

The TURBULENCE of IMPERFECTION

Essays about Real Life

D a v e N a d l e r

Yeah in this wasteland where I'm livin'
There is a crack in the door filled with light
And it's all that I need to get by
Yeah in this wasteland where I'm livin'
There is a crack in the door filled with light
And it's all that I need to shine

- Need to Breathe -

PERFECT STORM

I was thinking about you today and the perfect storm
in which I find myself. I wrote this poem for you - for me.

It is hard for me to think about the loss I feel
Companionship is such a touching thing for me - for my heart
Many times on this journey I have been taught through what is lost
And it can make my soul crumble if I let it
But if I protect myself I seem to suffer loss as well
So I have learned to turn my face toward the storm
Just like you, soldiering on to a more perfect destination

Thank you for what you have brought to my journey
I really think my deep life is a string of heart-lights
in this dark world
These are the things I value and carry with me
Not merely faces but the privilege of gifts of heart
Which have blessed my soul in their very depths
This heart which I have seen in you
And the light you have shone into me

I am sorry for the ways I have - or am - letting you down even now
It is weird to look to imperfection for comfort
But in this perfect storm I want you to know
That you and those whom you love
Will always be in my God-quicken memories
Of laughs and troubles, of births and deaths
Of triumphs and loss
Until the day we meet again

Take care my friend
Soon the storm will be over
And we will be overtaken by rivers of light

2021

For those who search deeply.

*“Expectations unrealized wear us down,
but hopes fulfilled grow deep strength.”*

- the richest king who has ever lived -
Proverbs 13:12

*“You have kept track of my journeys,
collecting my pain and sorrows for you to carry,
kept safe in my story which You alone hold?”*

- the most favored king who has ever lived -
Psalm 56:8

We live within a great paradox. While we work hard to control the circumstances and issues of our lives, many things are dictated by things out of our control. These things are not insignificant in their power to impact our peace of mind and our contentment about where we have come, who we are, and where we feel we are headed. We will consider some of these as these essays and stories unfold.

“Why are things the way they are?” is one of the great questions of life. Why is disappointment and turbulence around every corner? How has my heart coped with such challenges and how has this impacted my relationships? Have I experienced personal comfort? Have I learned and do I practice giving solace and reassurance to others?

More often than not, life has delivered us some kind of *turbulence* - even chaos. *Imperfection* resides everywhere, and pain and uncertainty surround us in the form of challenges and disappointments - even within our most cherished hopes and dreams. This unpredictable mix reaches out to cover the endings of our journeys as well. What exactly does happen when I die?

Some are convinced that the evolution of mankind is upward, with a certainty of elevated arrival. Others are less optimistic. Their view of history and human nature precludes embracing a rising trajectory. Most of us live somewhere between these two polarities.

From the atheist to the faith-zealot on the life continuum, each of us has assembled our core beliefs which shape our world view. We make our life decisions accordingly. These are very individual, personal, and powerful.

I am captivated by *scientific* thought. The sheer weight of knowledge which has come to light during my lifetime is remarkable. I am swept up in all things beautiful, and science and nature feed the deepest parts of who I am with their focus on the macro and the micro - the great and the small.

I enjoy the reasoning processes and conclusions of *philosophical* thinkers as well. There are multiplied ways to look at any one aspect of life, and I find it stimulating to contemplate the thoughts of other active thinkers, contemporary or historical, within their own life contexts.

The role of *faith* within history and human contemplation of ultimate meaning is fascinating and has shaped the human story in significant ways. I, personally, draw clear lines between faith and religion, consulting Jesus for clarity about this.

Consequently, I choose to be determined and not blindly accept either ancient or modern platitudes or unfounded speculations. I believe our intellect, our internal being, and our capacity for human impact is inseparably linked within science, philosophy, and faith. These essays pursue such lines of reflection.

It seems to me that we are born into a world at war. Turbulence and Imperfection are the arena where our stories unfold. My hope is that this book will be helpful as you navigate the challenging and weighty aspects of the impact of this on our minds, bodies, souls, and consciences.

Dave Nadler
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I am actually quite a positive soul (yet perhaps also a little cynical and impatient). Still, I am honest with myself. By way of a reasonable understanding of human history - and having my eyes opened during the decades which I have inhabited - I have concluded several things. First, there is a certain amount of true chaos alongside the beautiful order in and around everything. It strikes me that imperfection is part of the very nature of where we live. Who we are. From this imperfection springs turbulence, where a person simply cannot ignore the effects of the wild chaos we see.

Faith writers, philosophers, and all forms of scientists - each wrestle with things beyond their control. It is as though natural laws and the building blocks of life have been set into motion on a level which encompasses every part of our journey, yet precludes us from answers to certain questions. In the midst of science, faith, and philosophy, I must somehow find the peace of mind to know my existence matters. That my life is significant.

These conversations: *Chaos, Story, Transcendence, and Con-*

science form the basis for each essay. *True North* and *Finding Hope* help me make sense of it. Different philosophers and theologians hold varied views on the body, the mind, the heart, the soul, and the spirit. Science is most vocal about physical realities and varies in this from philosophy or faith. I believe this is why we need science, philosophy, *and* faith to grasp meaning.

My hope is to engage thoughts and conversations to make room for sorting out chaos, turbulence, and the ever-present imperfection we face each day. Over the years of engaging with people, I have witnessed and experienced much turbulence, and it has led me to search for answers.

You probably know well the impact of suffering in and around your life. Loss and disappointment are everywhere. Why? What underlies this inescapable and seemingly harsh imperfection?

These are important questions. By sorting out who we are - beyond the body we inhabit for such a limited time - we can achieve peace of mind regarding some of the unsettling and disturbing circumstances of our lives.

Perhaps these essays will enhance contemplation for your personal hoped-for outcomes.

CHAOS AND THE HEART

1.

Why are things the way they are?

2.

The reality of my many parts

3.

The suffering principle

4.

The joy principle

5.

The wisdom principle

Two Souls

I have had the sobering privilege of being present at the death of many - some young, some old, some tragic, some heartbreaking, and others filled with release and deep joy.

Soul 1: From Curious Journey

The old man breathed rhythmically as he contemplated what had 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 had spent the last 38 hours since having what appeared to be a stroke with some heart complications (if he understood what he was hearing) sorting through his perceptions and trying to focus as he broke in and out of the medications which had been prescribed for his comfort. He couldn't deny it. Everyone around him was positive, but the agitated concern was unmistakable. This must be it.

There was a randomness to his thinking which was 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 surely being ready could be put off one more 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, and wherever he pulled, something else triggered and he was left in a revolving door of memories, thoughts, and concerns.

The old man clenched his hands, struggled for breath, and slipped quietly from this life into the next. His story, just like our

own, inevitably reached its final day. The tapestried elements of his life are now “etched forever into the great river of timeless raindrops” where all stories find their ultimate destiny.

Soul 2: Watching my friend die from covid-19 complications

Within the panic that is covid, it has been painful to watch friends part ways and families divide over their differing views of the worldwide pandemic. It has been, in many ways, a perfect storm.

As our friend, Dave’s, sickness and death process unfolded, we learned much about turbulence and imperfection. At 51 Dave contracted covid and eventually ended up on a ventilator. After a hard fight and two months in the ICU, he chose to be taken off it. His lungs were shot, and as hard as everyone prayed and cared, there was nothing else to be done.

Dave lived a faithful, albeit somewhat unconventional, faith-experience. He was a connected part of our community of Christ-followers and lived life on the edges of religion. This opened many interesting doors for impact. As we shared stories at his celebration of life, it was striking how he had lived his quiet life as a window cleaner and chain saw carver. His appointed God days had been written in a book, and now they had run their course. He was valued because he deeply valued others.

I got to be with Dave, his wife, and their only son as he passed from this life into the next. If you have never experienced this before, it is sobering to watch a person’s heartbeat recede step by step until they are gone. It is one of the most moving experiences in life.

To watch his wife faithfully communicate love -- and regret -- during the previous months and then observe her courage during his last hours made us so proud of her and of her faith which is now being tested to its limits.

When his son came in to say goodbye, Dave spelled out his last message. (Dave and his wife had found a way to communicate though he couldn't speak.) He traced these words on a pillow his wife was holding: "honor being your dad." Then he fixed his last earthly look at his son. In these few moments, I witnessed one of the most beautifully awful things I had ever seen. Real love. Real death. Real hope. This young man's community also shares the love which Dave had for him.

Dave died well. He had run his race. He died in hope. He experienced genuine faith. He made a difference. His final words for all of us were simple: love more deeply. Many of us carry this message with us as we continue our own walk into the storm.



1. Why are things the way they are?

We have all experienced our share of pain or disappointment. An unfulfilled dream. Hard work which has been less than successful or disappointingly come to nothing. A lost baby. A failed marriage or friendship. Though we work hard to minimize turbulence, we certainly cannot completely overcome its effects. Our world is an imperfect place, and we are surrounded by imperfect people, some who live very close to home.

The world is a messy place and has been for a long time. The philosopher-teacher, Jordan Peterson, believes the 20th century was the most barbaric in history. Mankind is not evolving upward despite tech and modernization. For some reason, it is in human DNA to oppress. Not everyone lives this way, of course, but it is pretty widespread to observe subjugation from powers that be.

What is it within humanity that makes us want to manipulate, control, and bend things to our own advantage? There is always someone who seems to know what is best for others and is willing to exact an awful price to achieve it. Could it be there is something very deep which causes this turbulence?

Consequently, we often find ourselves in a world at war, and though there are things we can control and influence, there are many we cannot. We try to be experts at outcomes, but we often lack ultimate control. This manifests itself in personal suffering, and as mentioned, sometimes the oppression of others.

In the middle of all of this we long for something deep, real, and authentic. We search philosophically for a teacher, coach or ideology to find some sort of peace of mind. We look to religion to open the doors to hope and fulfillment which can't be brought about by attaining personal goals or accumulating more possessions. We hope knowledge will be an arbiter of deep contentment.

Science, learning, and technology do provide great opportunities for finding a satisfied mind. If we construct a world view which brings together our philosophy, our beliefs, and our hopes, will it be enough to experience an authentic life? Will we be satisfied?

As any careful observer negotiating the inevitable passages of life knows, *the clock is not cooperative*. While we learn from our

experiences and are motivated to bring about change, our health, energy levels, optimism, and even luck impact us all.

I have some younger, hopeful, scientific friends who believe they will live to 140 years (this is becoming a more common hope). Since medical and health technology still have much to resolve about the body's durability, we must do the best we can to face the reality that our longevity will inevitably eclipse quality of life.

2. The reality of my many parts

I must wrestle with several unchangeable realities as I contemplate meaning in the midst of the collision between incredible order and rampant imperfection. There is a fragility to being human. We have physical limitations. We can be emotionally unpredictable. In the last 50-100 years, self-help and counseling resources have exploded and insight into the micro details of our physical make-up (cells, genomes, DNA strands, etc.) have expanded exponentially. All of this has contributed to making the once seemingly simple much more complex.

While our physical beings are easily visible and amazing, our mind becomes our next level of familiarity. This is where we live - in our thoughts and in our dreams. Our innate intellectual processing ability is extraordinary. When you add imagination, the mosaic of the mind is filled with breathtaking possibilities. While physical realities are usually most pressing, our thinking realities guide us through everything we encounter. Indeed, all we need to experience is a physical injury, and our mind and brain are thrown into chaos as we rush to process and survive.

Somewhere between our minds and bodies, the emotional part of us exists. Some call this the heart. This is where we process what is taking place within us. It is where thought, enjoyment, pain,

and hopes and dreams engage the dance of life. We each have an inner compass that forms the basis for how we respond to ourselves and others.

So where does our morality emerge? Certainly our mind settles on conclusions and formulates impulses to act, but there also appears to be a part of us where thoughts and feelings come together. Some have termed this the soul. Here we process the *why* of existence. Our souls can ponder and even impart both incredible joy and sweeping fear. It can take us from the heights of peace to the depths of despair. This is where we determine the quality of our time-limited lives.

The God Story adds another dimension to the mix of body, mind, and soul. It says the breath of life appears to be a gift from God and is termed the “spirit of a man.” This is the part which some think defines our true essence because it will outlive our bodies.

Add personal conscience to these, and the picture is complete. The conscience is the arena where our body, mind, heart, and soul wrestle with the great questions concerning the ultimate meaning of life. Within our conscience resides the springboard for choices which define us as individual souls. It serves as a clearing-house for what is true or what is false, for what is moral or what is immoral, and what is temporary or eternal. History is populated with examples of both the beauty and the horror of these choices of conscience by powerful individuals, families, and cultures.

This leads us to contemplate three guiding principles of the body, mind, heart, and soul. *The suffering principle, the joy principle and the wisdom principle.* Each can help us process the imperfection all around us as well as the turbulence of our own lives.

3. *The suffering principle*

One of the oldest books in the God Story (the Bible) is about a sage named Job. Job was wildly successful and enjoyed all the fruits of a blessed life. He had family, possessions, recognition as one of the foremost men of the east, and he was deeply committed to doing what is right.

