set the gold standard for achieving the wonderful gift of personal peace. His teaching was clear on this:

“One of the Pharisees asked him over for a meal. He went to the Pharisee’s house and sat down at the dinner table. Just then a woman of the village, the town harlot, having learned that Jesus was a guest in the home of the Pharisee, came with a bottle of very expensive perfume and stood at his feet, weeping, raining tears on his feet. Letting down her hair, she dried his feet, kissed them, and anointed them with the perfume.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man was the prophet I thought he was, he would have known what kind of woman this is who is falling all over him.” Jesus said to him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Oh? Tell me.”

“Two men were in debt to a banker. One owed five hundred silver pieces, the other fifty. Neither of them could pay up, and so the banker canceled both debts. Which of the two would be more grateful?”

Simon answered, “I suppose the one who was forgiven the most.” “That’s right,” said Jesus.

Then turning to the woman, but speaking to Simon, he said, “Do you see this woman? I came to your home; you provided no water for my feet, but she rained tears on my feet and dried them with her hair. You gave me no greeting,

but from the time I arrived she hasn't quit kissing my feet. You provided nothing for freshening up, but she has soothed my feet with perfume.


Impressive, isn't it? She was forgiven many, many sins, and so she is very, very grateful. If the forgiveness is minimal, the gratitude is minimal."

Then he spoke to her: "I forgive your sins." That set the dinner guests talking behind his back: "Who does he think he is, forgiving sins!" He ignored them and said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

- from Luke 7 in The Message

To be free to live and complete your own curious journey at peace you must find the potent help forgiveness can bring. Through forgiveness we find the heart of God.

MORNINGSTAR



Several decades ago my dad and mom purchased eight acres in south-central Iowa. It reminded them of Wisconsin, partially because it was very remote and also because the mosquitoes were as big as songbirds. It is situated on a “lake” that the locals say used to be 30 feet deep, but now boasts about the same number in inches. It is now home to carp, geese, and ducks; and most of the year resembles the landscape of Mars.

About the time we were having babies (actually, to be fair, Burnadette was having the babies), I decided this little patch of land needed to become a place to get away. The first latrine (for about seven young teens) consisted of a hole, a rope between two trees, and a blanket to hide such precious moments. These were the pioneer years at Morningstar - clearing brush, getting poison ivy, building outdoor toilets, getting poison ivy, building awesome tree houses, playing capture the flag, and getting lots of poison ivy.

Our children grew up with Morningstar - from tents, to a camper, then a cabin, running water, indoor plumbing - to a year round getaway home - each step has been a gastro-nomic, arduous treat. My daughter Rachel and two sons David and John shared this with me. Burnadette (in her own way) shared it as well. Each summer I would take off for a week in the woods with my three kids - looking in the rear-view mirror to find the adoring, lingering gaze of my wife who was free...free...free! For five days she could call her life her own (catching up on laundry – but she WAS alone).

For our community of friendships, Morningstar has become an expression of boys becoming men, girls becoming women, and men embracing one of the highest callings we will ever face – as shepherds of our homes. We enjoy climbing

walls, a rifle range, canoes and kayaks, fire pits, deer, wild turkeys – and in the winter – a wood stove with a clear fireplace window on the front. My favorite time here is winter – often when the weatherman predicts five or six inches of new snow, I will jump in my truck and hole up at Morningstar for the duration, looking out the many windows, reading, and doing office work at an incredibly productive, creative rate.

Just last fall about 20 or so dads and daughters gathered for an annual overnight at Morningstar. After grilling burgers, cooking pizzas, and sharing the other fast food destinations we had encountered along the way, we hung out playing cards and board games and eventually gathered around the campfire. We took turns telling why our girls and dads were special to each one of us, taking care to bless our girls with words of affirmation, appreciation, and hope. Miles away from the city on this particular moonless, cloudless night we viewed a panorama of absolutely spectacular stars. We walked into the field that adjoins our timbered land and pointed out constellations, prayed, and sang a beautiful God-song that we all knew. It was perfect. After 25 years many of our girls (and boys) still come home each year. We watch young women with their own children sitting side by side with a new generation of six and eight year old girls, many with their own dads who have now become “papas.” Let’s just say it is a treasure which my feeble word pictures do poor justice.

We have shared many experiences at Morningstar – summer camps, family getaways, and great friendship and neighbor times. There is just something good about leaving your mainstream, even for just a few hours, and reconnecting with reflection upon those you love – and the things that bring true meaning to life. All of this without the distraction of video games, the internet, or time-guzzling television sets.

Several hundred children, teens, and adults have revealed parts of their stories at Morningstar as we have cared for one another, faced the awkwardness of being human, and grown up. Some stories are only fragments, some of the kids

are having children of their own and still play a regular part in each others' lives – but each piece forms an overlapping part of our circle of stories.

We met Thomas when he was about ten. He came to summer camp one year and was a kicking, spitting, spoiled piece of work. I can still see his little face when Skip, Karlen, and I took him in the cabin and explained the “man facts” of life to him. For the next ten years we never had a problem with Tom's behavior. It has been a privilege to be a part of Thomas' journey toward becoming a man of God.

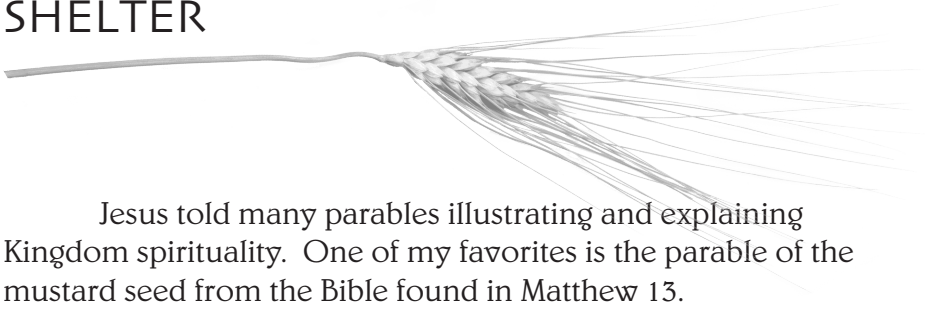
Sometimes I will be sitting alone at Morningstar and the Voice will bring one of these soul-strands to mind, and as I recount whatever memory is evoked, I pray for that particular person, and am grateful for the supernatural connections in my life. I am haunted by the fleeting aspects of life.

Tonight I am watching my three oldest grandsons sleeping in their bunks in our cabin at Camp Morningstar. I feel a thousand miles away from the busy world that clicks along around me at the speed of light. As I listen to their breathing I pray for Fusion with their Creator. I am hopeful tat their individual imprints on the souls of the people they love will be great. I dream of meeting them face to face after they have lived out their own lives of faith, sharing endless God-stories and enjoying a suffering-free eternity - when these shadows become rivers of light.

“We couldn't be more sure of what we saw and heard— God's glory, God's voice. The prophetic Word was confirmed to us. You'll do well to keep focusing on it. It's the one light you have in a dark time as you wait for daybreak and the rising of the Morning Star in your hearts.”

- 2 Peter 1:19 in the Message

SHELTER



Jesus told many parables illustrating and explaining Kingdom spirituality. One of my favorites is the parable of the mustard seed from the Bible found in Matthew 13.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. It is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

A number of years ago we helped start a ranch for at-risk kids. Each week of the summer we would pick up about seventy-five campers in the city, spend five days together with our special team of counselors, and then deposit the kids back to the care of their parent or guardian. In that first year I had a lot of contact with the children, and there was a little eight year old who spent all of his time collecting treasure: a neat rock, a discarded fishing lure, a shiny something dug out of the dirt. As he collected, Jimmy put his treasures into a safe place. For a lot of these kids, just being safe was a huge deal.

Jimmy had very few clothes and a small bag of possessions he had brought with him to the ranch. I happened to sit next to Jimmy on the school bus as we made the one-hour trek back to town. As things quieted down he began to lay his treasures onto his lap along with his art project he was bringing home. I reached over and patted his head like I would have done to one of my own boys and he leaned toward my touch. Slowly he looked down on the treasures in his lap and carefully selected a shiny piece of metal. He looked up and held it out for me to take. This little boy was telling me that he noticed he was being sheltered, and in his own language he

gave me one of the most meaningful gifts I have ever received.

This is the way I see it. The gift of life was planted in me – not by blood, nor by the choice of man – but by God. I am given a certain number of days for the stewardship of my life. Men and women of peace (Luke 10) are those who design and live their lives to provide shelter so the “birds of the air” may nest in safety. This is my aspiration: to provide shelter.

I take the stewardship of my family seriously and do everything within my power to sacrifice time, talents, and treasures for their welfare. We don't parent in name only, we parent in heart. Burnadette and I devote our primary energy to raising our children - viewing them as eternal beings with a finite number of days in which to choose to do good. We constantly keep the question before our own distracted hearts: “What are we doing right now that is investing in shelter for our own kids and how are we teaching them to provide shelter for others?”

We are also becoming people who devote regular portions of our income to care for some grouping of abandoned souls in our world. An orphanage in India, a refugee center in our city, a relief organization easing suffering around the world. We take this role in life seriously and view every relationship with the potential of giving increasing shelter to others.

It is obvious a calloused, self-driven heart will keep us from being men and women of peace and shelter. But for those who tap into the streams of compassion which flow from the Voice – our hearts simply cannot accept turning a blind eye or a deaf ear to those drawn into our personal spheres. You know who you are! There are thousands of us in every corner of the earth. Our hearts crush us into action on behalf of our lost and dying world. We see the hand of our Rescuer reaching into a dry and weary land, and we want to help. We desire to see sheep find a shepherd just as we have found our own place of shelter.

After our children had all moved out of our house we were made aware of a 13 year old, African-American boy whose mother had just gone to prison. He had been in a shelter for several weeks and we were challenged to give him a home until she got her back on her feet. Now Burnadette and I were enjoying our mobility, so it was with much consideration and soul searching we weighed the options. We needed our freedom. Kyle needed a safe place for a few months. After 20 months with us, Kyle moved in with his sister to another foster home. He had become a huge part of our lives. He taught us about black culture (and my definite lack of rhythm) and through his clean-slate openness to advice - we were taught once again about the power of shelter. It cost us to open our hearts to give Kyle shelter. But what he gave back to us cannot be measured – and returned to us a hundred times more.