Whatever you believe about good and evil, Job's story is epic. The Good Creator invited the Slug of the universe to consider His servant Job. This same Creator allowed this slug (satan) to take Job apart. He killed all his children, all his servants, all his livestock, his possessions were plundered, and his body was assaulted in the most horrifying ways. This is not chance chaos. It was targeted grief and profound loss. Soon his good friends arrived to explain his pain - in their own, non-comforting ways. And for all we can tell, Job doesn't deserve one bit of his troubles. He not only was a good guy, he was a sharp guy, but designed chaos overtook him like a whirlwind. Imperfection attacked him and turbulence engulfed him.

This is where we live as well, and, as much as we try to insulate ourselves from suffering, it inevitably overtakes us. We wrestle with questions like "*What did I do to deserve this?*" or "*How could a loving God do this to me?*" Job was encumbered with the deepest and saddest questions of life.

I have watched up close and personal as friends have suffered some of the greatest losses. I have been at the side of heart-wrenching unfolding human suffering that make my eyes sting even now as I contemplate such losses. Tragic accidents. Suicides. Untimely deaths. Painful and searing loss. I have learned there are no adequate human words in the face of such suffering. There is no true human comfort for the hurting soul. Tragedy exacts suffocating fear.

4. *The joy principle*

One of the great gifts of life is to find joy in the midst of personal suffering and chaos. Imperfection can become a friend to the suffering heart because it can move us to places we wouldn't choose to go. This journey can drive us toward something greater and allow us to find true satisfaction of heart, mind, and soul.

Our bodies will most assuredly run their course. Our minds will be stilled. But what about the spirit inside each one of us? What happens to our soul? Does it end when we take our last breath, or are we then just beginning our journey?

Jesus commented on this when He said “of what lasting use is it to a man if he acquires everything the world has to offer and loses his own soul?” The answer? If we miss the joy offered to us through neglecting our deeper parts, it is tragic beyond words. *One soul. One life. One opportunity.* God passionately encourages us to find true joy.

It is heart-wrenching to watch the process of death. Pain. Grief. Regret. I have witnessed this many times, and I'm always surprised by the clarity which occurs. The deep love-words of family. The recounting of a person's impact. The day to day connections each experienced in their own journey. What are the implications from the God Story? Many of us will stand before our Creator-Savior and hear the words “*well done, enter into the joy of your Master.*” Many will not.

Our accomplishments bring us earthly joy. This, to me, is a great reward of life. We must invest the capital we acquire in the

way we see fit - and this includes much more than physical assets. We either love deeply - or not so much. But in the final analysis, it appears that the joy of a well-lived journey follows us into the life to come. Boom.

5. *The wisdom principle*

In the American culture we discard the gray-haired as having little to offer compared to those with the energy, drive, and optimism of youth. But where does wisdom fit? How can we know what we don't know? When tested by life, our assumptions are tempered. We can actually learn to put knowledge into practice. Wisdom is a gift many will not find because it is not perceived as real treasure. God appears to value the wisdom of hearts filled with searching and learning - and humbling ourselves before Him.

Our great God says that *"wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her."* To discover deep value through living life is liberating. It is the process of life which shapes us. *Suffering* and *joy* are allies in our search for meaning. If we find *wisdom*, it will lead us back to our Creator. Our joys and sufferings are key ingredients to being set free.

The ultimate hope of the soul is to stand before our Creator-King and hear the words *"well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in many things. I will place you over ten cities. Enter into the joy of your Master."* When we find wisdom we find meaning, and when we find meaning we find Kingdom reward.

What I am concluding as I consider the reality of chaos, imperfection, and turbulence...

1) Trouble and turbulence and 2) my challenged nature and the imperfection all around me and 3) suffering are all factors that provide the backdrop for my life. Could each one provide keys to unlock deeper understanding of personal meaning? Consider the options.

When bad things happen, we appear designed to search for the origin. We respond to these deeper questions with philosophical and faith options. Science can give us the how, but it simply cannot comment on the deeper why. Inevitably we must turn to philosophy and faith to answer the tough questions.

Because we often consider ourselves above or beyond considering both faith and science as compatible allies, we rely only upon natural law to answer deep questions. However, human reasoning and scientific data fall short of complete understanding. We return to our God Story friend, Job. This man was virtually impeccable in his attempts to succeed, live peacefully, and care deeply about everything dear to him, including his children.

Then the devil, the repository of selfishness and chaos, joined the story. He apparently had access to God Himself. Note it was God who calls satan's attention to Job. "Have you considered my servant Job?" These are chilling words for those of us who wish for there to be clear delineation between order and chaos. Good and evil.

Whether you believe in a character such as lucifer, the devil, satan, or not, it is pretty difficult to make a compelling argument that the atrocities of history rest solely on the shoulders of the dirt bags of humanity. Oppression is endemic to the war into which we

are born and to our overall nature and desire *to come out on top*.

So IF chaos and imperfection are a deeply woven condition occurring within every generation, is it possible to juxtapose philosophy, faith, and natural science to complete our compass? This seems the point. If we can wrestle with *why* within a paradigm of science, philosophy, and faith, then perhaps we can find more complete answers. This seems important to me because these deeper questions will be with us until our final breath.

I have found it takes personal courage and effort to get to the root of the how, where, what, who, and especially the why of life. Challenging our own ideas when it comes to deeper life issues can help direct our compass as we find our way. This is what we will explore in the remainder of these essays.



STORY & MEANING

“There are only two things certain in life - death and taxes.”

Bullock, DeFoe, and Benjamin Franklin all contemplated this. Their commentaries regarding their times is historically insightful. Certain things are inescapable about the human condition - even when the chance for renewal presents itself. It appears to me that this comment exceeded a statement about taxation and included oppression. It is highly likely this was speaking of the *who* and *why* of taxation as well.

Little had changed in the move from Europe to the new world - the fresh start. Precious few things have changed still. There is nothing we can do about death and really very little that can be done about our human handlers. Death and oppression seem to go hand in hand within the human story. Try as we might (the American experience a great case in point), we continue to succumb to these same realities. Coping with death and oppression (taxes) are just some of our recurring circumstances as we examine history.

One of my favorite quotes is from the German philosopher, Hegel: *“the only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.”* Is it possible we can experience relationships which eclipse inevitable human oppression? Jesus summed up His teaching on this: *“Greater love has no one than this, than a man lay down his life for his friend.”*

Perhaps a fresh look at a personal story may help us wrestle with some deeper, more difficult questions.

Jimmy's story

Many years ago we became friends with a family and their two children. Sam and Mary experienced typical turbulence in how they, themselves, were parented and personal choices they'd made in life.

When their son Jimmy was born with Down Syndrome, it rocked their world. His sister followed two years later weighing in at only two pounds, fitting into the palm of her dad's hand, and with extensive early issues. Their initial parenting years were filled with enormous physical and emotional challenges and adjustments.

We learned much from Sam and Mary as they shouldered their lot in life. They loved their kids and nurtured them at significant cost to their own personal hopes and dreams. They embraced the radical challenges of care and culture as they taught and protected their vulnerable, and only, son. And his sister's first years were challenging to say the least. The amount of energy this all required was staggering.

From these dear people we learned how to express care and concern for kids with special needs. We became comfortable with greeting and embracing such souls. Several months ago we were able to thank these friends for the ways they taught us by how they have lived and loved their kids. They have blessed our lives by choosing to shoulder their load and lot in life with imperfect strength and beauty.

Mom and Dad's current take: "Jimmy and his sister Anna have blessed our lives each day - and they still do."

Stories of turbulence and imperfection animate things which would never have become apparent without suffering.

1. *Crime & Punishment*

A reasonable review of history often reveals a bleak picture concerning the propensity mankind has for selfishness and domination. There are truly evil people, of course, but perhaps more insidious is our personal callousness toward others. This is particularly damaging when we lose our compass regarding the value of others. We justify unkind or destructive actions within our own cultural perspectives. This happened in Nazi Germany. It has occurred in every century.

The God Story chronicles actions and reactions of many persons over many centuries. You would think the Bible would be filled with examples of perfect people, but just the opposite is true. Like these people, we wish to appear filled with admirable strength, but often experience feet of clay. If strength were just a matter of putting the right things in -- to get predictable results -- lives would be much more settled.

This is precisely the inescapable issue: we are living in a very imperfect and turbulent environment. Imperfection in forces, events, and people. All things human surround and impact us at every turn. Imperfection inevitably reaches each of us, causing turbulence from within as well as with others. *If imperfection is the sea in which we live, turbulence is the activity within each one of our personal pools of life.* These overlap with the concentric disturbances of others, and depending upon those people and forces, they determine the extent chaos impacts our lives. Imagine dropping a stone in water. The subsequent ripples occur no matter what we do. In life this repeats over and over.

I, and I presume you do also, wrestle with the question “Why do bad things happen to good people?” How does this reflect upon our view of our possible Designer? Could this turbulence spring from the imperfection all around us and far exceed merely our own choices to do good or, indeed, even bad things? Is God an aggressive observer waiting for us to screw up so we can be pun-

ished or perhaps even incinerated? Let's investigate.

2. *Unique Meaning*

In my first book, *Curious Journey*, I wrestled with the value of my personal story. Having grown up around what I thought to be purity in collection and interpretation of data (science) and being quite versed in modern philosophy, I had separated faith from the rest of my story.

As I began to string together what I had learned for certain in my then 50 years or so, I realized that my view of my story had refined into something very purposeful and powerful. Because there would only ever be one of me, I came to recognize my unique distinction in being made in the image of God. I am totally predictable - yet completely singular. One of a kind. Of designed value.

I am amazed that among the billions currently living on the face of the planet there is, and only ever will be, one of me. While my human characteristics are shared across centuries, races, and cultures, what I share in common in no way diminishes my personal uniqueness within the human family.

What I learned from the micro and macro of the sciences fueled my search for faith and helped set my sense of wonder on fire. As I sifted through the philosophies of antiquity and today, I encountered deeper things. These, along with the unfolding of personal faith, gave me a context for sorting out some of the more pressing questions of life.

Science brings massive knowledge and stimulation to our sense of wonder - if we allow it. *Knowledge* often serves humanity in absolutely staggering ways, and the pursuit of *philosophy* can broaden our horizons when thinking through personal constructs for life. This can help us where we are going and how we get there. In *faith* I have found structure for meaning. In faith I discover not

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only stimulation to be everything I can be but also the answers to questions science and philosophy don't fully supply.

For instance, who determined that Sam and Mary's first-born would be down syndrome? Was it a choice either parent made? And what about the question of "why us?" There are so many questions only faith is equipped to navigate to a satisfying conclusion.

True science is undeniably beautiful. Honest philosophy can free the mind. Faith brings everything together. By the way, faith is not synonymous with religion. We will discuss this in other essays. I don't wish to be misunderstood concerning definition of authentic faith.

Lizzie and Andrew

I have married many couples as a pastor-teacher-elder (hundreds, actually). When these young men and women arrive for the pre-wedding process, they are filled with optimism and hope for the future. I do everything I can to validate their hopes and dreams. However, as I have grown in my personal experiences and my knowledge of what works, I have also learned to help those just starting out (or struggling in the process) to be *honestly realistic*.

Lizzie and Andrew brought quite a bit of baggage with them to the party. Lizzie was neglected by her parents. She was belittled and abused. Andrew was passive, a result of a disengaged father and an unhappy mother. Together they were a recipe for failure. Their communication was inadequate. His ability to meaningfully cherish his wife was minimal. Her struggle to show respect made her impotent to support her husband's success. After eleven years and two children they were a oneness train wreck.

Now that they had a context for being married (rather than just hopes, dreams, and fears), they were in a place to begin to build and rebuild. They invited God to be the third Voice in their home.

The things we spoke of before they were married now made more sense. They had context.

Lizzie and Andrew humbled themselves and rolled up their sleeves. The turbulence and heartbreak they had experienced now became markers in their rise from the ashes. They rebuilt from the ground up stronger and wiser and more filled with honesty and humility than they were able to muster in their early years. It was beautiful to help and an honor to watch. And so, triumph was born out of turbulence. And four souls of this family were spared the inevitable erosion which occurs through imperfection.

Every story has nuance. We have varied backgrounds and experiences as well as shortcomings and strengths from our childhood. Every home has its challenges. Each of these make us unique, special recipes with distinct opportunities. When we forge life partnerships, we can experience creative combinations because of our mutual perspectives. We have found that accentuating strengths and downplaying weaknesses can be quite powerful.

3. *Context*

I must tell you that many assets are squandered because of imperfect love. Instead of coming together when life gets turbulent, we often drive wedges between one another and succumb to blame and disappointment. This selfishness costs us in our embracing of oneness. When we lose touch with the greater context it threatens hope which in turn causes us to lose motivation. Often our baser, selfish impulses take over, and we increase exposure to a host of evil schemes.

When we set ourselves to think deeply and honestly about our stories, it can be difficult - even humbling. Yet, honesty brings freedom. And truthful, vulnerable partners are able to tackle challenges together and enjoy the successes. It is good for us to celebrate our triumphs and diminish our failures by engaging one another in

humility. This can be an obstacle because people (every one of us) are self-driven and tend to focus on either what is in it for us or in defending ourselves.

This is one of the things that makes a genuine faith-based relationship unacceptable to many of us. It is about sacrifice. A submitted, authentic faith is the enemy of selfishness. What am I willing to give (or give up) for the welfare of those whom I love? And perhaps, even more, those whom I do not particularly cherish or respect?