My funeral is going to be very short and have two songs. “I’ll Follow the Sun” by the Beatles and “Dream a Little Dream of Me” by big old Mama Cass. My hope is that those who remain; my children, grandchildren, friends, and those whom I have helped along the way will reflect and say “thank you God, for Dave, and for using him to give me and teach me about a life of shelter.”

As I contemplate heaven I feel it is way under-rated. The idea that we will float on clouds like little toilet paper peddling angels playing harps is quite frightening. Let me get this straight – I have been given immortality, I will be rubbing shoulders forever with some of the most amazing persons who have ever lived, and I will be on a first-name basis with my Creator. Who, by the way, has no limitations on His intellect, creativity, compassion, beauty, or capacity. This is boring - how?!


Through giving shelter we escape the futility of existence and find our part in Kingdom joy. When we stand before the Voice who has rescued our soul, and brought us fully into the Fusion where immortality overtakes mortality

and the place where we will find forever rest.

I try not to underestimate the power of the intentionality, passion, and faithfulness involved in providing shelter. It is good for my soul.

CREATIVITY & BEAUTY

Music – Art - People



At Camp Morningstar there is a small clearing adjoining the edge of the timber which is planted with clover and natural grasses. One moonlit night one summer at around 11 PM a group of us walked out into this field. The Milky Way was so bright and the stars so pristine that it felt absolutely wild. Every few years the fireflies are abundant and this was one of those occurrences. Millions of stars in the heavens and a seemingly equal number of earthbound luminaries made for a breath-taking, spectacular display!

The heavens are an incredible repository of beauty. Astronomy can evoke awe and blow our minds if we take the time to contemplate the data recent science is accumulating about our privileged planet. I recently paged through a book with several hundred pictures taken over the last 25 years from space. The discoveries of Hubble are breath-taking. The stars are pouring out a story as old as time.

Nature is a beauty source to be considered as well. Whether observing creatures, terrains, climates, waterways, or oceans - the sheer immensity of the diversity of beauty is overwhelming - once we take the time to fix our eyes and our minds. Some of the new creature and creation hi-def programs being aired on various networks are breath-taking.


But perhaps the most compelling beauty of all is the vast uniqueness of the human race - with our ability to reason, adapt, love, and hate - we are truly a source of intrinsic beauty. Each continent contains incredible human diversity. Each human body is a hive of micro activity, complexity, and orchestrated harmony, challenging even the most learned with the concept of intelligent design. And anthropology and sociology reveal a complex human history we appear to know

relatively little about - apart from the last six or seven thousand years.

I enjoy expressing myself through setting my poems to music. I chronicle experiences by carrying a camera, mostly trying to capture meaningful people interactions to share with others. This last year I had fun expressing myself through a painting - my first attempt in over 25 years. I have no plans of being a professional photographer. I am quite undeveloped as a painter. My songs will never be published. But my heart holds things I wish to express to others.

You and I ARE ART. Our earth environment is a panorama of beauty which continues to unfold with timeless life, as artists have tried to capture since the dawn of time. It can be all too easy to become distracted from the exploding and emerging beauty around us. The way we have each been made, our own unique recipe, is a gift to the world.

SPIRITUALITY



I grew up in a home where church was a part of our lives, but my concept of God was impersonally religious. God existed but had little to do with my “real” life. Religion seemed to point to my need to become a “better person,” and I knew this appeared beyond my power to bring about. My beliefs about God were disconnected from my soul. I saw no relationship between the voices in my head and heart with the Voice of God. Fusion at that point consisted of a conceptual overlap. I embraced the “possibility” of an impersonal God.

During my teens, traditional authority structures were coming apart at the seams in the new American revolution. I fully embraced the self-indulgent, irresponsible, me-centered liberation theos of my generation. Everything was up for grabs. And I reached out and devoured – and was consumed – by my newfound freedom.

In the midst of this self-consumptive destruction I became aware of my emptiness. I began to distinguish a soft voice was speaking to a buried, empty part of me. “David, I am standing at the door of your heart. I am knocking. I want to come in. But you will need to open the door.” I picked up a Bible from Target and began to explore my distant understanding of God. For several months I read and even began to pray. There was a part of me longing for peace. I had not found anything adequate to fill this almost dream-like place.

Who was Jesus? Was He the Son of God? What made Him different from other religious icons? What had He been trying to say? Was He dead or alive? How extensive was the reach of His Kingdom? What did He have to do with me? Several months later, one evening while driving a familiar street, my heart was overcome with what I had been

wrestling for weeks. I needed to be rescued. My self-assured philosophies and constructs for living were simply not enough. I pulled over and wept uncontrollably - I was truly a lost son. And my Father was inviting me to a whole new world. He wanted to bring His Kingdom to me and me into His Kingdom. I was free-falling from a high cliff. It was time to lose myself so I could find myself. My desire for meaning had finally eclipsed my need to hold on to what I had built to make me secure. I was spiritually dead and my soul was lost. Jesus' Voice was my only hope.


I remember having dinner one night several years ago with a man from India who was devoted to his religion. He told about growing up, practicing his faith, and described his basic beliefs about God and heaven. He then courteously asked me a number of questions about my spiritual journey. When I finished he looked at me with an honest gaze and said, "I have never experienced anything that personal." This is exactly how I felt when I found Jesus. I had never dreamed that anything this personal was even possible. Spirituality is personal. It is the story of re-connection: creature with Creator. Lost son and daughter with loving Father. It is the Story of ultimate sacrifice. Our spirituality is the most significant part of the journey of our lives.

I cannot with a good conscience equate spirituality with religion. When people criticize christianity in any part of history I most times am on the same page. But conclusions about God based upon evaluation of any of His followers is shaky. God's Son is really the issue. Is He who He said He was, and what are my investigated conclusions about spirituality?

Too much is at stake to remain vague about Jesus because I don't like what His followers have done at some point in history. My spirituality will be evaluated by my connection with God, and I would do well to engage Him rather than any particular religious representation of Him.

Here is a mind-blower: Jesus, God's Son, created the world. Before my non-religious spiritual journey began I had no idea.

BEING FREE



Have you ever had a dream so vivid it shakes you just a bit? I could feel all the parts of my body shutting down, one compartment at a time. It was as though each area of my living tissue was closing up shop in some predetermined order. Like being in the living room in a house and sensing every room of the house closing for the last time. Systematic finality. When I awoke I realized this event had a different quality than the regular musings in my sleeping psyche. Even now I get shivers - it was that real. Many years later I think God was telling me - this is what it is like, Dave. This world must shut down in order for the new world to emerge. This is what it will be like when you shut down.

The internal benefits of fusing with God's heart are really quite amazing. Personal peace, forgiveness, the ability for expanding love, and experiencing true hope are a few. When I met Jesus I really was quite lost. As Eugene Peterson puts it in the Message translation of the Bible, I was "crashing around in the darkness." I was slave to my desires, to my self-centeredness, and to my blindness and insensitivity about the needs of others. I never would have called it bondage, but deep in my heart I certainly knew I was not free.

This has been an interesting part of my curious journey. I had found God, but I didn't have a clue as to how to become

truly free. As I look back I can see how God has been trying to set me free from my cares and concerns, from myself, and even from evil itself. All of my life.

Quite a few years ago I was wrestling with the incompleteness of different aspects of my life. Relationships were a constant struggle, and I questioned whether I would find the kind of companionship that would meet some of the deeper needs I was recognizing in myself and others. While I had come to faith I was far from free. The Voice had more to teach me. He wanted me to learn freedom.

The concept of a satisfied mind was something I found quite elusive. But as my faith continued to expand, and as my heart began to fuse with God's heart, I learned to step back from the self-defensive life in which I had grown up and enter the secure and honest realm where God exists. Most of my fears were then overtaken by an understanding of God's ultimate authority and power. One by one I submit my personal dreams to a loving Savior. He gives me exactly what I need to find a life of substance - and a satisfied mind. My insecurities about my shortcomings have been kindly healed as my security has grown - in my identity as a son of God Most High.

I truly wish I could have grasped these things as quickly in my heart as I was learning them intellectually. But one thing I know about God is that *process* is every bit as important as *outcome*. God can and will take years to etch something into our soul, even though we may grasp the intellectual concepts at the beginning. God doesn't want me to learn ABOUT peace, He wants me to KNOW peace,

After my eyes were opened by Jesus I began to do an inventory of my character. For the first time, I looked in the mirror and saw my soul, and it disturbed me. My life was built upon shadows. There was so much internal change necessary. It was overwhelming. But God began to explain the

journey to me. It was in His heart to walk with me through a transformation which continues today. He is in the process of overtaking me. It wasn't merely a matter of assimilating new information - it was time for my heart to change. This is difficult because it is much easier to hold on to what we know rather than take a chance in uncharted waters.

During my first few years as a Christ-follower I encountered a woman named Doreen. I had landed on my own standards for honesty, but it soon became apparent God was going to change all of that. Doreen tormented me day after day. If I promised to have a project completed and failed to follow through, she was there. She didn't take kindly to my excuses, and for the first time in my life I was faced with the concept that I needed to be trustworthy. While this was personally painful (it went on for what seemed like forever), step by step I began to get it. It was so freeing to follow through on my promises that a shift began in this part of my life. I was learning what it meant to live with a clear conscience. I had no idea what a relief this would be.

The process of following Jesus has severed my cords of bondage one by one as the years have unfolded, and the cumulative affect has been a sincere change in my heart. As I live each day with a clear, forgiven, and liberated conscience, I am amazed at what a gift it is to be able to talk to God and to hear Him answer. To close my eyes each night with a clean slate has greatly increased my capacity for gratefulness, and I have come to believe only grateful people are truly free.

Occasionally you will meet a deeply grateful person. You will notice the level of peace that surrounds them. He or she is so appreciative of what IS they spend little time speculating about what COULD be or what SHOULD have been. Grateful people reflect upon their past and discover the richness of their human journey. The present becomes an opportunity to live in the moment and to look to the future with hope and assurance. Finding what lies around the corner becomes an adventure and not merely a source for fretting

over the things which we have no control.

We know we are truly free as our faith increases and anxiety, fear, and striving diminish. A growing faith allows us to avoid our natural tendency to suck the life out of what is good, and to choose to contribute gratefully to it instead. I used to flip out trying to control the behavior of others. I called this “big brother syndrome.” I am much more likely these days to look for the grateful reality versus trying to control a situation. I am blessed as I become a kinder, more spiritual contributor into the lives of those around me. Instead of taking life and energy from others, I am free to gratefully offer whatever I can to help others on their journey of Fusion.


My mind used to be cluttered with so many loose ends. Unresolved relationships, imperfect outcomes, the weightiness of the sheer imperfection of so many things about life. The freedom that comes from reconciling each day to people and to God is truly priceless. It allows me to sleep in peace as well.

Of course, I will not be completely free until I have taken my final breath. Then (according to the scriptures) my real life begins.

“If the Son has set you free, you are truly free.”

- Jesus in John 8:36

AUTHENTICITY



Somewhere around 150 A.D. the growth of the Kingdom began a gradual descent to orbit power structures and majestic cathedrals rather than the change of heart Jesus taught. We moved from this heart focus to one of “if we build it, they will come” as the drift to motivate and attract followers began to shift into high gear. One chief detriment of this inevitable drift is a loss of understanding of the Kingdom. We no longer see the Kingdom alive and moving through us, but centered upon a work or visible evidence of God’s power in buildings, programs, and community or cultural influence. Rediscovering authentic expressions of Kingdom Spirituality will be key if we have any hope of returning to an incarnational or “God alive in me” approach to living.

This is my basic hope for writing *Curious Journey*. The Kingdom Gospel is incarnational. It is personal. It is alive. It is all about Jesus invading our personal stories and drawing them into line with the Big, never-ending Story. Because we are active consumers and isolated relationally, we like to think we are living big. But we are actually upside-down. We think by “finding ourselves” we are winning. We may be occupied but we are increasingly isolated. Are we truly alive?!

If we view religion as servant to this incredible, incarnational change - with Jesus overtaking every corner of our hearts - we have begun the process of rediscovering Kingdom spirituality. This is the legacy Jesus and His apostles pursued, many with the cost of their own earthly lives. What Jesus advocated is a revolution from the inside out, where mere religious conformity and participation pale before what is happening within a human heart. This is called transformation, and if you look closely in history, you can see

when it has been present or when there was something else in play. In fact, any authentic religious revolution always has launched with a rediscovery of Kingdom spirituality.

When I interact with my grandchildren it is beautiful to see how special and warm the simplicity of their lives can be. A baby or toddler is intuitive about belonging. Their whole world is one of connectedness. It is all about the basics. All about security. But as we grow this becomes more complicated. Our relational connections become a challenge, and failure and pain color the pure and simple design of our lives.

When we see ourselves integral to Jesus' Kingdom-building, then every relationship, every resource, every moment we live is an opportunity. If we don't need to "go" somewhere else for our spirituality, we can find it through hearing the Voice of the Spirit in the core of our souls. This, I believe, is one of the chief differences between religious and incarnational living. Quite simply, when God came into your life and mine, He opened a highway of spirituality from His throne to our soul. In finding this connection I discover my true self, my destiny, and Fusion with my Creator. I am a chosen heir, a priest to honor my Deliverer, and a person reborn to once again become a possession of my God. But we are much more comfortable as a part of a herd, and we are impressed with visible, measurable manifestations. After all, as one modern mantra goes, "if it works – it is legitimate."

You and I are made to reflect the image of God. All of our giftedness, drive, and energy is best placed in this direction – even at the expense of allowing religious pursuits to wither. As we gather with others it will be to live out and carry the image of God to our neighbors, families, and friends. Simplicity is found once again as we embrace the lifestyle of Jesus and the apostles. We ARE the Kingdom when Jesus comes into our lives.

Early in my spiritual walk it became apparent that I could either become religious and conform to the "cultural"

standards for religious behavior into which I was being birthed, or I could choose a path significantly less traveled. I was at a crossroads in my Jesus following: I could choose the comfort of assimilation or the unsure and less safe path of Fusion.


At this point it is important to say I have little interest in running down any aspect of what other people do to get their religious kicks. I understand some of what I am saying may sound critical, but I apply the same careful questioning to my own daily choices. I am advocating, however, that Kingdom spirituality – however it is expressed religiously – is at the core of what Jesus taught. One only needs to look at the excoriating statements found in Matthew 23 to see how Jesus felt about religious leaders and worship forms devoid of just, merciful, and faithful fruits. “Hypocrites, white-washed tombs, devourers, and vipers” are all pretty strong words.

Religious people almost always choose visible measures to determine spiritual effectiveness and substantiate legitimacy. How many are on your staff? What kind of programs do you provide to meet the needs of your members? What numerical growth are you achieving? How many people are you reaching?

Where are the questions about relationships? About connectedness? About the Spirit’s presence in our efforts? We have exchanged incarnational, relational priorities for more surface and measurable standards. Numbers of spectators, personalities of leaders, consumer-friendly words, and evaluation of services are the medium of the recent Jesus movement. Throw in coffee and a continental breakfast and we’re over the top. Unfortunately these things can easily have little to do with organic Kingdom Spirituality.

Authenticity occurs as a result of connection. King and Kingdom eclipse anything which can be accomplished through religion.

MESSIAH



“A first-century Hebrew walks alone on a hot afternoon, staff in hand. His shoulders are stooped, sandals covered with dirt, tunic stained with sweat. But he doesn’t stop to rest. He has pressing business in the city.

He veers off the road into a field, seeking a shortcut. The owner won’t mind - travelers are permitted this courtesy. The field is uneven. To keep his balance he thrusts his staff into the dirt.

THUNK - the staff strikes something hard. He stops, wipes his brow, and pokes again. THUNK - something’s hard under there, and it’s not a rock. The weary traveler tells himself that he can’t afford to linger. But his curiosity won’t let him go. He jabs at the ground. Something reflects a sliver of sunlight. He drops to his knees and starts digging.

Five minutes later he’s uncovered it - a case fringed in gold. By the looks of it, it’s been there for decades. Heart racing, he pries off the rusty lock and opens the lid. Gold coins! Jewelry! Precious stones of every color. A treasure more valuable than anything he’s ever imagined.

Hands shaking, the traveler inspects the coins, issued in Rome over seventy years ago. Some wealthy man must have buried the case and died suddenly, the secret of the treasure’s location dying with him. There is no homestead nearby. Surely the landowner has no clue that the treasure’s here.

“What a find! Unbelievable! I’ve got to have that treasure! But I can’t just take it. That would be stealing. Whoever owns the field owns what’s in it. But how can I afford to buy it? I’ll sell my farm...and crops...all my tools...my prize oxen. Yes, if I sell everything - that should be enough.

From the moment of his discovery, the traveler’s life changes. The treasure captures his imagination, becomes the stuff of His dreams. It is his reference point, his new center of gravity. The traveler takes every new step with this treasure in

mind. He experiences a radical paradigm shift.”

- Matthew 13 from the Treasure Principle by Randy Alcorn

What will it take to inspire your Kingdom imaginations? The King has come! His Kingdom is a great treasure! You and I are an integral, living part of this treasure!

It would be easy to hope that if you are reading this you are open to reexamining the fundamental premises of Jesus' teachings. If you are that brave, then I applaud your courage. Don't make the mistake of thinking I am advocating reform merely for the sake of being different or that I am bitter because I have not been able to excel at attractional church-life. Together our community of friends has built and maintained a "church" for over three decades. We have cared for one another through thick and thin. During these years this wonderful group of people has sacrificed time, money, and human resources to start a music radio station which blesses many homes. We have helped launch a ranch for at-risk kids. Each of these projects cost countless man-hours, dollars, and vast amounts of energy.

Incarnational living does not imply laziness or a rejection of everything traditional. It merely places relationships ahead of visible success, and relegates buildings, programs, and other "forms" to a second-tier of priorities. Kingdom spirituality rests upon "who we are" not merely "what we do." A person can be very spiritual and have created nothing fundamentally visible to show for it. Jesus Himself is a perfect example of this paradox, in that He was content to leave a handful of followers to carry on, once He had bypassed the religious establishment of His day.

My friend Gretchen loves life. After many years she is still deeply grateful Jesus has overtaken her soul. She uses her gift of arranging flowers as an entree' to talking about spirituality. She initiates conversations about spiritual matters in the most unlikely places and is undaunted about any lack of "notches" on her belt of souls. Gretchen loves people on a

connected level and deeply believes Jesus is the only answer to the inner longings of the soul. She has figured out how to make her life incarnational - she uses what God has given her to make heart to heart inroads in our isolating world.

If we really do “find our life by losing it” what would that mean for how we live? I find Jesus’ teachings so penetrating they invite a radical paradigm shift. If we are to love God with “all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength,” what would this look like if carried to its logical conclusion? If in order to follow Jesus we must “leave everything, pick up our cross, and follow” - just how radical would this appear? Faith without works is dead. But works without authentic faith is equally lame. If the Messiah is our treasure, He will capture our imagination - heart and soul.

Jesus is the only true radical. Everyone else lives for an earthly kingdom. Jesus was very clear: “My Kingdom is not of this earth.” This is why mankind loves to leave baby Jesus in a manger. There He is harmless. This is why we are content to call Him a great teacher: his power and influence are controllable. And this is why we cannot stomach His claims of exclusivity. It is too disconcerting and politically incorrect to espouse that there is only one way to finding the Voice. We place God in a box, right where all religious people and institutions wish to keep Him. Harmless, bound, impotent, and useful to our purposes. Only those who bravely search beyond the surface will find Jesus’ keys to authenticity.

With all of the philosophical, extra-terrestrial, speculative energy and reasoning expended in our culture over the last 50 years, is it any wonder we find ourselves open to the idea that there may be something more than what we can see with our eyes or imagine with our minds? Let this incredible concept break the barrier of our assertions, assumptions, or presuppositions: when Jesus was born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago it was not His beginning. The Bible is very clear on this point...He left the eternal presence of God where He had always been (wow!) and took the form of

a man for a brief time to accomplish a very specific purpose - to buy back the spiritually dead souls of mankind. He is so much more than one spiritual leader among many emerging throughout history.

I love people who have open-minded learning styles. They seem to intrinsically know that truth is good for truth's sake. Trying hard to approach knowledge with a welcoming intellect, these people maintain openness to matters of the soul. Discontent to regurgitate the ideas and opinions of others, they try to approach people and issues with a searching heart. I find such independent thinking is rare. Jesus called such people "men of peace." His followers were taught to find men of peace and stay with them as they brought the good news of the Kingdom to new pockets of people.