Deep meaning in our personal relationships emerges as we set ourselves aside. We turn here to Jesus for motivational insight. A man who, by the way, kept this perfectly:

“Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?”

Ask yourself: What value does my story have to the One Who made me? How can I know if I am living well? Do I even care? And, perhaps even more, what is my hope for journey’s end?

4. *Significance*

Significance is an interesting contemplation. How do I make my mark? How long will I have to get it right? Will tech bring me the promised advances and freedoms so many promise?

Many define success by portfolio. What I accumulate and what I pass on to others captures imagination and provides hope of significance. Never mind there are vultures to take their share and that there's a good chance what we pass on to others will be squandered or distributed harshly (death and taxes comes to mind).

Even the most conscientious mom and dad who are being faithful to prepare and launch their children into life must make way for their own kids' choices. Love. Friendships. Accomplishments. Hopes and dreams. All can evaporate before the march of time. Or not. I am not trying to be bleak here. Just realistic.

Consider our historic president, Abraham Lincoln. He presided over national turbulence and gave the ultimate sacrifice for his principles. I have contemplated Lincoln and hold him in high regard for his accomplishments, but time and chance overtake us all. Lincoln has been dead for 150 years and his picture remains on our five dollar bill. But how long will we even continue to use paper money? How is the teaching about his life and his presidency being modified? Who is living today who has met Abraham Lincoln? And so it goes.

You have also heard it said you can't take it with you. This is true. Some people creatively try, but in the end this is an impossibility (there is only so much room in the box).

When it comes down to it, there must be something greater than we can see - or we are destined for oblivion. Our death is the ultimate looming destiny, and there is not one thing we can do to stop it. For me this leads to finding and embracing a Story bigger than myself. It is the only way I know how to make sense of my life in light of hoped for personal significance.

Lucy

We have a friend named Lucy. She loves her job, her favorite TV shows and movies, her condominium, and she is crazy about dogs. She also experiences personal faith in Jesus. She is one of my favorite people. She is filled with life and nine out of ten times is SO optimistic.

Lucy has a significant life impacting disorder. Lucy's mom and dad and her siblings have shouldered the challenges and disappointments by growing in their faith - and are courageously solid in so many delightful ways. The way this home navigates is good for our hearts.

This family could feel very disappointed or even picked on by God. Roots of bitterness could have easily sprung up here, but they were watchful. They live better. Even though there were and are enormous challenges, both Mom and Dad know Lucy is a gift from God. She is God's instrument to expand their faith, fix their hope, and multiply their love.

This entire family has taught many of us so much about grace. It is humbling to me right now as I write these words. We have watched their story, witnessed what they have overcome, and have spent enough time with them to know their vulnerabilities. Yet in God's severe mercy they have chosen to bend before their Creator, and their faith shines with unique strength. While their personal turbulence is painful, their hearts continue to convey living truth in their neighborhood, their workplace, their community, and in our city.

Lucy's Mom and Dad: "She feels the loneliness so deeply and our challenge is we have no clue of that and can only observe and pray and cry with her when she isn't around. This also brings to mind her path is mysterious (just like walking with God is) and so we never really know how to think or pray or what to expect - this keeps us more honest/humble even though we are so desperate for a path with signs. We don't often get it right. She has suffered and

does so gracefully. She is very aware of her loneliness and of her disability. She could have a pity party every day.”

The Kingdom can look like this. Strength perfected in weakness. Unfolding life within the challenge of turbulence. And with it, the reality of courageous love in the midst of imperfection. This leads us to consider the possibility of a greater story.

5. *Is there a Greater Story?*

The generally perceived paradigm of humanity is “eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we may die.” This gives birth to two polarities: asceticism or epicureanism. The epicurean seizes the day because there is no substantial tomorrow and they drink in life and revel in *what is*. The ascetic, however, is quite leery of this philosophy. He or she chooses rather to limit pleasure for a more spartan lifestyle. By severe treatment of the body or by living frugally, an ascetic pursues a deeper quality of life based upon denial of self rather than unbridled embrace of gratification.

The sobering reality is that the ascetic and the epicurean both arrive at the same destination. If there is no faith in their portfolio, the next transition at death seems as though it will be deeply difficult.

People make anything and everything out of religion. Some love it. Some hate it. Most people believe theirs is the most reliable. “Who needs religion? It only lets us down.” It is ironic that Jesus, the most significant human who ever lived, had such antipathy for religion. God raised up the Jewish nation, not because they were *better* than anyone else, but because their need was *identical* to every human who would ever live. This is the cradle of the story of authentic faith.

We cannot rely upon religion to present God authentically. We subtract. We add. We modify. We mess it up. Often to gain

influence over others. Remember the death and taxes quote from Benjamin Franklin? You can count on humans to oppress one another for personal and social gain. I know this sounds harsh especially if you have hopes that humanity is evolving to be better. We simply are not.

This is why death and taxes can be counted on 100%. No one lives forever, and people will always take advantage of one another. There will always be One to whom we will give an account for the stewardship of our lives, both by how we lived and how we treated others. There will always be people who oppress others. We are corrupt. The system is flawed. Cain's killing of his brother Abel 100%. This is the nature of the imperfection in which we find ourselves. Life is a gift to be used wisely - because it will end.

There is a Story which does not result in misplaced religious fervor nor does it end in manipulation. This Story must be allowed *to interpret itself*. It does not need religious leaders to make sense of it. It is accessible to every person. There is one originator and one messenger. He is the first and the last, the beginning and the end. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. This Story has little to do with religion and has everything to do with true authority and the intentional plan of our Creator.

This leads me to consider the wonder and beauty of transcendence and the incomparable gift of hope.



TRANSCENDENCE & HOPE

The Bible says we are made in the image of God, and we have the ability to see God. Here is the rub: when we choose, instead, to BE gods we shut ourselves off from that ability, Him, and His grace. The very nature of God is that He has created all things to bring glory to Himself. This is very unpalatable to a competing god.

To find God we must not merely look within, we must look above. Transcendence implies *better than*, and this is accurate. God is infinitely above all. This is what makes Him God. But He is also filled with compassionate love. It is a great honor to be included in His glory whether we reciprocate with Him or not. So the One Who is *before all things and in Whom all things hold together (people, things, animals, and atoms)* has also reached down to us, offering love and blessing beyond our wildest imaginations.

God is filled with hopeful desire for us to experience truth. For instance, Jesus said “*He who is forgiven little loves little.*” By teaching this, Jesus opened the door to living life more deeply. He is inviting us where we would not choose on our own. Could it be everything has been designed for His glory and the opportunity for us to be included in that glory? Wow. Faith become our chief ally to knowing God.

“Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and He is a rewarder of those who seriously seek Him.”

Grace can be defined as receiving favor we don’t deserve. We are lost and then found. We are corrupt and then healed. Imperfection ends and a new way begins. This is the story of the Good

News. And this forever story has just begun.

I love this: *“Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”* - Psalm 85:10

God is above all. He is in all. He is Near.

1. *Powerful Design* (for some perspective)

I am reading a book right now that includes data about DNA strands. It is written through the eyes of a coder. I cannot relate to the math, but the system helps me to contemplate the amazingly complex designs in cells, etc. This author is one of many over the past several decades who has discarded belief in natural selection because it is antithetical to the recent outpouring of discoveries. Apparently the scientific community is quite divided over this. I suppose once you make room for a designer, many other things get set into motion. Inscrutable things begin to unfold with clarity.

On the cellular level there is such sophisticated design that it would be inconsistent (lame) to deny a designer. Seriously. It seems easy to fall into an argument about design which removes any possibility of supernatural intervention in the sciences because we are obsessed with denial of overlap in design and faith. But is this really the way it must be?

The author is Perry Marshal from his book *Evolution 2.0*. You may enjoy his scientific and mathematical conclusions regarding design on a cellular level: *“It’s not slow or gradual; it’s fast. It’s not accidental; it’s organized. It’s not purposeless; it’s adaptive. Natural selection isn’t the star of the show; Natural Genetic Engineering is.”*

And then, concerning DNA’s complexity: *“If you stretched one strand of human DNA end to end, it would be 6 feet (1.8 meters)”*

long. But it is folded into a space so small that it is literally a trillion times denser than any hard drive. Plus the cell easily reads it whenever necessary. How is this possible?...The folding of DNA inside the nucleus of the cell is fractal. A unique mathematical pattern places folds within folds within folds so that, unlike your headphone cord, DNA strands don't tangle."

My point? I am not a mathematician nor a scientist, but there are so many things causing upheaval right now that assumptions are being challenged and mountains of data are upsetting the apple cart of the old guard of the scientific community. Watch for it. This is ramping up because so much is at stake concerning who will be in the driver's seat concerning social, political, religious influence, and grant dollars.

One great challenge is that all three - science, philosophy, and faith - have become political and opportunistic. Death and taxes. Death and oppression are always with us. Just saying.

I believe our struggles in harmonizing science and philosophy and faith stem from our human limitations to put it all together. It seems entirely plausible, and likely, that all three will visibly converge harmoniously at a point in the future. Perhaps sooner than we think.

Pure science? Proven philosophy? Authentic faith?

2. *I Am Graciously Seen* (giving me hope)

Our Creator tells us He is the great God above all gods. He is not merely top dog - He is the *only* true God. And in addition to being purely true, He is incredibly kind and slow to anger. This is difficult to grasp because we see everything through human eyes. We play off each other and compare ourselves to other humans rather than God's gracious standards. "Not the best but not the worst either." "Pretty good considering the competition." It is no

wonder 75% of us think we are above average!

God is said to be slow to anger and overflowing with infinite kindness, and we are beneficiaries of His patient grace. Laying down our lives for others is the gold standard - it is His ultimate evaluation of a soul. God's kindness leads us to turn away and *turn toward*. Our turbulence stems from the fact that the human race is arrogant to the core which is why Jesus taught us the importance of loving others more than we love ourselves.

What if He births us into a world at war where there is imperfection around every corner. This imperfection is the proving ground for personal faith. Not cookie cutter faith. Not coerced by a celestial figure. Rather, personal faith chosen by each of His sons and daughters. All of us. Each of us.

Will our choices make us effective and ultimately successful? Will this occur through our own judgement and personal "goodness?" We are in a tough spot. Something needs to be done to activate the faith of many in order to escape the inevitable and ultimate loss of all. Enter the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is grace to the max, and He came to reverse the curse.

Often those who consider the human struggle and imperfection indicate that perhaps our suffering is because of something we have done. While this may be true, it is certainly not the only reason we suffer. Premature death, family disappointment, letting down or being let down by those we have trusted are also weighty reasons. Imperfection propels us places we would never choose to go. Our personal turbulence from an imperfect world rocks our own existence and causes us to ask deeper *why* questions.

We inevitably come to this point: Is God good, or is He capriciously pulling my chain? Does He have my best interest at heart? Is His love flawed in some fundamental regard? Has He "got this" or are things spiraling out of control?

3. *Awakening to Purpose* (giving me strength and a reason to love)

It is precisely who God is that makes me able to live my life with purpose. This is one of the things the God Story (the Bible) does for me. It is not just the story of mankind but the Story of God as well. Where did He come from? Who is He? What is He trying to accomplish? Where is all of this heading?

If God is an unknowable mystery, how will I ever be known? Or if there is no God - and no purpose for all that is - then I am left with only deep emptiness?

On the other hand, what if there is not one thing left to chance? What if this has all been accomplished without creating us to be mere robotic players in a cosmic drama? Perhaps God is big enough to do this. This would make sense if He really is God, right? He would be without this limitation and the only truly unbound creature in all the cosmos.

How can this kind of power - this kind of authority - exist in one Being? And what am I to do about my limitations regarding perceiving and following such a Supreme Mind and Heart? How do I find my way?

Different me-gods (self, possessions, family, etc.) serve varied self-purposes. However, the Living God is single-minded: *He wishes us to share in His glory*. Because most of our understanding of glory is self-driven this can be perplexing, self-centered and self-serving, but not for God.

But what if God's ways really are not our ways and His thoughts not our thoughts? What if they transcend to purposes we can only *imagine* because we are created in His image but we cannot *comprehend* fully because we are earthbound? Certainly there must be more than just physical reality. There has to be.

Is it possible we have been placed in an imperfect environment where faith can generate, grow, and reach out to bless and help others? Perhaps we are on a journey of discovery where learning to love more deeply is the ultimate end. Not to be perfect. Not to accomplish huge feats of bravery or hard work. What if we are here to follow God by being fully present to Him? What if the entire purpose of life is to be tested and to grow stronger? What if imperfection and turbulence are the precise and vital recipe to make faith, hope, and love emerge! Imagine.

So where does this leave us regarding our own purpose? Are we *performing* or *being*? Are we growing in our capacity and application of love for our neighbor? Are we being prepared for something we can only imagine right now but will need to count on God to expand for us? We are living in His world - His reality. What if we have been provided the path to find our place in His heart and mind, and what if this is the very nature of the thing called heaven?

I realize this may seem a little out there, but we owe it to ourselves to think deeply and search with our hearts for how and what God has revealed about Himself. It is key to finding our true selves.