I know a man named James who is an independent thinker - a man of peace - someone with a spiritually open mind. He is a good neighbor, an honest business person, and he has been careful to love and provide for his wife, children, and grandchildren. If you need advice or a helping hand you can come to James and his circle of family and friends. He practices what he calls the "golden rule." "Do to others what you would want done to you." He is undecided about eternity and struggles with the concept of trusting Jesus on a personal level, but he believes Jesus and teachers like him model good, peaceful lives. He is, however, quite nervous about growing older and closer to the end of his life. While he continues to try to live a good life, he is beginning to ask probing questions about the destiny of his soul.

The extent of ignorance concerning what Jesus actually did and taught is astounding considering how many books, movies, and all "Christian" religion has produced over the centuries. A careful consideration of the four Gospels will reveal a unique unfolding of the meaning of life, death, and eternity. Sadly, many never experience firsthand inquiry, but rely upon the parroted ideas and impressions of others.

Original spiritual thought escapes self-absorbed travelers in life.

Probably the most compelling evidence Jesus is still alive is that He “appears” to men and women in every century, in every country, in every culture. Time and time again, men and women discover the Living God in Jesus - and find themselves transformed in heart and mind. This “testimony” is powerful inasmuch as while other “religions” also motivate and soothe - none transform as Jesus does - and certainly don’t animate in life the way King and Kingdom do.

When the choices and the facts are weighed, no one comes close to Jesus for sheer shaping of the historical world. However you feel about Him being sent from God or actually being God - His teaching, His life, and His influence are unsurpassed.

There is nothing better than sitting across the table from someone who is telling how they first encountered God. The light in their eyes, the wonder in their voice, and the grateful peace upon their face always washes over my soul. It is amazing to me how Jesus continues this personal encounter process year after year - century after century.

The word Messiah means “to smear.” He has provided His blood, the blood of God Himself, in order to buy back what has been lost - who has been lost. With His own obedient sacrifice He has literally “covered” the things which keep us from God.

What a gift has been given to the world. What a gift has been given to you!

KINGDOM SPIRITUALITY



I have no use for anything religious. Untangling Jesus from historical Christianity and the cultural church is a necessary task for anyone who wishes to explain Kingdom Spirituality to the exponentially growing number of skeptics in America. Sometime after the first century a “pure and simple devotion to Christ” view of the Kingdom began to slip, and was even hijacked for human purposes. Religion expanded in earnest and began competing with authentic spirituality. If we are to recover authentic faith in the midst of these centuries of spiritual malaise, we will need to rediscover what Jesus’ original followers knew to be true - in the very core of their beings.

Jesus (the Son) came to the world and moved into the human neighborhood – our world. He became one of us in order to rescue us. He didn’t come to build a visible, earthly Kingdom, but an invisible, heavenly Kingdom. Most men and women today see little connection between the King, the Kingdom, and our own lives. This is a shame, because the Kingdom is breathing and growing and expanding all around us - in us and through us. Authentic Kingdom spirituality is a mustard seed – the smallest of all seeds and yet it becomes a huge plant which provides spiritual shelter in this world. DOING is the mantra of religion. BEING is the message of the Kingdom.

Ellen is a quiet, unassuming soul. She has worked for 17 years as an employee in a small insurance company. Year after year she befriends the women who come and go from the cubicles around her. While she has carved out her own life, Ellen has also made room to care for others. She lives her faith by intentionally attempting to encourage and help others in

practical ways, and she uses her platform as a faithful worker to “be there” for people as they encounter challenges with raising children, being married, and trying to make ends meet. While Ellen will never be the object of a testimonial dinner, she is storing up treasure in God’s Kingdom. She loves with what she has been given - and expects nothing in return.

This is the simplicity of Kingdom Spirituality. The King over all has come to the earth. His Kingdom is being planted in the hearts of men and women in every century. As we turn from our separation from God (repent) and turn toward this great Light (Jesus) we are given a choice. “Come, FOLLOW ME, and I will make you fishers of men.” This transformation occurs from the inside out. Rather than merely re-training ourselves behaviorally, the core of our being begins a genuine change. True peace begins reforming the priorities of our hearts - and such impact transforms the essence of who we are.

All of my life as a spiritual person I have been haunted by the incompleteness of religion. We have a root heart problem transcending any philosophical, social, economic, or racial issue. Admitting this was one of my first steps in allowing myself to be overtaken by Fusion. If I can separate Jesus from what is done in His Name, then I can once again see the purity and simplicity of what God is trying to accomplish on the earth. Like Ellen, I can carve out my own kingdom life and present it as an offering as I enter the life to come. I can kick out the props of religious living and embrace the energy of Kingdom spirituality!

How do you feel about your connectedness with the King of the earth? In what ways has religion helped this process? How has it obscured the Kingdom for you? Key questions if you desire authenticity in your life.

FRIENDS AND COMPANIONS



The words we speak are powerful. We either carry words of life or words of death. Words of life spur others on to something greater. Words of death discourage, stop people in their tracks, and fuel insecurity and hopelessness. Kingdom spirituality teaches people to become strong in giving words of life!

We were designed to thrive in relationships but interpersonal isolation is more common in the world in which we live. If the Kingdom is to grow in our lives we need to invest significant time with people who share our values - including those who have yet to embrace the Kingdom. The following "one another's" were excerpted from letters of the followers of Jesus as they attempted to live genuine Kingdom spirituality among people from "every nation under heaven." They are all fruits of the "men of peace" to whom Jesus refers.

Our Life With One Another (Romans 12:3-21; 14:10-23)

John the apostle was very clear. "If we cannot love our neighbor whom we can see, how shall we love God whom we cannot see." This principle is key to breaking the cultural isolation which keeps us from joining others in pursuit of genuine faith.

Our community has learned a lot about love through the years. It is easy to love people who love us, but much more difficult to love impartially. True love really does bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things. You learn most about the love of others when you are weak or fail in some way. Enter the jackals when you are overcome by weakness, accused falsely, or come face to face with your

shortcomings! Through years of sifting we have found friends and companions who are principled in their loyalty and who love us even when we don't measure up. They have helped us press the questions: How strong is my ability to love? Am I willing to sacrifice part of myself to see others excel and grow? (1 Peter 1:22; 4:8)

Consider One Another (Hebrews 10:24)

We have a friend who is very discerning and has a God-built ability to be sincerely interested in people of different backgrounds and ages. It is fun to be around her because you can count on Diane to engage relationally. She is willing to take risks, put herself out there, and draw people into the circle of meaningful conversation. When she is absent from our lives for periods of time we suffer for it. People like this bring out the color in human existence, and turn drab landscapes into a beautiful wash of life and energy.

Build Up One Another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

We walk with a couple who are about as practically helpful as you can imagine. Not only do they serve others in Christ's body, their life and home are opened and intertwined with their neighbors. As Dennis and Cheri raise their three boys and daughter they have built us up and refreshed us many times by their willing participation. If it needs to be done, they will be there. They have an uncanny sense of overcoming when it comes to participation in the mission, and they are willing to re-shuffle their lives for the benefit of others. And they do all this with the challenges of a special needs child in their home. They inspire me to ask the questions: What do I have by way of experiences, abilities, and personality that can benefit others? What can I do to support and strengthen other people?

Be Devoted to One Another (Romans 12:10)

I have a friend who is truly a loyal partner in life. His wife has even described him as having the faithful qualities of a golden retriever. He lives to serve others in practical ways. He and I have pioneered many things together. We have cleared land, built buildings, and developed things where there were only ideas and very few resources. Together we have tackled these tasks without looking back. I deeply appreciate Karlen. I can count on him to stay focused and to have my back. He helps me to ask the questions: How committed am I to sticking with other people? Am I willing to overcome interpersonal obstacles that will develop lasting relationships? Am I willing to serve others and move forward, whether or not I receive recognition or a tangible reward?

Accept One Another (Romans 15:7)

Patty is the consummate defender of the helpless. In her profession as a physical therapist she chooses to work with families with significant needs, and has gone to many painful funerals. Her work has actually cost her some of her physical health. What is cool about Patty is that she always looks for reasons to accept others. God has given her a profound energy to hope for the best, and has blessed her in overcoming some of her painful past, which would be crushing and debilitating to many people. Her husband John (who many people consider the “nicest” person they know) completes their home of acceptance by being one of the most approachable, non-judgmental people that I know. They constrain me to ask the questions: Do people have to measure up to my standards to be acceptable to me? How tolerant am I of others’ differences? Can I overlook other people’s shortcomings?

Care for One Another (1 Corinthians 12:25)

I have enjoyed the privilege of walking with some discerning, compassionate men over the last number of years. Together we have done our best to be faithful to God and impartial in our care for the people God brings our way. It is interesting to me to see the willingness each of these “elders” as they have cared for people – some in pressing and even dire need, as well as encouraging many others engaged in the grind of trying to build lives of substance. And some of their most lavish love is painfully rejected! Sometimes love costs us way more than we are willing to give, and we must humble ourselves as we entrust the needs of others to God’s impartial care. People who care make me ask the questions: Am I able to provide practical care for others’ needs? By whom do I feel I am being cared for and toward whom am I actively giving care?

Admonish One Another (Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16)

Truth-speaking is risky today. We all want friends but often define a friend as someone who will agree with us or tell us what we want to hear. Speaking honestly to another requires a huge amount of security on the part of both parties. A good friend tells you the truth about what they see and hear, both when the input is positive as well as negative. The very nature of admonishing produces and inspires a course correction. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend!” Caring truth-speakers make me want to ask hard questions I would prefer to not think about: Am I willing to take the risk of being truthful with others when there is an opportunity to grow? Am I willing to receive the thoughts of others when there are things that need to be said to me?

Comfort One Another (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

I have an old friend named Mike I run into every now and then, usually when people we have in common experience a crisis. When life is hard, people feel very alone. What I really appreciate about Mike is that he has no barriers when it comes to stepping in and doing what he can to help when people he knows are in distress. People like Mike make me brave in what are for me very uncomfortable situations. They make me ask questions like: How do I break through my natural barriers to care for others when they are hurting? When they are sinking? Am I willing to set aside my comfort levels in order to reach out and care for others, even when situations may seem hopeless, or when I feel inadequate?