“After He spoke long ago to the fathers through His spokesmen often and in many ways, in these last days God has spoken to us in His Son, the One whom He appointed to inherit all things. This is the same Son Whose power created the world.

He radiates His Father’s glory and exposes the very character of God. He also upholds all things by the mighty power of His commands. When He had purified creation from both the curse and bondage of sin, He took His seat at the right hand of His Father’s Majesty, having won the right to become better than the angels, because He has inherited a more excellent name and deeper authority than theirs.”
- Hebrews 1:1-4

4. *Sweeping Wonder* (firing my imagination)

I cannot overstate the deep respect and enthusiasm I have for the amount of significant scientific discovery during my lifetime. Tech. Medicine. Space. Biology. Knowledge. It is breathtaking. To contemplate the sheer breadth of the known universe is mind boggling.

How does a person grasp the reality of a light year? Or the nature of planets in our solar system - that our own sun is 93,000,000 million miles from earth - and that this is a blip on the measurement scale. Our nearest neighbor galaxy, Andromeda (only one of 100 to 200 billion estimated galaxies) is 2.537 light years away. Using current travel technology, which can travel five miles per second, it would take us about 37,200 years to go one light year. We get so used to throwing around big numbers when it comes to the cosmos, they cease to have reasoning relevance.

Immensity is just one aspect of contemplating God. We have no frame of reference for relating to such vastness. This is exactly the point. Since we are surrounded by infinite design and are trying our best to interpret it, all we can do is attempt to grasp it. And as we pursue this scientifically, why shouldn't we contemplate immensity in the arenas of philosophy and faith as well?

In *Curious Journey* I wrote this about my sense of wonder: *"Now really – be honest with me. Don't you get just a little freaked out when you get one of those emails 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 would 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 breathtaking sight as the heavens sing to my earthbound soul. If I am so small and the heavens so immense – who am I – that such a Designer would take notice of me?!”

Another ten years have flown by. I am still writing my thoughts in our cabin, contemplating my growing sense of wonder and awe at the Greatness of the King of the earth - and ever closer to the One Who is everything.

5. Fine-tuned Beauty (my taste of intricacy)

I mentioned earlier my deep admiration for processing and assimilating knowledge unfolding at fever pitch. The cosmos is the macro. The micro is our scientific exploration of the details. I would like to briefly revisit the conversation about some amazing insights we have been given about the building blocks of life.

There is incredible fine-tuning right down to the structure of cellular design. If we begin from a perspective of chance rather than design, our interpretations become implausible or skewed. As we examine the building blocks of life, it's scientifically proven that there is a shared language which makes everything work. Randomness, then, must be submitted to design itself. The context of how

we process such *shared language* is important.

We return to Perry Marshall's *Evolution 2.0* for a few quotes. Don't freak out. I am continuing to investigate things I don't necessarily understand. I'm attempting to process unbiased information - if there is such a thing. Once any data is mined it must always be submitted to the appropriate construct or system - whatever it may be. I am simply attempting to observe and let the data speak for itself.

On the language of cells:

"Like the English language, DNA operates under defined rules to create predictable combinations of amino acids. The mutations have to obey the rules of the language. Otherwise you get legs growing out of your head."

On genetic code:

"If the genetic code is text, proteins are calligraphy. All cells and tissues are built from proteins. They're like beautiful fonts that transform mere assembly instructions into art. In the same way that a Mac in the '80s was head and shoulders above all its drab cousins in the computer world, proteins are not just building blocks; they, too, are works of art."

On how things work:

"Genes switch on, switch off, rearrange, and exchange. Hybrids double; viruses hijack; cells merge; winners emerge."

When I look at a luna moth or a swallowtail butterfly, I am swept up in their delicate beauty. As I observe the complexity of living beings and the intricate systems required to flip all the switches, how can I deny the power of intricacy?

Did you know that if the moon were adjusted even a degree from its orbit that all hell would break loose with such things as untethered tides, extreme weather, and plant and animal internal clock disarray? We live in a highly fine-tuned, precise environment, right down to the smallest particle of life.

It is incumbent upon us to search for God's design in everything that is made. To not do so is limiting to the soul and to our ultimate purpose of *knowing God and enjoying Him forever*. Even our turbulence of faith is being interjected as an offer of love and discovery from the One who made us.

So many miraculous things to consider!

Imperfection & Loss

My Story from Curious Journey

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 disappointments. 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 were deeply 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'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 I cannot make right.

Each of these heartbreaking events drove me to places I didn't want to go, and each time the Voice told me things I didn't know. As He dealt suffering into my life, He continued to open my

eyes to His world: a world where suffering could bring redemption and a rescued and flourishing life.

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 unfolded her story, I was overwhelmed with sorrow over her pain. At the same time, I was 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 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 (intentionally or unintentionally). The times 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 that justice belongs to God, getting even is a trap, and 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. Yet there are nagging questions at the edges of our minds: Is my life counting for something? Am I finding significance? Will I be missed when life is finished with me? Through questions like these, I have experienced connection with the Living God who 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 would not go on my own

initiative.

I have taken part in a 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) has touched thousands of lives as we all attempted to sort through our loss of Erika. No one chooses tragedy. 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 ask “How can I possibly feel safe from this kind of tragedy happening to me or to someone I love?” The hurt ask “How am I supposed to go on while carrying this kind of pain?” 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 or we can shut down. We can also embrace denial and detach from these 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 substance.

Perhaps you have had your share of disappointment. Someone who should have known better may have exposed you. A disingenuous friend 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 living in a harsh environment which are exactly the circumstances which either 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 needed to be rescued. Or just God being gracious. Either way I have found freedom in the midst of imperfection. Though I regret some of the circumstances of my life, I have found peace through authentic faith. I long for you to experience this same freedom.

Why things are the way they are is one of the great questions of life. How has my heart coped with the troubles I was born into? In

what ways have I experienced personal peace and a satisfied mind?

All of these - - *powerful design, being graciously seen, awakening to my purpose, sweeping wonder, and fine-tuned beauty* - reconcile me to the idea of transcendence. This leads me to bend the knee of my heart to Someone Greater and trust Him with all I am.



Building Blocks

We experience overlap in our physical (the body), mental (the mind), and our souls (our internal compass). The *conscience* appears to be where we process impulses of the body, mind, and soul. It is the place from which we guide our choices and is inseparably linked to the powerful part of us which is our heart.

Perhaps you have pondered the reality that your conscience can bother you. This is usually coupled with some regrettable action toward someone or when we act contrary to one of our valued principles. This is an indication of the tremendous influence exerted by conscience.

There is a spectrum of beliefs and actions regarding conscience. Narcissists are on one end of this continuum. By and large

in this way of thinking, conscience impulses are sought for what a person or situation can bring for personal benefit. At the other end are people who are riddled with guilt, both imagined and real, who live lives without personal peace because they can never do or be good enough. Most of us live somewhere between these two extremes.

If we have encountered God, we feel awareness that we have missed God's mark, and there is a part of us which can experience personal guilt. This can promote justifying selfishness or engaging in hurtful behavior which can deny the deep spiritual reality of our conscience. We all manage our consciences within our own personal views of the world.

While our physical bodies press upon us and motivate us to respond and act, and our minds consume us, *our consciences are our link to our souls*. Some people term this a recognition of right and wrong, but perhaps it is more than that. Because we are created in the image of God, we were made to be free. Freedom of the spirit is a gift of great value. Yet bondage appears to reach out around every corner, pressing us to exchange what is greater for lesser. If we re-establish our conscience connection, we can be drawn to a correct trajectory.

To examine the reality of the conscience is to unlock the deeper part of who we are. It opens the door to relational fulfillment coupled with meaningful impact and personal satisfaction. When we live with what the Bible terms a clear conscience, we are liberated. We can live free.

Healthy attachments

While our relationships do not necessarily define us, they do indicate much about who we are. Take Sandra for instance. She had a history of turbulent relationships. Growing up the youngest of four in her family, she had lived in the background. Sandra did not receive some of the attention her older sibs experienced. Not all

of this was negative, and some aspects were good for her heart. She was able to observe her siblings and learn, yet she also often got lost in the shuffle.

High school was brutal. The guys who sought her out were self-centered. Girlfriends proved to be shallow or mean. She often felt used and even a little traumatized about not being loved.

When she met and married Dennis in her second year of college, she was hoping she had found someone who would *see* her - and would in turn acknowledge her value. This is common in new marriages. We hope our new adventure will make up for what we didn't receive previously. Dennis, however, was not prepared to live with his wife in kindness. He had no experience because he came from a combative home where family members made fun of each other, and it often wasn't good natured. They were stuck.

Fortunately they connected with another couple who were a few years down the road and interested in their spiritual welfare. They were able to provide solid, hopeful, and practical advice. They came alongside the turbulence Dennis and Sandra were experiencing and guided them toward learning to love each other. It took a lot of attention, hard work, and time. They began to learn to pull together and pursued accentuating each other's strengths and downplaying weaknesses.

It would be nice if all of our hoped for attachments to people, jobs, interests, and friends worked out for the best, but you and I both know this may or may not occur. A person is actually quite fortunate if they find life-giving community in relationships. It is important to associate with wise and loving people who know how to treat each other well in public and private. These are persons who engage in giving of themselves every bit as much as they engage in receiving. There are people like this around. They are gifts from God.

When we experience internal turbulence between us and the people with whom we desire to grow in reciprocal love, it is important to make changes. In my mind the best approach is to invite

the One who made us into the center of our relationship to help us. The Spirit can be a third Person in our home. It is also helpful to walk with those whom the God Story calls the *wise*, because it is difficult to rise above where you are when you are isolated, feeling alone, or looking to bad examples for inspiration.

The laws of freedom

During the past year or so, I have distanced myself from politics, big tech and big business, and the petulant agitation that is the modern media. Day by day I found I was being sucked down a wormhole of hopelessness and speculation. I was receiving no relief. No satisfaction. Consequently, I have spent even more time searching the God Story for what I really need. This renewal has caused me to examine what brings freedom to my soul.

Everyone knows about the ten commandments, right? But just attempt to list them. There was a huge movie about it once. What came to your mind when I just communicated this? An old actor with a magnificent beard? A dusty old story which has been told so many times it is hard to believe it is relevant? Perhaps a list of things God holds over our heads to shame us into getting what He wants and to make our lives a list of do nots?

I have experienced a whole new paradigm for looking at the big ten. Rather than rules to shame us, the commands are given to *shelter* and *set us free*. Imagine! His commands are literally a road map to a clear conscience. God's commandments will never be kept in their entirety. It is an impossibility. But Jesus clearly explained that His Father's Law is a part of His grace. A way to become free.

If you go to Fourthstream.com and enter *Conscience* in the search box, you will find 12 posts and teachings about each of these ten commandments and how they are designed for us to experience personal freedom. Here is a quick recap of the freedoms we find (or miss) by not taking God seriously. The me-gods consume any God energy which might come our way via the ten commandments.

THE BIG TEN VS. THE ME GODS

<i>No other gods</i>	Take what you want
<i>No idols</i>	Gratify your personal me-gods
<i>Do not empty My Value</i>	Elevate what pleases you as superior
<i>Enter My rest</i>	Reject finding true rest
<i>Honor Family</i>	Live dishonorably
<i>No murder</i>	The end justifies the means
<i>No adultery</i>	Indulge yourself
<i>No stealing</i>	Take what you believe you deserve
<i>No false witness</i>	Slime your neighbor with untruths
<i>No coveting</i>	Crave what belongs to others

While the list on the right promises possible freedoms, the opposite is true. When we walk in the way of a clear conscience, *each life choice we make to engage truth sets us free.*

I didn't understand this before I was 21 years old. It was like a cleansing shock to my soul. Now I'm able to talk to God and download each day's baggage and clear my account. I actually now have the option to live every day with a cleared conscience?! Remarkable. What a relief. Though it was humbling to back track, I soon ascertained that life without weight upon my conscience was (and is) worth the work of apologizing and asking forgiveness of God and others.

The bottom line? To stand before God and man forgiven and with a clean conscience is how we were meant to live.

Security & Love & Respect

The world is relational, so if we fail at family, friendship, and neighboring, we are left with little comfort when we give account to God for the way we have lived. While it is fulfilling to create, accomplish, or enjoy what we do for a living, we can be confident our replacement will be waiting in the wings. This will occur whether

he or she is good at the job or not. It is an inevitability.

Learning how to love well involves effort. It is a lot of work with great promise of success. And if we have loved well, there is a good chance we will experience genuine love in return. To find identity merely from accomplishments, even good ones, can be tenuous. There is a security of mind and heart which only solid relationships can provide. Knowing we matter to others, that our life counts, and the fact we will be remembered fondly and lovingly is a great reward in light of the coming eternity.

What a gift to have those dozen or so people at any one time who value our contribution to their lives. Perhaps we have made their journey lighter. More hopeful. Made them feel more cared about. All the better if this has been reciprocal.

I am beyond the phase in life where I believe I am going to change the nature of the world, but I believe I have made a substantive difference in certain lives as I have made available my gifts, skills, time and energy to what God values. It is what I call the *security of a satisfied mind*. It is all about God and others and ultimately about finding my true self.