Serve One Another (Galatians 5:13)

It is easy to serve to be seen. True servants shy away from recognition. They often choose more difficult, less visible ways to bless others. Our friend Sarah is like that. She is so content to work behind the scene. Making a wedding dress, planning a week's food for 80 (in the woods), dropping off a piece of material, organizing a birthday party – I really could give a long list. While I know Sarah likes to be thanked on a personal basis, she truly loves the process and outcome of her serving. She uses whatever project or event to draw out, connect, and care for others. She inspires me to ask questions which are foreign to my nature: What are other people's love languages? How do I discern what a person really needs? Inasmuch as serving does not come naturally, how does a person learn to become servant-aware? Why in the world did Jesus choose to wash His own disciples' feet?

Bear With One Another (Ephesians 4:2)

There are certainly people who are easier to love than

others! Burnadette and I will often laugh that the only truly “normal” people seem to be us. We do this tongue and cheek, of course, but it is ironic that we all have pretty significant uniquenesses, quirks and idiosyncrasies. Sometimes we must bear with the weaknesses or immaturity of others. Often we must allow ourselves to be outshined by their superior strengths.

I remember as a young man someone a little older than I was (and with more spiritual experience) told me that I took myself too seriously. I have never forgotten his comment. I try to be deeply sincere, but at the same time try to be able to lighten up and laugh at myself and others. How can I become the kind of person who makes room for the growth of others? Am I patient to wait for others to come to where they need to be (or where I need to be) in order for us to be in harmony? Am I able to set my needs aside for another person’s welfare?

Be Kind to One Another (Ephesians 4:32)

Several years ago our family significantly let down some friends. I can still remember wanting to vomit as this dad began to tell me about the offense. It was one of those precarious moments where our family was completely exposed. As our friend talked through what had been done and what he wanted to have happen to rectify the wrong, I was overwhelmed with the grace of such a principled man. Though his family had been offended significantly, he was willing to be obedient to God and merciful and kind to us. The offense was devastating, but his kindness was humbling. People like this make me want to extend kindness to others. How can I choose to do the kind thing rather than be offended or obsessed with getting even or having a “right” to my anger? How can I learn to be sensitive to God’s greater purposes and treat others with kindness?

Speak and Submit to One Another (Ephesians 5:19, 20)

One of the beautiful things about having varying gifts is that we can provide protection for one another. One of my most faithful friends in the Good News is Andre'. He and I had the privilege of starting the first spiritual music radio station in our city. Before we launched this 20 year odyssey, I asked our elders what they thought. It was not an easily received idea, inasmuch as they knew what such an effort would require from me and our community of friends. One week later we met to make a final decision – and all of us were in favor of moving forward. By praying, our skepticism had been removed (it could have just as easily multiplied into a definitive no).

Many times over those next months and years Andre' and I had differing viewpoints. Sometimes our opposing views put a strain on our relationship, especially because the financial pressure was intense. But because Andre' was the kind of man who was willing to speak his mind in love and strength, God used him to protect me and provide a partner every bit as committed to our mutual submission to God's will as to our success in the effort. God used our relationship to bless many people. Andre' is the kind of man who makes me willing to take the risk of submitting to the other people around me. He helps me ask and teach others to ask the questions: Do I have the courage to find submissive truth? It is easy to submit to those with whom we agree, but how do we speak truth and submit to one another even when we are in disagreement?

Regard One Another (Philippians 2:3)

Skip is a successful relational evangelist. He has helped me to understand that the work of sharing the good news is one of building bridges wherever God reveals a chasm. He is comfortable among many people groups, and he is good at asking questions. Somehow he seems to get away with having

spiritual conversations all of the time. He designs his life to be inclusive, and he has learned the art of ongoing personal conversation.

I have watched Skip carefully over many years, and I have come to the conclusion that he succeeds because he has a high regard for people – even if they are very different from himself. Muslim, Jew, atheist or agnostic – professional or everyday working person - Skip sees a person's shared humanity. He has regard for each man or woman's intrinsic worth, whether they agree with him theologically or not. By his example, Skip has taught me not to dismiss people who fail to measure to my standards or function as I do. It is easy to mask our natural aura of self-importance. But holding others in high regard produces amazing results while building Kingdom relationships.

Be at Peace with One Another (1 Thessalonians 5:13)

Strife and agitation come naturally for humans. Over the years I have worked with many musicians, and they can be a particularly testy people-group. My friends Dean and Diane have been a part of this network of relationships, and I have watched them be taken for granted, imposed upon, and treated poorly on numerous occasions as people have come and gone. Through all of this they have been at peace with this very diverse group of people. They go about their business with joy, and are content to live peacefully with others and to provide an atmosphere of grace.

I count on Dean and Diane to be a sane voice of peace in an agitated, self-centered, and chaotic world. Their grateful hearts and faithful unflappability have blessed me often, and they help me answer the question: How do I set aside agitation and even insult and enjoy peaceful relationships with people who rub me the wrong way?

Confess to One Another (James 5:16)

It is easy to try to manage our insecurities and shortcomings by ourselves, but it is a great gift to find confidants we know will care for and pray for us - even in our dark or weak times. I have a circle of male friends whom I am very comfortable being transparent around. I can discuss my weaknesses and know they won't try to fix me, but will pray for me and care about me. They will also tell me what they think, and encourage me to overcome my issues and remain faithful to the way I have chosen. These men are acquainted with their own weaknesses and won't exploit mine. I feel quite blessed to have friends who can handle my weaknesses and care enough to lift me up when I am weak. They help me ask the question "am I connected or am I isolated?"

Pray for One Another (James 5:16)

Part of love for one another is to care about spoken and unspoken needs and issues and take them before God on another's behalf. It is easy to underestimate the power of this kind of love. When we care enough to pray for someone else with passion and regularity, we are showing a deep labor of love. It is easy to think our prayers don't matter or ultimately change nothing. But the scriptures make it clear that praying for others can be of great spiritual value.

Gretchen faithfully prays without a thought to current appearances. Connie joyfully anticipates God's hand moving even in the most immovable situations. Fervency and effectiveness are noted in the verse above, and those who pursue the quest of making a difference in prayer are incredibly valuable to the spiritual life of those around them. If for no other reason than people who truly pray are rare. Friends such as these help me to ask the questions "what is the Voice saying to me?" and "do I care enough to listen?"

Encourage One Another (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13)


We have basically three groups of friends. There are those we have known a long time, and with whom we share a backlog of experiences and battles we have fought together. We started our careers, established our families, and forged our faith lives together. They encourage me by their confident faithfulness and the way they care about me, my wife, my children, and now my grand kids.

We also have companions who are too old to be our children but have entered our reciprocal circle of care over the years. We rely upon them for their energy, their emerging passion, and their respect for our experience. They encourage us by their active embrace of Kingdom spirituality as they try to do their best to build God-honoring homes.

We are also grow increasingly excited about our younger friends. As they sift through various philosophies and make their own decisions of faith, they encourage us by their openness and their willingness to submit to God's hand upon their lives. Their energy for life and God spur us on. Each of these generations of friends encourage us to ask the questions: How do I help someone to continue moving forward? What words will help spur others on? How can I learn to speak words of life?

There have been so many stories which have come to mind as I have written *Curious Journey* and put together *Fourthstream.com*. These are just a few of the people who have shaped our souls. There are many others. Each of your gifts has touched us in deep ways. From you (and many others like you) we have learned the basics of giving and receiving words of life. Our friends and companions have incrementally drawn us toward fusion with my Creator.

SNAPSHOT



Sarah and Alex are learning to have a Kingdom home. They have started to build their life together with a common foundation of submission to their King, Jesus Christ. Their faith is very organic in that they try to understand what Jesus wants and then let His desires begin to take over the foundation of their hearts. They have chosen the hard path of oneness in marriage, growing in character, and pleasing God. They have decided to roll up their sleeves and engage the arduous work of building a Kingdom life.

Some of their free time is invested understanding the scriptures, praying for their friends-family-neighbors, and enjoying activities that put them into close proximity with people who know the King - as well as people who do not. Like us they work on their home, pursue their interests, keep in touch with their families, argue, burn meals, and on occasion get sick of work and life. At the end of each week they sit down and talk about what worked and what didn't and they make plans for another week.

While Christianity and "church" is a touchstone in their lives - pleasing their King has captured their imaginations. They believe every dollar they earn, every hour they live, and every circumstance they encounter is an opportunity for God's glory to unfold in their lives. As they pursue vocational goals, set their standard of living, and determine the extent of what they will choose to give to God's Kingdom. Alex and Sarah see their faith as a compass - sifting decisions to have children, change jobs, open their home to others - all through the grid of "what will most honor our King?"

Brad and Alisha come to Sarah and Alex's home every Friday night. They play cards, cook out in the summer, and

play with Brad and Alisha's 10 month old, Jessica. The baby is comfortable going to sleep in a pack-and-play crib that Sarah and Alex have set up in their extra bedroom. After dinner and when the baby is asleep, sometimes they will all sit and talk about their week, read passages from the scriptures, and pray for each other. Some of their mutual friends stop in. Bob is a widower from next door. He feels comfortable in Sarah and Alex's home because they have included him over a period of many months. Occasional spur-of-the-moment invitations to lunch or dinner, a helping hand pulling out the overgrown bushes in Bob's back yard; everyday things where Alex has included Bob have begun to build a trusting relationship.


Alex and Brad get together for breakfast each week to talk about what Jesus wants from them as spiritual men. They also invite friends from work and the neighborhood with whom they are engaging in discussions about being husbands. On Saturday afternoons Brad and Alisha get a sitter and go to the Starbuck's down the street, inviting friends and neighbors to participate as they talk. They have gotten to know the people who work at the shop and have carved out their little corner to laugh, talk, and experience life with their friends. They are also getting to know each other's families as the years unfold, and include one another in birthdays and celebrations with their respective families whenever it is appropriate.

While this story sounds pretty common-place and unspectacular, it is exactly the kind of life Jesus encourages His followers to pursue. By working together with others (Alex and Sarah/Brad and Alisha) these "neighbors" are contemplating the world God has set up for them - and trying to find the connections He has appointed through the process of living life. They may end up being long time friends together or this may be only for a time in their lives, but they are grateful to have mutual encouragement in listening to the Voice of their King - and a practical partnership as they do the "work" of the harvest. Imagine if each of these couples were a part of

another five or ten people coming to know Christ during their lifetimes and taught the same paradigm of Kingdom spirituality to these Christ-followers as well!? Like the servant Jesus praised for being faithful in little things, they could reap a huge harvest at the end of the age.