“But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the other religious leaders, they gathered themselves together to trap Him. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”

And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor the way you love yourself. Everything the entire law and all the prophets tell us can be summed up in these two.”

- Matthew 22:34-40

Jesus & His Dad

I wrote a book a while back titled *Mentored by God: Finding Our Way in a Darkening World*. You can locate it in electronic or printed form at Fourthstream.com on the home page. You may find it informative - perhaps even helpful. It recounts the Bible's story about the eternal relationship of the Father and the Son alongside Lady Wisdom from Proverbs. The God Family.

I loved my own father. Yet to the day he died I never heard the words "I love you" cross his lips. Though this was tough on me, fortunately for me (and the people I love), my relationship with my heavenly Father was beginning to ramp up. What I couldn't count on from my own dad, I began to receive from my heavenly Father.

In my unfolding years of spiritual growth, I found I was becoming more and more equipped to communicate love to my own dad. It really was supernatural. I could have been bitter because he was an angry guy and had passed the pissed off gene to me. As I settled into God's perfect love, the door opened to loving my father.

After speaking with my mom and grandmothers, it dawned on me one day that my father had done the best he knew how. His life was difficult in the verbal and expressed love category. Though I never heard the words 'I love you' from my dad, he heard them from me over many years, and I think he actually came to believe it.

Fortunately, our three kids and grands definitely got an upgrade on verbal love. I wrote this a few years ago, and I have tried to reinforce these words. I in no way wished for my children to go through their lives not hearing spoken words of love from their dad.

Dear Kids

Thanks for so faithfully connecting with mom and me, and for including us in your lives. It makes me grateful for all three of you and reflective of a few things God brings to my heart about being the father of an awesome daughter and two fine sons. So, here goes...

I am struck by how imperfect I am as a father. I try hard, but it is kind of a shot in the dark. Loving each other through life-seasons is really the best thing I can offer, I think. Of course I appreciate the woman and men you have become. It does my heart good to see you implement your own style and your own ideas. It is weird moving from being in the driver's seat to the backseat (and I don't want to be a back seat driver).

I wish I could have spared you some of the pain you have encountered, but thinking it through makes me realize this is ultimately pretty selfish. I would never choose for you to suffer, let alone inflict your pain myself, and yet I (and life) have dealt you your share of challenges and tough times. I suppose to become an overcomer – one must indeed overcome something.

It is a privilege to have you as my kids. Forgive me for where I have fallen short. You, your mom, and your kids are my great treasures in life. My hope is that the cup of your heart will fill with deep joy and that you will truly find a satisfied mind, and a rich, full soul.

It will be a privilege to be by your side in the coming Kingdom.

Love, Dad

Jesus had a perfect Father and yet He suffered deeply. How can this be? Why didn't His Father rescue Him? We know He loved His Son more than anything. "Father, why have you forsaken me?" *He must have had greater things in mind.*

According to the author of the letter to the Hebrews: *“In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and urgent requests with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission.”*

As one of my sons shared with me the other day regarding suffering allowed by God: “We are not in trouble. We are in training.” It appears God uses troubles to produce things in us that would not come about otherwise.

From the same letter to the Hebrews:

“For consider Jesus who endured such hostility by sinners toward Him, so you will not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your struggling against sin.

It is for the benefits of discipline you endure difficulty. God treats you like daughters and sons; for is there a son whom his father does not discipline because of love? However, if you are without discipline which is given to you by God Himself, then you are not His connected children. We had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them; what greater things will come as we subject ourselves to the Father of spirits, and find deep life?

*For our parents disciplined us for a brief time as seemed best to them, but **He disciplines us for our good, so we may share His holiness.***

All discipline for the moment seems difficult and even painful, yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of living God’s way. Strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but instead be healed.”

God has given us everything we need to live with a clear conscience. His discipline guides us toward freedom from human bondage. This is a large part of the big picture concerning suffering. *Imperfection can ultimately make us stronger - as well as more coura-*

geous and bold.

What do you do when you can't seem to get traction?

When I feel stuck, I try to remember a few things. Perhaps they may be helpful to you. Let's call them Dave's 7 rules for dealing with imperfection. Catchy, right? Here we go:

1. The world is a broken place. *Adjust your expectations.* Suffer in brokenness, but don't take any more upon your shoulders than is yours to carry. Don't fear transparency when it come to yourself and God. Be honest. It can be liberating to see yourself as more than just a target for troubled waters.
2. Remember that life is not about perfect behavior. It's about our *God-responses* as we wrestle with whatever comes our way. Many things are out of our control. This is why Jesus said *do not be anxious or worry about tomorrow.* Every day has enough trouble of its own.
3. Some turbulence I bring upon myself because of bad choices. I am free to *own this, confess it to God, straighten it out* with whom-ever I can via apology and forgiveness, and continue to run my race.
4. Imperfection is not unique to me. I must not take it overly personally or let it crush me.
5. There is nothing in the arena of imperfection God has not subjected Himself to as well. His Son Jesus *understands my challenges.* There is nothing He does not understand about my weakness. I can go to Him and know He completely gets me. Everything.
6. *Talk to your true friends* when you are low. Let them know when you struggle and why. Solitude and contemplation are deeply helpful while isolation is the enemy of the soul.
7. *Chill out and love more deeply.* Don't expect people to do for you what only God can do. Love has the capacity to cover anything!

FINDING TRUE NORTH

Navigating Imperfection

Apparently there are several kinds of north. As a compass guy who knows how to calculate an azimuth (I was trained as a Military Policeman), you'd think I would have known there is magnetic north, true north, and grid north. Keep this in mind as we pull together our conversation on turbulence and imperfection. The course we plot must be revisited again and again for direction since it is easy to lose our way.

Your own research and a reliable compass

I find it fascinating to live in a culture with so little firsthand information. By and large we take what we hear, adapt it, and pass it on. All this is allegedly backed up by data, even though such data is rarely produced and seldom evaluated for authenticity. Perhaps it has always been this way, but I believe a bit of skepticism concerning process might be good. Just because someone says something is true doesn't mean it is, right? This is why true north is so important. One degree can change everything regarding destination.

"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." - From Curious Journey

I have set aside all religions - including religious christianity - to pursue the authentic faith of Jesus as my personal compass. I also try to keep in mind that Jesus' greatest conflict came with the leaders of arguably the oldest and most zealous religious movement in world history. I am careful to not let religion distract me.

Calculate and pursue

If our Creator made us in His image to share His glory, what a tremendous honor! The God Story is all about taking imperfect men and women and blessing us so there remains no question Who deserves credit for our triumphs. It makes sense that authentic, worthwhile faith would not be automatic or easy.

Because we need to believe in something - even if it is nothing - there are plenty of people prone to inhabit religions of our own making. It is also in our DNA to twist, conform, and reject truth. This is why some pretty crazy cults with crazy beliefs have sprung up in America. Even Jewish traditions were antithetical to Jesus' plan for setting people free. In fact, like all religious traditions, just the opposite was happening. People were being invited into all kinds of bondage. When it comes to many aspects of religious pursuit, we spend our entire lives climbing mountains only to discover we were ascending the wrong mountains. Sobering.

This is why there has to be some way to ascertain authenticity. It is why it is so critical for us to allow the Bible to *interpret itself*. By diminishing God's words to a series of dusty old stories, we lose sight of the fact we have been provided *supernatural, animated words of life*. Here is an example. Do you realize God's Story is a book of only *one* testament? Where exactly does the Bible make the distinction old and new? Often we are quite prone to add, or twist in order to get it to say what we want.

The idea we can get the Bible to say anything we want arises not because of the nature of the Bible but our own propensity for blowing smoke. We can "make it say anything" when we reject the

context, or when we choose to remain ignorant of the process of searching and allowing the Word itself to lead us in discovery of true meaning. For instance, you have probably heard the quote “*I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me.*” Yet the context clarifies that Paul had learned how to do just this - no matter his circumstances.

Jesus created the world, He judged the world, He gave Himself for the world, and His witnessed signs and wonders cause all else in ancient times to pale. This is precisely the point of Jesus visiting the earth. It was a supernatural event of glorious proportions. His good news changed the world forever, and delivered millions of souls from death. This is the context of all Scripture.

It is important for us to be dedicated to the right things - the right Someone. Like me, I imagine you want to make your life count. You don't have to believe what I believe, but it seems we all owe it to ourselves to invest in a calculated, thought-through trajectory of belief. There is simply too much at stake to get this wrong. The last thing we want to do is navigate ourselves into oblivion.

What if God *has* shown up on the earth? What if transcendence and face-to-face encounter have collided in space-time? What if this was planned before the dawn of time? The ramifications are epic.

Embracing sacrificial generosity

Another thing we learn from the God Story is that God is enormously generous. It is in His nature to lavish gifts upon each of us. He sets the stage for a life spent giving and draws us to give ourselves to something greater.

It also appears the more we give, the more He asks of us, and the more He gives. But it is not as though He is trying to mess with our lives. He is interested in transforming us. Sacrificial giving is one way He has demonstrated this through Himself and His Son. Humans are value driven. If it has no value, there is little fascina-

tion. Apparently this is part of being made in the image of God. He values kind generosity, and He invites us to do the same.

What this means is the more we give, the more we receive. We not only give to receive, we are blessed when we live generously. This moves us from a small place into wide open spaces. He asks us to join Him.

What about truth?

My personal search for authentic faith led me to the God Story. It was not as if I was searching hard to find God. I wasn't. I was living my life by my wits for personal satisfaction of my inner desires, but my Creator awakened my heart to my true roots and ultimate destiny. He opened my mind and my heart to my God connection.

Religion had proven inadequate in my quest for a satisfied mind. Historic and current life philosophies had left me feeling empty. I struggled to find a place where both solid science and authentic God truth could bring harmony to my world view.

My personal encounter with Jesus was a simple, revolutionary connection. My mind and heart were opened to the reality of a Being who could answer all of my questions because He Himself was and is the Maker of all things. He was and is the King of the earth. He is my King. So began a 50 year learning process of discovering what it means for me to bow my free will before the authority of God's ultimate will. Clarity.

FIRST KING - THEN KINGDOM - THEN CHURCH

There was so much for me to learn. Religious access to God is the way of mankind (even for an atheist). I gave religion a try. It proved inadequate. The harder I tried the more it failed me. Every behavioral success still resulted in ultimate emptiness. How could I become good enough to find peace? How could I find assurance

that my life was going to be more than a speck on the time continuum? I needed to learn the difference between “being” and “doing.” I had to discover a different path than religion in order to find my way to God and to the satisfied mind only He can bring. I needed to become like Jesus.

“When a follower is fully trained, he shall be like his teacher.”

Jesus was and remains a “fisher of men” and calls us to follow. To be like Him. To imitate His faith and His relationship with the Father. Being *with* Jesus is far superior to knowing the right facts and merely doing the right things. I needed to follow. I needed to learn to fish the way He does. This is how Peter and James and John and the rest of His followers found their way. I needed to imitate their journey, find my own path to connection, and ultimately achieve a satisfied mind.

This was my key to moving from my “me” paradigm to finding my “King” motivation. Jesus’ words began to animate for me. I began to understand how the Kingdom works. Rather than *going* to church I *lived* as part of His living work on the earth. I was becoming a fisher of men. This meant to succeed I would need to *“love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love my neighbor as I loved myself.”*

Jesus taught me that true meaning is found in the pursuit of a *pure, humbled heart*, the very real experience of *knowing God*, being set free by His Spirit to *do true kindness*, and choosing to participate in *growing life* in others.

These four ideals guided Jesus’ own journey of faith. He left His home in heaven to become a man. He learned to connect with His Father in a faith environment. His kindness was deep and never self driven. His track record for continuing to bring life has been simply amazing.

Have you ever wondered when Jesus became “God aware?” In Mary’s womb? In the manger? In the Temple at the age of 12? When exactly did Jesus figure out He was God? And what was it

like for God to become man? How has His example given us a clear path to pursue?

We engage this pure **heart** of Jesus, the **presence** of our Master through knowing God, the **passion** of our Savior to do kindness, and the **honor** of our King to grow life. These four passages from the God Story will help paint a brief, clear picture of authentic spirituality. Check them out! (Psalm 51/John 1:9-13/Micah 6:6-8/2 Timothy 4:1-8)

All this gives us context for our lives. In God's framework we freely discover personal experiences of faith, hope, and love. He alone can give us greater purpose which will never fade away.

A few worthwhile considerations about finding True North...

1. *Everything belongs to God.*

"and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God."

- 1 Corinthians 3:23

"His master said to him, 'Excellent work faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things and soon I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the celebration with your master.'"

- Matthew 25:21

2. *Eternity is our great prize.*

"So Paul stood in the midst of the city hall called the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. As I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship I found an altar with this inscription, 'To An Unknown God.' What you worship in your ignorance, I explain and proclaim to you."

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. He is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life, breath and everything we need to live our lives. He made from one man every nation of mankind to fill the entire earth, and determined the timing and duration of their lives, and where they would live. His hope was for us is to seek God, even if we have to hunt for Him to find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are His children as well.'

"Being then the children of God, don't think that true God's Nature is like gold or silver or stone, a mere image formed by the art and thought of man. He is overlooking the centuries of ignorance, and is now declaring that all people everywhere should turn away from sin and futility and turn toward Him. He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in truth by a Man He has appointed, having furnished proof of His authority to all men by raising Him from the dead."