Kingdom spirituality is one of engagement. It is often not flashy or “big” - but intentional, grateful, and connected. It is a mustard seed full-grown to a plant with shelter-providing branches! It happens in the ordinary day-to-day lives of people like Alex and Sarah - like yours and mine!

GENERATIONAL ACHILLES



We are all creatures of the culture into which we were born: Abraham, Muhammad, Aristotle, or Lincoln. Our decade, our century, our ethnicity, our politics and pop-culture, our families, our experiences – all serve to forge the heart and soul of our being.

Try as we might, these cultural realities color our view of God and man. It is as if the God Story must be rediscovered every generation. While we may appreciate and respect the stories of our parents' or grandparents' spiritual journeys, it really means little of a personal nature until our own feet hit the path of personal faith.

My generation bequeaths yours the fruits of selfish individualism. We have embraced materialism, self-actualization, personal convenience, and secularism. This has robbed our generation of huge parts of our collective soul. We pass to you relativism, isolation, and defiant independence from authority.

Your generation has inherited the futility of this paradigm shift and you find yourself at a precarious historical crossroads. Aloof and individualistic, you are free to be cynical about the substance of life and matters of the soul. You are indecisive, excuse-ridden, re-inventive of your own brand of materialism, and have been spoon-fed political correctness – a mere band-aid for the ills of mankind (if we can correctly call them ills).

I am amazed how differently my children and their friends think. It is as if they look at what has transpired before them with an accepting, non-committal, wait-and-see world view. Everything should be - and is - up for grabs. It is easy to

be a spectator in such an environment. Passivity is the new companion of your individuality.

My wife, Burnadette, and son, David, owned a LearningRx franchise in West Des Moines, Iowa where they worked with students to improve cognitive skills and help overcome learning challenges. It is so cool to see students face obstacles and find a new way to learn. I can remember the first time I was told my intelligence quotient. For all of my life we have believed IQ could not be changed. New research on the brain flatly denies this supposition. LearningRx students are experiencing 10 – 25% gains in IQ in centers across the nation.

This illustration makes me hopeful. Perhaps a generation's spiritual IQ can be changed as well. Is it possible that there will be another wave of Americans who will feel the call to innovate spiritually? I am willing to do whatever I can to contribute to such an upstream movement.

In writing the story of this book I have tried to paint a picture of what authentic Kingdom spirituality could look like in your own back yard. We will need to recover a pioneer view of life. Instead of walking well-worn cultural paths, you will need to become a student of Jesus and the apostles. This will make you part of a minority. Many are willing to follow when there is a path before them, but few wish to be those who take first steps. If you have a heart for Kingdom Spirituality (and Fusion with your Creator's will for your life) – you will find this less-traveled road. Here are a few points of advice for emerging leaders, servants, and change-agents among you as your stories unfold.

Whatever your history with religion and church, learn from them and forge ahead. Ask God to teach you about Kingdom spirituality and move forward without criticism or anger. A Kingdom paradigm does not necessitate a revolution in form, but in heart. I was quite angry and disillusioned for a long time thought it was my mission to change the face of the

church. This is like throwing watermelons against a rock wall hoping to break the rocks – all energy is absorbed by futility and frustration. God is at work all around us, and people do not need to agree with us before we can bring about change. Too much energy is expended over anger for how others have failed us rather than how our experiences have prepared us to be pioneers. Many hide behind the shortcomings or injustices of others as an excuse for our own lack of conviction and action. The Bible is filled with examples of men and women who overcame obstacles rather than living a life of blaming others for their limitations. This is one of the main hurdles to be overcome by a new generation of Kingdom servants.

Other than ourselves there is no one on earth who can keep us from fulfilling our destinies. My life is my challenge to carry – I call the shots on how I will expend my time and my life energy. How I perceive God, treat others, invest my resources, and to what degree I provide shelter – all are in my hand to control. When I was younger I was told by person after person what I would have to do in order to succeed in the “Christian” life. It was difficult, but I had to courageously embrace personal responsibility for my own journey. After several years of doing what OTHERS thought I should, I settled into a life-long quest to act upon what GOD wanted from me. I have never looked back. Kingdom spirituality flows from a belief that God IS at work in my life. All around me are people He has designed and gifted me to impact. Many of us search our entire lives for ways to do something BIG, when all the elements to experience kingdom “greatness” are already in place.

Don't you just love to read a book or see a movie that includes a noble theme and a selfless, courageous character? Against all odds, he or she sacrifices and overcomes whatever danger or obstacle. I leave the theater or put down the book with a new resolve to live beyond myself, but 24 hours later I wake up - the same me. But as we realize the connection of God in our lives, our view of priorities expands to flow from

within us rather than from without. Spirituality is more than a mere checklist of religious options. When we see 100% of our lives belonging to God, we can live in consuming passion rather than elective commitment that can be turned on and off like a running tap. I encourage you to decide to take a stand with your whole life. One of the traps of a materialistic society is to have all of our core-passion siphoned away by the personal pursuit of the latest technology, comfort, affluence, and self-actualization. We must swim against this current and take a stand amidst the shaky waters of our culture.

An ascetic is someone who treats his or her body harshly to achieve devotion. An epicurean is one who indulges pleasure to fulfill what is lacking in his or her soul. Neither extreme is profitable for Kingdom spirituality.

What are the things that keep you from devotion? Fear? Laziness? Lack of discipline? Ignorance? Preoccupations? Proclivities? Jesus advocated a life of engagement. He invites us to sacrifice things that keep us from being who we know we should be and to store up treasures for our eternal future with Him.

Jesus knows that denial of self is powerful in the hands of someone who wants to live a Kingdom life. His kind of self-denial is more than a reformation of behavior. When we aspire to please God we are willing to open our very soul to His presence and His care, as well as His authority. True humility is the fuel of godliness. Whatever we jettison of our self will appear small when we finish the race of life and enjoy the rewards of a faithful servant and beloved son!

Don't forget to faithfully and passionately pray to find others of a similar Kingdom mind as well as those who can guide you in the journey. Good friendships and life partnerships require effort and only emerge after prayer and a devoted pursuit of God's will - as well as openness to His work in the lives of people around us. Pray for older men

and women who will care for you and pray for your growth in grace. Build a network of relationships that rally around finding God's will and honoring Jesus in your part of the world. Ask God to give you a "tomorrow" view of life, where you can live your life now with a clear picture of the beauty of your certain future!

I also encourage you to be as free as you can from the bias of visible religion. Inside of you is the literal power that raised Jesus from the dead. This is one of the beautiful things about the Kingdom. Even though our world has become cookie-cutter for mass production, God builds His Kingdom one soul at a time and harvests His crops using ordinary people like you and me. The Bible is God's love story to the world. In it we can find solutions to life and death, passion and love, mercy and justice, and guidance for acquiring a satisfied mind. Ask God for a Kingdom vision as you search the scriptures, Start with the words and teachings of Jesus and move back into the Old Testament and forward into the letters. The Bible is an untapped gold mine for understanding Kingdom Spirituality.

Above all, dear friends, remember God is incredibly gracious and those of us who realize we have been forgiven much will love much. Our human problem is not solved by a change of environment or even the best self-reformation (and certainly not by more human governance). Freedom grows as we understand who God is and how His heart and mind work. A grateful person, in touch with his or her shortcomings – and who knows deeply the forgiveness of God - will find a capacity to love and be loved which is truly supernatural!

HEAVEN



We have covered a lot of ground in just a few pages. The beauty of authentic Kingdom spirituality is that while it is deep enough to never be boring, it is also within reach for anyone who has a heart for it. It is all about connection, a personal link offered by the Son of God to anyone who is interested.

One day you and I will pass from this life into the next. This will occur whether or not we have thought about it, prepared for it, accepted or rejected it. It is inevitable.

Much of this book has been about the basics of how to find heaven and be at peace with the process (including death). I would like to take a moment and discuss what the scriptures say (and infer) about heaven.

Here is something to think about. The Living God revealed in the Bible is infinite intellect. Unending creativity. Unlimited power. Pure justice. Complete goodness. Add to this His incredible capacity to love and you have all the elements of a mind-blowing eternity. After all, the idea of endlessly floating on clouds singing worship songs is not very motivating. But what if you and I are joined with a multitude of humans from every century, with thousands of languages and dialects, and millions of faith stories to relive together - and in addition - we can all understand each other?! As I have said before - God chose story to communicate Himself to the world. This story (and our stories) will not disappear - they will multiply!

The Bible tells about a city 1500 miles high by 1500 miles wide by 1500 miles deep. I imagine beautiful rooms which have been prepared for thousands of years of storytelling! Imagine enjoying community with Moses, Ruth, David, Paul,

and even Jesus Himself. The basic math tells us that the top of the city will reach well into space. How would you like to be this close to the stars?!

We will no longer struggle with our identity or our purpose. Because of our current condition (which the Bible calls “sin”) we all struggle with what someone has called the empty “god-shaped hole” inside of us. This will not be the case for those who find heaven and eternal life in Jesus. The empty part of us will be complete. Our longings, our human weaknesses, our hurt and suffering from however our lives have unfolded, will all be healed. Whatever peace which has eluded us in this life will be exponentially fulfilled in heaven. There will be no pain or death because all will be well. Everything will be as it was originally intended; where the Living God is glorified in all things, and where we each we find our true destinies.

As I have learned about the Living God and His Son from the scriptures, I have found the images and conclusions of world religions (including christianity) to be woefully insufficient. Heaven is a reward of cosmic, awesome proportions. It is the pinnacle of an imperfect life lived-out in robust faith. Simply mind-blowing. Far out.

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” - Hebrews 11:6

COMPASS



This is not a how-to or self-help book. You've read 7 steps to this and 10 steps to becoming that – this is not what I am talking about. Kingdom Spirituality requires a change in the big picture of your life. It involves intention – intention to embrace a greater paradigm which shifts from a “me” world view to a God world view. This is nothing less than foundational transformation.

Our human root problem is rebellion. We are like fish out of water when it comes to pleasing God. We are born self-absorbed - and the problem just continues to expand. In Christ's Kingdom we literally FIND our lives by LOSING ourselves. Willingness to submit to God's hand upon us is often an undiscovered supernatural treasure. It is as if we have been given a lavish inheritance that is waiting to be claimed. The Voice has locked Himself inside of us and invites us to find the amazing gift of freedom.