- Acts 17:22-28

3. People are God's eternal capital.

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 profit will come to a person if they gain the whole world and loses their own soul? And what exactly is your soul worth?" - Matthew 16:24-26

Our earthbound souls are given insight, vision even, into a deeper look at life. As Jesus explained to the woman at the well in Samaria in John 4, to thirst for *God's living water* results in liberation and ultimate satisfaction!

Retro-perspective

Imperfection is all around us. Our own personal turbulence is very real. Our suffering and our limitations are integrated into the design of our individualized turbulence. By cooperating with our Creator, *imperfection and turbulence are allies of the truth*. Don't get me wrong, it is sad that the world is such a twisted place, but that's kind of the point. Something in God's nature makes Him a Rescuer. After all, what is the alternative?

Here are several things to consider as this wraps up.

Where there is turbulence, there is movement. When presented with a problem or a challenge in my life or concerning someone I love, I am much more prone to walk toward it than I was even a decade ago. Why? I simply trust Jesus more than I ever have. His ways truly are not my ways. His thoughts are not my thoughts. I am so blessed to be able to embrace His Words into my life and trust Him for both *process* and *outcome*.

Where there is imperfection, there is the opportunity for faith. Paul said "the sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed." In other words, there is no comparison between the hard times I am presently experiencing and the good times and rewards that await me. I am immersed in *now* for *now*, but soon we will break free into a whole new reality brought to us by the incomparable work of Jesus. We have limited data on the realities of heaven but plenty to understand the perks such is no pain, perfect peace, reunion with other God souls - and my favorite - learning about an inexhaustible God - forever!

Where there is suffering, God is present. I remain chilled by the words "have you considered my servant Job" in God's interaction with the evil one. God doesn't apologize. He certainly doesn't back off. There is no fear present. Our struggle goes beyond our lives on the earth. It involves powerful authority structures which

include angelic and wicked spiritual intent in heavenly places. We will visit this topic in future podcasts (and perhaps a book) because it is so key to understanding our context. It is entirely possible and probable that we are part of a story design that will blow our minds.

I am not a pawn: I am a partner. His Kingdom is my Kingdom. His image is my image. His grace is my greatest treasure.

There is eternal value in following in the sufferings of Christ. I will conclude this missive with a brief essay of God's perspective on the nature of suffering. *Because of Jesus, the Father has great credibility with me regarding turbulence and loss.* Remember at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry when He was tempted for 40 days in the wilderness? With what was He tempted? The exact things we are tempted by. He was challenged by *Who He could be (powerful, wealthy, prestigious)* if He took things into His own hands and ignored His Father's will. Amazing. This is a developing pattern from which we can learn much.

Finally, there is hope in even the deepest tragedy.

"We have our faith-treasure in vessels of vulnerable clay, so that the incredible greatness of transforming power in and over us will be attributed to God and not to ourselves. Right now we are afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed but not despairing; picked on but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed...always carrying about in our submitted bodies the dying of Jesus by dying ourselves, so that the life of Jesus also may be shiningly apparent through our suffering bodies." - 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

Searing Loss

We have two dear friends whose lives and children and grandchildren have been intertwined with ours for many years. We have been companions through thick and thin, and they have brought us enjoyment, loyal companionship, and freely shared giftings to our family and our community of Christ-followers.

They have three awesome daughters (now grown women with children of their own) and a dear son (married with three young children). Two years ago the worst happened. Their son was headed home with his son from their Sunday gathering. By a freak traffic accident, our friends' son was killed. Their grandson walked away without any physical injury.

I could say many things about this tragedy and the family members, friends, and the Des Moines community's response to Grant's death. It certainly was beautiful, but mostly it was terrible. I am still stunned by this tremendous hurt. Stuart Townend wrote a song titled *How Deep the Father's Love* which we sang at Grant's memorial funeral. It will always be the song that reminds me of him, his family, and this deeply searing loss.

How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss –
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;

Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life –
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart –
His wounds have paid my ransom.

Our friends were and still are living out this bitter loss with their faith being called upon to the deepest part of who they are over and over again. Grant's family tragically buried their beloved father, husband, son, brother, and friend. He left an empty place of humor, hard work, protection, and intentional love no one can fill. Nor is anyone supposed to.

Warriors show their strength when all hope is covered by grief. What emerges is something that comes from a different world - a different place. Mere men and women are often consumed by grief, but these dear friends are walking toward the prize and the expectation of reuniting with love lost.

THE SUFFERING OF JESUS

The perception of the *way of suffering* has modified in the 21st century. We have achieved high levels of personal comfort and developed significant buffers to isolate us from pain. The concept of suffering (or choosing to suffer) is typically unthinkable and, in some ways, repulsive to modern thinking.

Jesus, however, taught His followers about suffering. It can be helpful to the soul to consider that God Himself chose to experience the very things that challenge us. Why not learn from the best?!

What are the boundaries of suffering for a Jesus-follower?

1 Corinthians 10:13

“There is no temptation that has overtaken you that is not common to all people. God is faithful, and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with every temptation will provide the way of escape, so you will be able to endure it.”

What does this teach us about the extent and nature of suffering? God is not unaware or unfeeling about our troubles. In fact the opposite is true. He promises to be with us, to understand us, and to lead us through our personal turbulence into never-ending life.

Who should receive blame for personal suffering?

John 9:1-3

“As Jesus passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, “Teacher, who sinned, this man or his parents, that would cause him to be born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but his blindness happened so that the works of God might be displayed through his story.”

Why do we always jump to cause and effect? If there is suffering we assume it must come from something we have done, right? Jesus is offering a completely expanded take on why we suffer. God wants to show up through the suffering we experience. Loss offers opportunity to suffer which in turn opens the door to deeper understanding of His love and power.

To what extent can Christ's followers expect to suffer?

2 Corinthians 11:23-30

"Consider my service to Jesus compared to others: in far more hardships and imprisonments, beaten times without number, and often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, and a night and a day I have spent in the sea.

I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, other Jews, and from the Gentiles. I have encountered dangers both in the city and in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, and dangers among disloyal believers. I have been engaged in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, and in cold and exposure.

And apart from external things like these, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without me being weak? Who falls into sin without my intense concern? If I need to lift up anything I have done, it will be through what pertains to my weakness."

There is nothing appealing about any of these expressions of suffering. Paul had a tough mission and hard life. His weakness became a tool in God's hands. As his turbulence unfolded he recognized God's purpose within imperfection. Can you imagine the

stories he could tell!?

As you reflect on your own personal turbulence, what would you consider the bigger picture things you have concluded?

1 Peter 5:6-11

“Humble yourselves under God’s mighty hand, so He may lift you up at the proper time, casting all your anxieties and fears upon Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit and be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, searching for someone to devour.

But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing the same experiences of suffering are being faced by your brothers and sisters throughout the world. And after you have suffered for a little while the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”

Suffering is inseparably linked to humility in God’s world. Humility is a less chosen path, but it is God’s path for both His Son and for those who love and follow His Son.

What can suffering produce in us and why should we expect it?

Hebrews 12:3-13

“Focus on Jesus who has endured these kinds of hostility by God-haters against Himself, so that by weighing and learning from His example you will not grow weary and lose heart. Unlike Him, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your struggling against sin. Never forget the challenge given to you as a son or daughter of God, ‘do not take lightly or misunderstand the discipline of the Lord.’ Don’t fold up when you are tested by Him, for when God loves us He disciplines us. He presses every son He calls and receives us to Himself with many trials of faith.”

“We endure to learn discipline. God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are not partakers of discipline then you are illegitimate children and not sons. After all, we had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not live more fully by being subject to the Father of every soul?”

For our parents disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment is rarely joyful but produces sorrow. Yet to those who have been trained by discipline it yields the peace that truth brings to a God-cared for soul.

So take care to strengthen any hands that are weak and the knees that are struggling for strength, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.”

The benefits of suffering run deep. It is interesting that God has chosen the path of suffering as a means to bless us. This seems very counterintuitive to our pursuit of minimizing pain in any way we can. Some things, however, are inescapable.

What can be chief outcomes of our personal suffering?

James 1:12

“Blessed is a person who perseveres under trial; for once they have been approved, he or she will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

Perseverance in the face of trouble has much to do with approval before God. He loves it when we express our value for Him in this way. *Hope is our strong place* in the midst of imperfection and our personal turbulence. The crown of life is our reward: literally forever existence! Pretty cool.

What should be our response to the outcomes of suffering?

James 1:2-4

“Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfected and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Acts 16:22-31

“When they had struck them repeatedly, they cast them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely. The jailer followed his orders and threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God and the prisoners were listening to them.

Suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains unfastened. When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, thinking that his prisoners had escaped.

But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here! And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he released them from the inner prison said, “What must I do to be saved?” They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your entire household.”

There are insights here about the benefits of endurance. Trials take us places we would never choose on our own. Spiritual maturity and deliverance of heart appear to be rewards of perseverance.

What does affliction take from us and what can it return to us?

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

“But we have the treasure of our souls in perishable containers so that the incredible greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not despairing; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed. We are always carrying about in our physical bodies the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be made plain in our physical experiences.

For as living servants we are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our own experiences. Death is working in us so that life may kindle in you. This same spirit of faith expands as the Spirit brings us alive.

We believe and then we speak, knowing that the Father who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus, and will present us with you as well. For all these things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause a giving of thanks - all to expand the glory of God to others.

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying and will terminate, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal and significant reward of glory. We do not merely look at things which are seen but also the things which can not be readily seen. For the things we can see are only temporary, but the things which we cannot see are eternal.”

Paul wants us to join him in learning God’s ways through our earthly turbulence. Trials are one key step in our faith process and lead us beyond what is temporary to what is eternal.

What did Paul communicate about suffering in Romans 8:18?

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed to us.”

Paul is making an important comparison. What happens on earth is totally tied to what occurs in heaven. Our reward of shared glory is meant to be a substantive motivator. What this means is we have the opportunity to be right in the middle of the ultimate honor in the universe. Wow.

Some conclusions on this challenging and life-producing topic...

God’s way appears to be linked to the path of suffering.....

- √ Expect it.
- √ Ask God questions but avoid questioning God.
- √ Don’t seek suffering for self-centered reasons - rather suffer for the Kingdom of Heaven and your Kingdom reward!

Don’t be crushed by the weight of what you suffer even though you may be bruised and hurting. Accept it as a God part of life which leads to ultimate victory.

Here are more deep thoughts about turbulence and suffering:

1 Peter 2:21-23/Message

“This is the kind of life you’ve been invited into, the kind of life Christ lived. He suffered everything that came his way so you would know that it could be done, and also know how to do it, step-by-step. He never did one thing wrong and not once said anything amiss. They called him every name in the book and he said nothing back. He suffered in silence, content to let God set things right.”

1 Peter 4:1, 2, 12-19

“Since Christ suffered in His body prepare yourselves for the same thing as you follow Him. Suffering delivers us from the futility of living for the lusts of humanity, reminding us to live for the will of God.”

Friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you. To the degree you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that at the revelation of His glory you may experience joy that is hard to imagine now.

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, thief, evildoer, or a troublesome meddler. But if anyone suffers as he or she follows Christ, we are not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in the name of His Son.

For it is time for light to shine first upon those of God’s household; and if it starts with us, what will be the outcome for those who reject and disobey the Good News of God? ...So, those who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust our souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”

Isaiah 53:1-5

“Who has received our message and to whom has the work of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot and a root out of parched ground. He has no royal form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor an appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was like one from whom men hide their face, and He was despised, and we did not see His value.

Yet our griefs He Himself shouldered and our sorrows He carried. We saw this and were amazed: He was struck down by His own Father, and afflicted in our place.

He was pierced through for our transgressions and He was crushed for our rebellious hearts. What we deserved fell upon Him, and by His whipping we were healed.”

Zechariah 12:10/Message

“Next I’ll deal with the family of David and those who live in Jerusalem. I’ll pour a spirit of grace and prayer over them. Then they will be able to recognize Me as the One they so grievously wounded - that piercing spear-thrust! And they will weep - oh, how they will weep! Deep grief like a parent mourning the loss of their firstborn child.”

Luke 22:41-44

“And He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Yet not My will, but Yours be done. Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. Being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.”

Matthew 27:46

“About the ninth hour as He approached death Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, Lama sabachthani” which translates “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?”

Imperfection is all around us. Personal turbulence overtakes everyone. If we can grow to understand and accept suffering as God sees it, many doors will open for us. *Spiritual growth, emotional healing, and a balanced perspective* to help us avoid roots of bitterness over our suffering and the suffering of others to name just a few.

Imperfection + Personal Turbulence produces supernatural

opportunities for growth.

FOURTH
STREAM
FINDING HOPE

THE WHY:
Shared glory

I realize my view of chaos, order, imperfection, and turbulence may differ from yours. I am doing my best to provide clarity to what I believe to be our Creator's plan within the challenges we face. I invite you to sift your ideas and mine through the grid of the God Story.

I make much reference to the Bible, but it is important you know I am searching the woven threads of God's Word for God's commentary on suffering, imperfection, and beautiful, ultimate hope. If God does not have answers to these questions, where does it leave us?