Jesus magnified this in a simple concept which found its roots in the Law of Moses. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength – and love your neighbor as you love yourself.” “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” To have a pure heart we must learn to love God more than we love our own lives. Few men and women ever come to this place of surrender of self. The PURE IN HEART are told they will SEE God. A pure heart has less to do with our performance or our ability to clean up our act – it is more about intention of heart. A true pure heart is filled with God-planted motivation because we know that apart from His intervention, we are lost. Everything in our nature kicks against the intention to find a pure heart.

In my hunting gear I keep an old brass compass that my grandfather carried long before I was born. In northern Wisconsin we hunt large sections of land used for paper pulp

production and there is mile after mile of sameness. Without taking frequent compass readings you can literally get turned around, especially if the sun is obscured by clouds. Within 100 steps you can make a turn that will cost you hours to find your way back to a main road. You can walk in circles despite your intention to find a straight path. This is why men and women need a spiritual compass. When we have connected with God with a pure, motivated heart that wishes to encounter Him and hear His voice, the WANT TO issue is solved.

Once we have harnessed our motivation for a pure heart we are free to place a high value upon KNOWING GOD. Reading the God Story, talking with God, and meaningful time with others become **essential** to our lives. We do not find ourselves lacking motivation because we have exchanged what we formerly valued. Knowing God becomes important to us because it IS important to us. This results in a new ability to look beyond ourselves as we begin to view all of life through the prism of knowing God.

DOING KINDNESS can then become the heart of our existence. We begin to look at every human interaction as an opportunity for the Kingdom. We take the Scriptures seriously when they describe pure religion as “helping widows and orphans, and keeping ourselves unstained by the world.” Our lives are no longer lived for our own purposes. We find ourselves by losing ourselves, and in the process we discover deeper meaning and drive.

As we embrace kindness we GROW LIFE, and begin the exciting process of providing shelter for people within our natural relational networks. Family, co-workers, and friends all become objects of His caring through us. This satisfies our soul, and we begin to experience fulfillment of our deep longing for significance. This is how we live a full life and finish our journey at peace. No kidding!

As travelers with a compass, we are free to pick up our shield of faith and our Spirit-sword for the honor of the

Captain our souls. Our spirituality flows from Jesus – to us – and then to others. This is how Kingdom Spirituality works. We are not becoming better “christians.” We are learning how to more fully allow God to live through us! He is our King and we are sons and daughters in His Kingdom. It is no longer a matter of mere performance, but God’s life alive in us, around us, and through us.

What do you think? Have I gone mad with too many hours of investigation, reflection, and meditation? Perhaps, but I must tell you my friend, I am at peace with this life - and ready for the life to come!


Have you discovered the spiritual life-cycle of the Kingdom of Heaven?



“You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind, and with all of your strength. And love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

WHO I AM.

"I am a chosen instrument to play the music of my Creator."



"But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." - 1 Peter 2:9

As soon as the first "eye-witness" followers of Jesus finished their lives, the church began to drift from some of His fundamental teachings. While many truths have been lost and rediscovered in the centuries since, the teaching that Christ-followers have connection and direct approach to God at any time has for the most part never been fully recovered. Because we are chosen to be sons of God when we come to know Christ we have unlimited access to the Father through Jesus. We don't need anyone to pray, talk, or serve for us. We belong to Him. This sense of belonging can do much for the heart of a lost son or daughter!

I love to watch talented musicians play, especially awesome pianists. I can't help but think that heaven will be a wild, complex piece of music - meticulously and passionately played creatively and endlessly for our Creator. In one sense our faith is the instrument for our part in this beautiful composition.

What makes a person decide he or she wants to become a man or woman of God? Often this decision flows from personal gratefulness and the excitement of being part of a bigger story. For me it was a realization that I belonged to God. Jesus had chosen me for His special purposes, and my adventure is to discover these purposes as I walk the journey of my life.

Over the years I have watched many people approach questions of significance and devotion. Some do it cautiously, as if getting too close to God is dangerous or scary. Others engage flippantly, denying the significant impact of being chosen for the purposes of our Creator. There are also those who investigate greedily, trying to figure out “what’s in it for me.” But Jesus’ words continue to cut through history: “Who do you say that I am?” If your answer is that you believe He is God’s Son, the personal implications are massive for what you do with the rest of your life.

Is Jesus God’s Son?

Have you made the decision to become a man or woman of God? Why or why not? What are the barriers? What are your questions?

Have you made the choice to find your identity in Christ and His Kingdom?

- Have you availed yourself to a **pure heart**? Do you believe the “god shaped hole” inside of you is filled? Are you motivated to give God first place in your life?
- Have you decided there is high value to **hearing the voice** of your Creator and His Son? Do you believe God has spoken? That He is still speaking? That He wants to speak to you? It is possible for you to hear His voice? How badly do you want to know God?
- Have you embraced a lifestyle of **doing kindness** to others? Are you willing to live a life dedicated to sheltering others and setting myself aside?
- Have you caught a vision for the **growth of true life** all around you? Do you live beyond yourself and experience a life focused on the deep welfare of others?

This is the heart-pledge of those who have chosen to

“leave their nets” and follow Jesus, and follow Jesus to become a Kingdom follower. It would be awesome if this meant only a change in behavior – a cleaning up of our lives. But it really isn’t that at all. It is a decision to embrace a lifetime of being changed – from the inside out. It is trusting the Voice to take us where He wants us to go, and where we need to be.

It is difficult for us to imagine we are made in the image of our Creator. Especially with all of the imperfection inside us and around us. But to succumb to the futility of being mere “dust in the wind” is a terrible tragedy. According to the scriptures we have more value than this. We have intrinsic worth which makes us more than accidents careening aimlessly through the cosmos.

In just a few pages we have covered miles of spiritual ground. Don’t let it intimidate you! *If you are willing to take steps toward your King, He will reward your efforts with success.* The journey of a life of faith can be arduous, but consider the alternatives. Eternal loss (if the scriptures are true) or the emptiness of obliteration (if He does not exist). How terribly sad and meaningless.

Hopefully, along with me, you desire the path of personal peace - with the reward of Heaven itself. This is what Kingdom spirituality offers your heart and soul!

WHAT WE MUST OWN



“Then Jesus said to His followers, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses His life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits His own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

(Matthew 16:24-26)

“He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor Him.”

(John 12:25-26)

“Peter began to say to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You.” Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. “But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.”

(Mark 10:28-31)

In my spiritual journey I have learned many hard lessons - primarily because I am by nature a very stubborn and self-centered person. Bending our will to God’s will comes naturally to few. While life is difficult and challenging at times, a Kingdom vision is one of hope and adventurous meaning!

The early followers of Christ embraced a few things you must own if you are to navigate this adventure with grace, meaning, and hope.

You are free! In a sense we have been returned to the privilege of Adam. We have been plucked from obscure and inevitable death and placed in the middle of the will of God. Once we were blind regarding spiritual things - now the light has dawned in our hearts and we are free to hear God's voice. Jesus was sent to come to have first place in everything. *What are your honest thoughts about submission to Christ's leadership over your life?* Each of the disciples went through this learning curve and came out the other end of their training with an understanding that life was all about Jesus coming to have first place. *This is the principle of authority.*

We are dear sons and daughters! Each one of us owns our direct connection with Jesus. We are useful to Jesus' Kingdom with no further schooling or need to become a "full-time" christian worker or missionary. People marveled that the followers of Jesus were uneducated and untrained. Jesus qualified them by being with them and then sending them toward the mission. He simply told them to rely upon Him and to love one another. When you entered Jesus' Kingdom you were given the full rights of a son or daughter. You have literally become one of Jesus' family. *This is the principle of connection.*

You were re-birthed to serve! Literally every Christ-follower owns and contributes to the mission of Jesus. You were called into your own unique world of relationships. As you serve others and learn humility you find effectiveness. It is your privilege in life to give your time, talents, and treasures to furthering Jesus' Kingdom in the hearts of mankind. *Just how serious are you about God's ownership over your life?* It is too easy to give God a mere tenth of our time, talents, and treasures, or even worse; to give Him only leftover crumbs. God wants everything. *This is the principle of mission.*

You are significant! As Kingdom family members we are each indispensable for God's purposes. When we come to Christ, the Holy Spirit is locked within each one of us. The Holy Spirit is the only guide needed to "lead us in truth." Spiritual

gifts are activated when we choose to love others, and they are given for the common good. You have been given a unique personal history and supernatural spiritual gifts which will not be duplicated in anyone else's life. Do you sense the Holy Spirit in your life and see Him disclosing the Father to you? *It is this unique blend of God in each one of us which makes us special.* There will never be another you. God has destined you for YOUR life. And His Spirit can accomplish in a day what we can never achieve in an entire lifetime of human effort.

What are the things you OWN in your spirituality? What are the things you are sure about? In what ways do you feel you experience Kingdom spirituality?

"If we wish to find our lives, we must lose our lives." If we wish to follow, we must set aside our desires and subject them to Jesus' desires. (Luke 22)

His Kingdom is here - *and there is so much more to come!*

REVOLUTION: A FOURTH STREAM



The Kingdom of Heaven is not like kingdoms of men. It is not networking-slick, nor religious, nor centered upon man. His Kingdom is inspired and brought to fruition by the Voice. It is built around deep and intentional devotion toward God the Father and His Son. It is able to be found and embraced as the most incredible part of your journey.

Over the years our community has encountered many religious people - as well as Kingdom servants. You never know where a true Kingdom servant will show up. A nurse who stays late after a long day to move between waiting and operating room on behalf of a distraught and fearful family. A worker in a nursing facility for the aging who almost seems to care too much. A physical therapist who exercises fragile, twisted bodies and heart-breaking mental disabilities. A car mechanic who reflects personal interest, pleasantness and joy as he zealously does his job. A family who makes room in their home for an ailing grandparent or an abandoned child. If “pure religion” is helping “widows and orphans and keeping ourselves unstained by the world” – then servant leaders, while obscure from limelight, are truly great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

I have been waiting for an outpouring all of my life. Praying hungrily for the Voice to sweep through the hearts of millions of my American neighbors’ souls. I am thirsty to see what would happen if this kind of Kingdom compassion were unleashed within our culture through unique lives such as yours and mine.

Such phenomenon can be tracked historically on three major occasions in our country, since the first Americans risked everything to escape religious tyranny in Europe and find a new home. Each was a spiritual renewal of major proportions.

The First stream began with the hope of freedom and a sacrificial desire to establish a “city on a hill” in our new, renewed world. It receded in religious formalization and fragmentation as our new country was established.

The Second stream preceded our Civil war and was a Spirit-led prayer revival with awesome impact. It was cooled by the onset of our bloody internal conflict.

The Third stream unfolded with the development of denominations and continued with the fundamentalist and evangelical movements from 1900 to World War II to recent years. It marked the development of America as a socially “Christian nation.”

During this “third stream” we have experienced a ramping up of the mechanization of our society and the full embrace of consumerism. The “new enlightenment” of the sixties, the Vietnam era and the death of traditional authority, the shift to neo-evangelicalism, and, finally, the onset of post-modern teachings signal America has come fully into the tech-rich, secular society which will mark either the beginning of the end and/or the outpouring of a fourth stream.

Fourthstream Christ-followers are coming full circle to our authentic Jesus roots. As the church in the first century was captivated with Jesus rather than religion, so a fourth stream resumes this connection.

Across our cities men and women are courageously engaging a relational, philosophical, and creative revolution. Together we are rediscovering authentic Kingdom spirituality, and the true nature of the Kingdom Harvest.

CURIOUS JOURNEY



At this point I am compelled to ask a few personal questions. *Have you found peace, or do you feel you are “crashing around in the darkness?” Do you see how your journey has an ultimate purpose of Fusion with your Creator? Are you truly free? Have you found a satisfied mind which can carry you through death into life?*

I have tried the best I know to be transparent and heartfelt as I have shared with you my curious journey as well as our experience in community. The concept of King and then Kingdom spirituality are quite distinct from being religious. This kind of spiritual revolution CAN belong to you. There is simply nowhere the Voice cannot be heard!

Some day not too far away Kingdom faith warriors of every nation under heaven and from every century since the dawn of time will gather before our Captain and give an account of our stewardship. We will not assemble to gather medals, recognition, or payback for what we have sacrificed. We will gather for one purpose – to lay the glory of our battles at the feet of our King. Our Fusion will be complete, and the beautiful tapestry of our lives will be presented as a part of the eternal glory of Jesus and His Father. The messiness of the work-side of the tapestry will be forgotten...and we will live as a part of the Father's Shining forever!

May your curious journey fuse with the Voice who is everything. And may you find the reward of a true Kingdom life, my friend. Now THAT is something to live for!

- David Nadler



Additional resources for your own Curious Journey

TheGodStory.com

Fourthstream.com

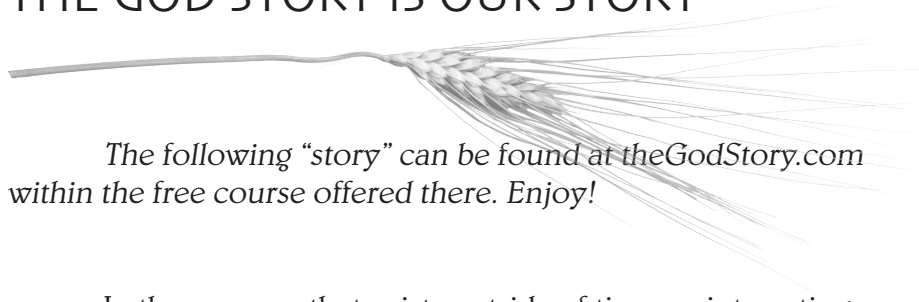
MyCuriousJourney.com

MyStrongHome.com

We also offer on-line training courses which you will find helpful if you are spiritually motivated, lacking data, a skeptic, or disillusioned by experiences with religion.

Inquire at 4@Fourthstream.com.

THE GOD STORY IS OUR STORY



The following "story" can be found at theGodStory.com within the free course offered there. Enjoy!

In the expanse that exists outside of time an interesting conversation unfolds. "We will make them in our image, in our likeness. They will revere and honor us. We will give them authority over every creature on the earth. They will have offspring and live and enjoy their growing garden forever - until the entire earth is filled with their generations."

The arch-angels Michael and Gabriel nodded as they heard their Sovereign's choices spoken into existence. They have seen it before, millennia after millennia. His intellect, His creativity, His heart, His sheer power are beyond even their belief. There is simply no describing the glory of the One speaking on the throne of Light!

At the Creator's right hand the Son smiles and then looks over the churning deep - into a future that only He and His Father could conceive or comprehend. His heart bursts with love for the One who is His infinite friend. There was nothing that He would not do to bless His Father. Absolutely nothing.

*

And it all happened just as the Living God had spoken. The creation was breathed into existence. Time means nothing to the Father of all living. The infinite galaxies are His playground. The imprint of life - the very building blocks of life are just the tip of the Designer's mind - a mind that knows no limits.

As the world is birthed another angel looks on. Inside he seethes with masked contempt for what is unfolding before his powerful eyes. He is one of only three - Gabriel, Michael, and himself. He is Lucifer. Son of the morning. He is one of the three who covers. His beauty and power are eclipsed only by the Two who are on the Throne. Deep within his great heart cancerous seeds are growing bitter roots. He will find a way. One day his glory will bring him the throne that he so deeply deserves.

*

What happened in the Garden was terrible on a huge scale. Adam and Eve took the bait offered by the Lucifer serpent. No longer would they walk with the Father in the cool of the day. No longer would the master plan for cultivating the earth occur. Now access to the eternal tree in the Garden would be denied to the sons of Adam. Life would yield pain and thorns and death. Animals died. Blood was shed. Coverings were made.

As the deep dark moved over the souls of men the Son set His face to do what needed to be done. Now His relationship with His eternal Father would exact a huge price. Sinless, holy, pure and righteous God would now have to experience the unthinkable. He would now need to build a bridge back from death. If not, ALL of the Sons of Adam would be eternally separated from their Creator. The cost to humanity had been incalculable.

The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders around the throne lifted up their voices. As the innumerable angels joined in - the sound was so massively intense that it shook heaven like an earthquake. Now billions of eyes prepared to watch, pray, and engage in the War. Lucifer had claimed his kingdom - The Living God would buy them back with His own blood.

*

The time would come soon for the Gift - centuries of preparation began. The Living Father created a people from one man to prepare the soil until the appointed day. He set His affection upon a man called Abraham and his wife Sarah. Through their descendents would come the Human King - the Deliverer of the souls of the sons of Adam. This people would see His glory, know His Name, and show His Life to the rest of the world. He gave them the God-Story to care for and give to the rest of the world. He sent them kings and prophets to tell them the truth about themselves and invite them to the Bridge of Light.

As this nation grew 2/3's of the Angels led by Michael and Gabriel watched the affairs of men and fought the beginnings of the War with Lucifer. His power among men became great - the earth was his - his kingdom seethed with satisfaction. His glory was growing. His Day was coming.

*

For four thousand years mankind multiplied - nations were birthed - and men, women, and children were dying. The Garden had become a death-trap abyss. Each generation would find renewed opportunity to find light and each generation rejected the light. And the cycle of life and death was only broken by men and women who found the Living God and the Bridge of Light. When the final prophet had spoken his last words Heaven became silent for 400 years, according the prophecies of His spokesmen.

Already the Father's hand had moved and His Son had stepped forward. A chosen young Jewish woman was implanted with the seed of God. The Holy Spirit did His work. The sinless sacrifice had to be brought into the world. Without God's blood the Sons of Adam were hopelessly lost. Without Jesus' blood forgiveness could not be won. The price was more than anyone in heaven could have dreamed. Michael and

Gabriel looked on in awe: God's Son was going to die.

Lucifer waited expectantly for the birth of the Son - child. He would have to be killed, of course. There could be only one king over the earth. When the child was born - he would be there. And the Son-child would surely die.

*

The Son's 34 years on earth were complete. He looked to the heavens and in intense anguish He said "It is finished." Michael and Gabriel looked on silently as the Father turned His face from His Son-child on the cross. The veil of death and holiness between the Father and all mankind was torn from top to bottom. Heaven's door was now opened into the Bridge of Light.

Now the silence around the throne was deafening beyond human comprehension. Three days later in the stone grave the figure in grave clothes began to move. Michael and Gabriel stood by as the breath of life began to sustain Him once again. Though the body was no longer dead the deep scars were as plain as the light of day on the Risen Son's hands and feet. Lucifer had failed. Death had been cheated in a huge way. The 4000 year old kingdom of Satan had begun to crumble. Graves were opened. Dead God-followers came to life and walked the streets of Jerusalem. The Son Jesus appeared to hundreds of men and women and demonstrated His supreme power over life and eternal death.

*

Over two Millennia had passed. The first Christ-followers had fulfilled their assignment. The good news had taken root and grown in the world. The Bridge of Light had seen a steady stream of millions of souls. As the last living soul crossed the Bridge the heavens ripped back like a scroll.

“Then I saw Heaven open wide—and oh! a white horse and its Rider. The Rider, named Faithful and True, judges and makes war in pure righteousness. His eyes are a blaze of fire, on his head many crowns. He has a Name inscribed that’s known only to himself. He is dressed in a robe soaked with blood, and he is addressed as “Word of God.”

“The armies of Heaven, mounted on white horses and dressed in dazzling white linen, follow him. A sharp sword comes out of his mouth so he can subdue the nations, then rule them with a rod of iron. He treads the winepress of the raging wrath of God, the Sovereign-Strong. On his robe and thigh is written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.”

- Revelation 19:11-17, the Message

Jesus said: “I am the Way. I am the Truth. I am the Life. No man comes to the Father but by Me.”

What amazing authority has been given to the Son!

THE SILENT PLANET

from a song inspired by C.S. Lewis' Silent Planet/the Space trilogy

I'm just a singer, singing my song.
Taking what I've seen – and passing it along
I'm just a traveler – writing my lines
Inviting you to come along

For centuries, and year after year
The Silent Planet cannot see cannot hear
Self-imposed silence, self-imposed fear
Lost in a maze – her ending is near

Merlin the magician, takes his stand in time
Ransom left for Venus, and we've been left behind
In the silent planet
In the silent planet
Who will cry, for the silent planet?

Then One steps forward, "I will pay the price"
I'll take the Silent Planet, and I will give it life
If you wish to cross the chasm,
then you must come through Me
Or darkness you will have, and darkness there will be

I'm just a singer. singing my song
Taking what I've seen – and passin' it along
I'm just a traveler – writing my lines
Inviting you to come along