It can be deeply sobering or even disturbing to contemplate turbulence and imperfection. I have attempted to consider the role of suffering within the backdrop of God's good purposes for us. There is something in our Father's nature which amplifies contrast. For instance, if there is going to be value from good news, it is best understood when set alongside bad news. It is a relief to know significant things will be made right - and to experience this hope within our souls.

The core purpose of all Story is to prepare us for a massive pivot: the culmination of the hopes and dreams of millions! What *has been*, all *that is*, and all that is *yet to come* will soon find their destination. The Lamb of God is ready to take away the sin of the world! Revelation 21:1-7 tells us how this will look:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth because the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. Then I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, arriving as a bride prepared for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Now I Myself will once again live among them, and they shall be My people, and I will be with them. I will wipe away every tear from your eyes and there will no longer be any death or any mourning, crying, or pain - the first things have passed away."

*And the One Who sits on the throne says, "**See it, I am making all things new.**" Then He said, 'Write these words - they are faithful and true.' Then He said to me, "It is complete. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the one who thirsts I will give springs of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son."*

We have wrestled with God's view of turbulence and imperfection. Get this: ***He is making all things new!***

Jesus lived for this hope and He invites us to do the same. His disciples concluded this as well. *Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life."*

The Bible is an explanation of what it means to grow in living faith. This is often brought about through the crucible of turbulence, imperfection, and suffering. Paul teaches us about this when addressing those in the faith community in Rome.

"For I have weighed the sufferings of this present life and they are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed to us. For creation itself longs anxiously and eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God (that's us!)."

For all creation was subjected to futility by the One Who made it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption and into the freedom of the glory of being children of God.

We know that the entire creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. Not only this, but also we ourselves, having the beginnings of the promises of the Spirit, we groan within ourselves. We are waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons and the redemption of our body.

For we have been saved so we may have a living hope, but the very nature of hope is that it includes the unseen; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we embrace it with anticipated joy when it arrives.”

And hope glorifies the One Who deserves everything! *What do we know for certain about our personal hope?* Romans chapter 8 teaches us so much about turbulence and imperfection. It is worth a careful read!

And what do we know for sure about our hoped for *destination*?

Here are a few things:

- √ It takes place in heaven, the dwelling place of God.
- √ Our preparation for it is forged in the fires of life.
- √ It is a pain-free destination.
- √ It lasts forever.
- √ There will be reuniting with those companions we have loved.
- √ There will be the reward of thirst-quenching living water.
- √ There will be shared Glory beyond our wildest imaginations.
- √ ***All things will be new.***

This destiny is a tremendous part of our hope.

Hope Stories

Don't you love a good story that fills you with some aspect of true hope? It is my heartfelt expectation to hear and tell such stories for much of eternity.

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. There was a little eight year old who spent all of his time collecting treasures: a neat rock, a discarded fishing lure, a shiny something dug out of the dirt. As he collected, Samuel put his treasures into a safe place. For a lot of these kids, just being safe was a huge deal.

Samuel had very few clothes and only a small bag of possessions he had brought with him to the ranch. I happened to sit next to him 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 taking 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.

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

THE NATURE AND INTENT OF HOPE

Hope is our ally in the fight of faith. Our faith drives us. Our love propels us. Our hope keeps us focused. As we follow this thread of living hope, we are painting a picture of something that is quite valuable both to us and our Creator! Read these words and take a moment to assimilate them into your picture of your hope.

Romans 15:13

“May the God of hope fill you with deep joy and peace through your believing faith, overflowing in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

There are several things to note here. This hope appears to be active toward us, and the Spirit pours this hope into us until we overflow with it. This is a great kindness from God.

1 Corinthians 9:10

“Or is this quote here for our benefit? Of course! This is why it was written, so that the one who works in the Kingdom should cultivate in hope. The harvester will do the hard work of cultivating in hope of sharing the reward of our work.”

The hard work of faith is about the harvest. Where is our motivation if there is no reward for this work? The idea of reward is clearly woven into the teachings of Jesus because He, too, was expecting a reward. His complete surrender to hope was in the power of His Father to do what needed to be done after His sufferings were complete...actually bringing Him back to life!

Ephesians 1:18

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, as well as the riches of the glory of His heavenly reward for saints...”

These are not abstractions. Our hearts can take in (see) enlightenment. Cool. We have been called by God with a very real promise to inherit, not as disconnected travelers, but as sons and

daughters of God Most High. This makes us children of the King of the universe and beyond. We are His, and He is ours.

Colossians 1:23

“...if you continue in your faith, established strong and steadfast in your resolve, and don’t move away from the hope of the gospel you have received. This same hope was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, was made a servant of this gospel of hope.”

Apparently we can drift from our hope. Turbulence and imperfection hurt and distract us. Where do we store our hope to keep it safe? Do we place deep value in temporary things or in those things which will remain and renew? How do our *faith, hope, and love* strengthen and move us forward?

Colossians 1:27

“...God has chosen to make known the extravagant riches of the glory of His great mystery to the entire earth. This mystery is Christ within you, the hope of reigning with Him in glory.”

What a mind-blower. It appears things have been made known to us which have sweeping value. This treasure seems to be much more than silver or gold or precious stones. It is God inside of us. Not carried in a box or kept in a safe. He will be alive within us forever. He is alive in His followers right now!

Do you see how this works? We are following one particular thread in the God Story, and it is pouring out value as we take the time to find clarity. We are answering questions. We are formulating new questions. We are contemplating this key concept from the Word of God and sifting our hearts through this grid.

1 Timothy 4:10

“...we work hard and strain against the load, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially those who have turned to Jesus for help.”

The work we do in this world -- our effort, our striving -- will count for something! Not only for those who *will* believe but for everyone we impact through living out love. Wow. This is the harvest Jesus talks about. We are anticipating and participating in the glory of the Living God over all things from all time - the har-

vest of the earth. How special is that!?

Hebrews 6:18

"...(it is impossible for God to lie) we have taken refuge and find strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us."

The two unchangeable things? When God makes a promise He will never break it. When He swears by Himself it is as sure as any treasure we can imagine. We have taken refuge in our powerful, true, and gracious God! This is an active and informed choice. We are in need of strong encouragement from the Spirit and through the words and actions of other Christ followers. Our hope is before us like a beautiful prize. This is deeply motivating.

1 Peter 1:3

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope. How? Through the resurrection from the dead of His Son Jesus Christ..."

How did this happen? The resurrection opened the door for my sorry soul. Before this I had no hope. With Jesus raising from the dead I am forgiven, free, and my hope is filled with life. It is not only about what WILL be, but what IS now.

1 Peter 1:13

"So prepare your minds for action, keep measured in your spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace which will be brought to you when Jesus Christ reveals Himself a second time."

Wait, I thought all grace was already delivered? And how do I go about *fixing my hope*? How can I do it completely? By placing my hope on the One who can and will make it happen!

1 Peter 3:15

"...set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you. Do this with gentleness and respect for what others think and believe."

There are many things that reach for my attention. Set-

ting Jesus as Lord over my heart sounds pretty lofty. What does it look like to others when I engage God? What would cause another person to inquire about my inside hope and speak of deeper things? What would this kind of gentleness look like in my acceptance and caring for others?

1 John 3:3

“Everyone who has this ultimate hope fixed on Him comes alive from the inside out, His pure life in us.”

This is an incredibly high standard. Is it even doable? How does fixing my hope purify me? Hope is much more than the mere desire something will occur. Like faith and love, hope is alive. When I place my hope in Him it is every bit as internal as it is expressed action. It is a state of heart which in turn purifies my soul, which belongs to God.

Amazing. We just completed a major God Story thread examination about *hope*. Congratulations on your accomplishment!

These are the deep waters of hope, my friend.

Our hope is alive. Our hope needs attention. In the midst of our own personal turbulence and such widespread imperfection, we can make choices to live as a person of hope. We can cultivate hope or lose perspective in the midst of the struggle.

FOR THE JOY

The Father of all living encourages us to follow His Son's example of humility. When we embrace our own suffering or that of another, even when it is inconvenient, the door is opened to a deeper joy. There is joy which occurs during this life of turbulence, and through the troubles of this life more joy is yet to come.

“Therefore, since so many souls from every century have

found faith, we add our voices to theirs. Let us lay aside our own weights and the sin which so easily entangles us. Let us run with courageous endurance the race set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, absorbing shame He did not deserve, and then sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” - Hebrews 12:1,2

Joy and suffering are linked. Personal happiness and joy are not identical. Happiness identifies with our immediate state of being. Joy speaks to the condition of our soul. Joy was placed in front of Jesus as part of His reward. Soon He will reign over everything! Throughout His suffering He was completely reliant on His Father keeping His promises. Even though Jesus was God, He entrusted His life, death, and resurrection into the hands of His Father. Often meaning and joy result through the troubles of this life, which drive us to place hope in the world to come.

*“May grace and peace multiply and overflow to you in your knowledge of God through Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted us everything we need to live life in a way that pleases Him, through experiencing the true knowledge of the One Who called us. For by His glory and excellence He has gifted to us His precious and magnificent promises of life, so that by these promises we may become partakers of His divine nature. Because we have escaped the corruption that is in the world through self-centered lust we are set free.”
- 2 Peter 1:2-4*

**Such depth of joy is a great gift from God.
Do you experience it?**

Trust. Confidence. Rest. Hope. Glory.

FOR THE GLORY

“Since we have such a clear mission from God as we received mercy, we do not lose heart about bringing mercy to others...though our outer man is in the inevitable process of decaying, our inner man is being made new day by day.” - 2 Corinthians 4:1,16

It is difficult to feel we are making huge progress when we balance our hoped for accomplishments with our inevitable, limited number of days. We are investing in something we cannot completely understand now. We must constantly refocus the *reason* we do what we do - and not lose heart.

Sometimes this is easier said than done. Living for a future promise can seem hard to picture. This is the arena where authentic faith is nurtured.

“All of these men and women died in faith without receiving the promises. But they welcome the fulfilled promises in the hope of the promised new heavens and earth. They accepted the fact they were strangers and exiles on the earth - this world was not their home.” - Hebrews 11:13

The glory of God is beyond my imagination, though in Jesus I have a very clear representation of my heavenly Father. What will my eternal experience be with such amazing, unfolding glory? We shall see!

“There is one breathtaking beauty of the sun, and another glory the moon exudes, and another panorama of the stars: with one star differing from another star in design and brilliance. It will be the same with the resurrection of the dead. Here our souls are sown in perishable bodies, then they will be raised to an indestructible existence. Because of sin we are surrounded by dishonor. But by God’s grace we will be raised in glory! Here seed is sown in weakness, there

it will be raised in power! In this life it lives in a natural body, then it will be raised in a spiritual, never-ending body. If our natural bodies are so apparent, our spiritual bodies will be no less real!"

- 1 Corinthians 15:41-44

This future spiritual existence is an anchor for my hope. As Paul said, *"if we have only hoped in Christ in this life alone, we are of all men to be most pitied."* **Glory is deeply valuable.**

FOR THE PRIZE

Genuine faith is active and alive. It captures our imagination. With God's help it propels us toward victory.

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win."

- 1 Corinthians 9:24

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of our upward invitation by God in His Son Jesus."

- Philippians 3:14

"Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules." - 2 Timothy 2:5

This imagery was important to Paul. He was dedicated to *fighting the good fight, finishing the course, and keeping the faith.* These are three powerful metaphors for a man or woman of faith.

The soldier pleases his or her Captain. The athlete is devoted to whatever it takes to achieve the finish line. The farmer cultivates and waits on God for everything needed for a successful harvest.

Faith is destination oriented. We run to win, and we can count on God to teach us what this means. We do not live the way we do for what we can get but to share in what belongs to God.

BECOMING KINGS

*“Here is a statement with depth that you can count on: For if we died with Him by embracing His path of faith, we will also live with Him for eternity, and if we endure in our trials as He did in His, we will also **reign with Him** in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

If we deny His work and His invitation, He also will deny us. But if we are lacking faith, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny what He Himself has purchased with His own blood - you and me!”
- 2 Timothy 2:11-13

From this and other threads from the God Story we are taught there are bigger things going on. Massive. Did you know it is our destiny to judge angels? What? - 1 Corinthians 6:3

We are being prepared to reign with Christ.

What have we uncovered about finding hope?

√ Hope is multiplied by looking at things from God’s perspective. Our lives are part of a much larger picture. We are hoping for immortality.

√ Hope is aided and amplified by forgiveness. When we forgive we are set free in our souls, and when we are free we live with hope.

√ Hope is fueled by what is promised to us. Because God’s promises are clear and He is a promise-keeper, we can live in great confidence.

√ Hope is clarified as it is contrasted with turbulence within the arena of faith. As our faith is tested our hope is amplified.

√ Turbulence takes us places we would never choose to go on our own. Hope is the reward of trust in the midst of our trials.

√ Imperfection exists not merely as a result of our actions. This part of His design specifically expands our faith and our hope and our love. Seriously.

What are you anticipating about heaven, and in what ways does this make you hopeful?

It is challenging to articulate our hopes for heaven. Here are a few thoughts which make me expectant.

REUNIONS OF JOY

We will be reunited with people we have loved but have lost. Old friends will rejoin in an environment of perfect peace and forgiveness. We'll meet men and women of faith from every century. This is something to anticipate for sure!

ALL THINGS MADE NEW

There are so many beautiful things about living but deterioration is inescapable. As life moves forward (and sometimes grinds) the idea of perpetual renewal is difficult to grasp. When Jesus says He is making all things new, He is explaining that one of the inherent qualities in heaven is never ending freshness and newness. As this happens old things fade away and new things take their place.

NO MORE WEeping

So much of our energy is consumed by negotiating turbulence, imperfection, and trauma. What will happen when these drop away like taking off a heavy coat? There is a terrible beauty to suffering, but how glorious will it be to live in a suffer free zone - unendingly!

ONLY GLORY

Our turbulent world is so fragmented that it is hard to see

a pure and healthy flow unencumbered by sin, yet this is exactly where we are headed. To an uninterrupted connection of the glory of God between Himself and His creation. Beautiful!

A Word About Forgiveness

From Curious Journey

Letting others down and being let down seems to be an inevitable part of life. Each broken relationship provides another chance to mature or 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 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. 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. Outcomes vary, but God's love remains the same.

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. 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, but success in forgiveness occurs when you believe that there is Someone who does understand and care about you. Jesus is that person. Many of us believe 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 themselves, it is very difficult 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, often laying 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.

As Jesus died, He forgave disappointments, betrayals, and enormous personal losses. He set the gold standard for achieving the wonderful gift of personal peace. His teaching was clear on this:

“One of the Pharisees (religious leaders) asked him over for a meal. He went to his 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’ to which Simon replied, ‘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 has been forgiven many sins, and so she is very grateful. If the forgiveness is minimal, the gratitude is minimal."

Then he spoke to her: 'I forgive your sins.' This 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

By laying down the heavy weight of unforgiveness, we will find the heart of God.

Jesus placed some of His highest worth on forgiveness because it most reflects God's compassionate heart. Embracing forgiveness as a lifestyle brings personal freedom. The one who goes to God to find strength for forgiveness, however he or she has been wronged, will find the key to being released from what the Bible calls roots of bitterness. These spring up in many crops such as disappointment, fear, doubt, pride, rebellion, anger, dread, stubbornness, or depression (to name a few).

It is important not to underestimate the gift of freedom which comes from forgiveness. Who do you feel you need to forgive much? In what ways have you received significant forgiveness from others whom you have let down or offended?

Ask God for clarity on this for yourself and begin to make it a point as part of your conversation with the Father. He is an expert. Just try to imagine the extent of what He has chosen to forgive.

REACHING OUT

When we are troubled, a variety of emotional responses may spring up.

- √ We can become discouraged and lose hope.
- √ Turbulence can make us numb to our emotions and relationships.
- √ We may choose to insulate or isolate ourselves.
- √ We can become deeply angry, skewing our perspective.

When someone hurts us deeply or we are disappointed in ourselves, or when we are so sure God will show up but He doesn't appear to do so, we become vulnerable to disillusion, anger, and retaliation.

Hebrews 12:12-17 provides some **action strategies** which may help us reach out to others who are experiencing turbulence - or helping us personally in our own conflictedness.

“Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are out of joint, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is weak may not continue in pain but rather be healed.”

There are times in all our lives when we are in a weakened condition physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. There are things we can do for others who are suffering seriously and are experiencing weakness. When we observe weak hands struggling to do what is needed, we can step in and help shoulder their weight. When there is any kind of pain keeping a person from standing upright, we can come alongside and steady them. We choose straight

paths ourselves so that by example and encouragement we can invite those who are suffering to join us on the straight path as well. This is a really encouraging way to bless someone who is struggling.

Jesus said peacemakers are blessed and will inherit the earth. Reasoning with and helping people find peace is close to the heart of God. Perhaps such peace applies as much to inward conflict as outward turbulence.

“Pursue living in peace with all men, and take care to engage God’s heart-purifying process - this helps us see our Lord.”

“See to it that no one comes short of God’s grace and that no root of bitterness springs up and causes even deeper trouble for ourselves and the people around us. Make sure not to be or associate with an immoral or godless person...”

Bitterness is a hungry wolf that devours the soul. To feel we are not blessed (or to have had our inheritance stolen) is a deeply distressing burden. We can come beside those who are hurt and stand with them to strengthen their faint hearts and then pray for release from bitterness and for healing of deep hurts.

What is the recipe for intense challenges in life?

James 5:13-18 is helpful

“Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He should sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Then he should call for the elders of the church to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. Prayers offered in faith will restore the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up. If he or she is suffering from sins committed, they will be forgiven him.” What?

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a limited nature just like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. When he prayed again the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.”
Really?

There is so much we can do to help others navigate turbulence and imperfection, and God invites us to engage this process with those we love - and with those whom we share life.

REACHING UP

King David is one of the foremost examples of a human king experiencing God's favor and grace. Through the ups and downs of His imperfect life one thing is clear: his *heart* always returned to God and he recovered from weakness very swiftly. He knew to pour out his heart to God about his turbulence and misery and the things for which he was grateful. As you read the upcoming passage ask yourself "why and how did God bless this king?" Here is a great chance to get to know David better, and to learn from his relationship with his heavenly Father. It provides a poignant entry into the gritty and beautiful Psalms, many of which were written by David.

Then David the king went in and sat before the LORD saying "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my life, that You have blessed me so much? And You have spoken also of the lasting dynasty of Your servant in the distant future. O Lord God You give life beyond this life and into the one to come!" What is David telling us about his heart and concerning his future which will exceed his mortal life? How does he know this?

"Again, what more can I say to You that you do not know? You know me, O Lord God! For the sake of Your word and according to Your own heart You have done all these great things to reveal Yourself to Your servant. You are great, O Lord God; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, we have heard with our own ears." These are David's conclusions because his trials have led him deeper in God, though his kingly and human impulses could easily have derailed his heart.

“And what nation on the earth is like Your people Israel whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people. He has chosen through us to make a name for Himself and to accomplish great things for You and awesome things for Your land. You redeemed us from the bondage of Egypt as well as other nations and their gods. You have established for Yourself Your people Israel to be Your own forever, and You, O LORD, have become their God.” (How does David feel about his identity as a Jewish king? As a son of God Most High?)

“Now therefore, O LORD God, the word You have spoken concerning Your servant and his house, please confirm it forever and do as You have spoken, that Your name may be magnified forever. The LORD of hosts is God over Israel; and may the house of Your servant David be established before You.” (David is asking for meaning beyond this life.)

“For You, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have revealed to me that I will build you a house. This gives me the courage to pray this prayer to You. O Lord GOD, You are God and Your words are truth and You have promised this good thing to Your servant. Please bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You. For You, O Lord GOD, have spoken; and with Your blessing may the house of Your servant be blessed forever.”

- From 2 Samuel 7:18-29 (David appeared to have found deep security in God.)

This is a seriously powerful example of looking to God for help and restoration. David was hated unjustly by many people including his own wife. He lost his kingdom to a rebellious son. David made significant life mistakes which contributed to his own troubles. However, he came to God and courageously exchanged his turbulence and imperfection for God's favor. David humbled himself when he was confronted about his shortcomings. God noticed. God forgave and blessed. This gives me great hope.

Elijah the Prophet was designated by God to do some very difficult things. His harsh and truthful words to kings and

leaders cost him considerably. He made enemies not because he treated people badly, but because powerful people didn't want to hear what God had to say through him. If only he had played the game of kings, his life would have looked much different.

Imagine Elijah, nearly at the end of his earthly mission and worn out with the job of being God's mouthpiece. He was in such despair that he headed out to the desert to die (intense). The turbulence of his life had overtaken his soul, and the imperfection of his circumstances buried him in despair. Take time to place yourself into this story. It can be good for your heart.

"Now Ahab (the king) told Jezebel (his nasty wife) all that Elijah (the prophet of God) had done, and how he had killed all of their idolatrous prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "May the gods take my life if I do not take your life by tomorrow about this time." (I think this is a scary and serious threat, right?)

Elijah was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to the city of Beersheba in Judah, and left his servant there (isolated and perhaps a little fearful?). He went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat under a juniper tree; and he requested that he might die, and said, "I have had enough LORD, take my life, for I have no more meaning than my ancestors."

He slept under a juniper tree and amazingly an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise, eat." He looked up and there was a bread cake baking on hot stones and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. The angel of the LORD came a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God." (This is some supernatural food!)

(Part one) *"Then he came to a cave and camped there; and amazingly, the word of the LORD came to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have rejected Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone*

remain; and they pursue my life, to take it away."

(Part two) *"So God said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before Me." And the LORD was passing by! A great and strong wind was tearing up the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing."*

"When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and stood in the entrance of the cave. And a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have rejected Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

*The LORD said to him, "Return to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram; and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel. You shall anoint **Elisha** the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death." (So the slaughter continues. These priests appear to be anti-Living God.)*

*"But I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to the false and idolatrous god, Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." **(Part three: finale)** So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat plowing a field with twelve pairs of oxen. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his prophet's cloak over him." - 1 Kings 19:1-19*

Elijah was honest with God and with himself. He had done everything God had asked him to do, and he was rewarded with burnout. When we are engaged with those around us and are fulfilling who we were meant to be, it can require an enormous amount of stamina and energy. Elijah had been faithful despite intense

turbulence - much personally directed toward him. God heard his prayers, and he is now allowed an exit few men will experience. Can you imagine instead of a death like all men you were transported to heaven in a fiery chariot?! Nice.

As we weigh some of the aspects of looking to God in turbulence we can keep perspective, and, hopefully, live beyond mere human capacities. When added to our sincere commitment to walk with others who are looking up, we are standing in the Kingdom of heaven, friends!

MY CONCLUSIONS ON TURBULENCE & IMPERFECTION:

- √ Chaos and order exist together.
- √ Imperfection is everywhere.
- √ Turbulence is our personal connection to suffering.
- √ Story is where God is producing glory.
- √ Transcendence connects us with God's thoughts and ways.
- √ A Clear Conscience is God's offer of freedom.
- √ Finding True North is our compass for joyful arrival.
- √ Hope is our anchor to what really matters.
- √ Arrival is the great Reward.

I am deeply sorry for any suffering you have experienced in your journey, and I am hopeful in God that some of these words have helped you gain some perspective and not feel so alone in your story.

Truly your suffering and mine has not and will not be in vain. Selah.



I wrote these essays over a period of about 30 days in 2021. Our cabin is very remote and carries many memories of God-solitude as well as echoes of God's Voice through many people over many years. I am grateful for what we have experienced here together.

There were many times I would awaken in the middle of the night impressed about a next pivot, a clarification or a pressing thing to communicate. This is often how my walk with God has unfolded over these 50 or so years. I display my hunger to know Jesus, and I search His God Story to learn while life is constantly pressing in on me and is my backdrop for my growing faith. He continues to communicate truth and comfort to my soul through His Spirit of grace, and I take one more step in His direction.

Like you, I am sorry for turbulence we have had to endure - some worse than others. The word *selah* pops up from time to time particularly in the Psalms. In essence it means "I lift this up to the highway of praise that flows before the Lord of all living." I lift these essays before my Lord.

We have shared a variety of personal stories of some of our dear friends' turbulence in an imperfect existence. They know these things firsthand. Thank you for letting me pass on your stories. You are very faith-filled and brave people and an inspiration to my soul!

As always, it is a privilege to suffer this turbulence shoulder to shoulder. You are some of the first souls I will hope to see once we have arrived at the City of Light.

The Word of God is *“living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces to the confluence of soul and spirit as well as our physical bodies, and His Word alone is able to weigh the thoughts and intentions of every heart. There is no creature hidden from His sight, rather, all things are open and laid before His eyes.”*

Until then. Dave Nadler/Fourthstream.com/2021

“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

- Jesus in John 16:33 -

Lyric-Poem-Song Posts at Fourthstream.com

*Here are a series of posts and songs which parallel
the Turbulence conversations in this collection of essays.*

*Some are good for family time
and some for your own think time.*

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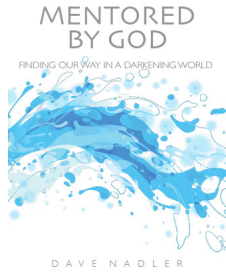
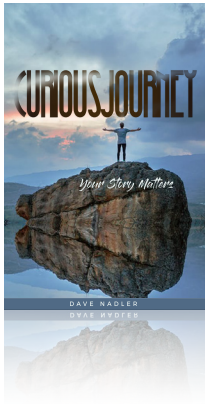
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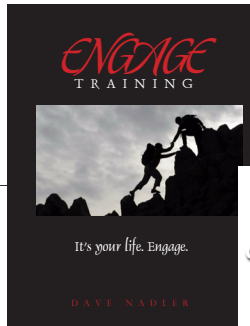


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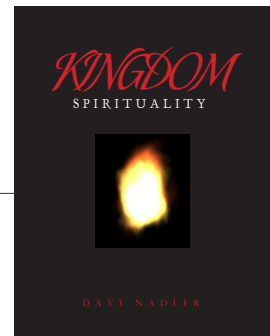
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