

HOW CAN
WE
LOVE?

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First Edition:

First Revision: May 2014

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All Scripture quotations from the World English Bible, which is public domain.

ABOUT

First Edition -- First Revision:

Hello, I'm James Banks. I don't have anything to say to distinguish myself, in particular. There is more information about me at my website, 10v24.net.

You can respond to the book at my email, banks@10v24.net -- make objections, ask for explanations, or whatever else.

This book contains short essays and two short stories on the subjects of injury, slavery and love. Or, from a different angle, the Problem of Evil, the Problem of Autonomy, and the Problem of Lovelessness. These three Problems are barriers to people being in harmony with God and each other.

Do we need to seek to completely overcome these barriers? If we live in disharmony, in an environment less than heaven (or less than utopia, if you will), then someone has to suffer. Who will suffer, if anyone? The disenfranchised. If heaven is possible, we have a moral obligation to seek it with all of our beings so that we can have it and extend it to all.

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First Edition -- Second Revision:

Some help: Two of the chapters (“Morality” and “Free Will”) are like philosophy papers -- puzzle-like. Further, the idea or argument of the whole book needs to be put together by you, if you want, using the chapters I present. You may wish to read the whole book in one sitting, then read it again to understand each part, at leisure, or do the reverse, read each part at leisure, then read the whole in one sitting.

I mostly made minor changes in this revision to improve clarity.

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Second Edition -- First Revision:

I rewrote several sections according to my current understanding. I also added material to the beginning and end.

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Second Edition -- Second Revision:

This revision incorporates some feedback, and makes a few small revisions and corrections.

Reading through this material in November of 2016 (reflecting back on what I wrote two years ago, the “main text”), it strikes me that if I were to do anything differently in that part, I would rewrite parts of it with a different tone (for that matter, I might rewrite some of the “additional

material” as well). I don’t think I want to do that, because while I’ve come to have a different tonality as a person, the text as it is could help people who are different from me.

I would say that if you are older and tired at heart, more traumatized, more fragile, or, if you come from a background that finds Christianity alien or offensive, you should try to read my book in your mind with the tone of voice I used in a podcast of mine, called *The House of Mourning*. Listen to enough episodes to learn how the voice speaks, and then read the book, imagining me reading the book that way. I think that should help.

The podcast is available for free at 10v24.net/mourning

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Second Edition -- Third Revision:

A few corrections and revisions for re-release in 2018.

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Second Edition — Fourth Revision:

A few corrections and revisions in 2020.

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PREFATORY MATERIAL

Material added to the 2nd Edition.

IMPORTANT NOTE

I do not like to coerce, and this book does not coerce -- if it seems to coerce you, it is under your power, as you read it to yourself.

I do not like to persuade, but I do not avoid doing that. There is a persuasion that is dishonest and deceptive, which conceals evidence while making an argument, which stuns the reader, charms the reader, rather than showing the reader the truth. I have written with a sort of style -- with a sort of charm. I have expressed myself in emotionally charged ways. (We know what critical thinking is: thinking according to a high standard, in touch with reality. What is critical feeling? I try to teach that to some extent in this book.) In any event, you have the ability and responsibility to determine which aspects of this book you honestly believe are true, and then to live accordingly. Take your time in doing this, and listen with your most trustworthy faculties -- those which, in your experience, are most trustworthy in finding the truth.

In general, I would prefer to be attractive. I offer you this book to challenge yourself. Perhaps in the midst of the challenge, you will see something that speaks to your most trustworthy self in a quiet, simple way -- you will find a "Yes" in this, a word of peace, (though yet perhaps a word that sets your life tumbling forward).

TRUST AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

I'll ask you a question before we begin:

Why doesn't the Problem of Evil tend to make Christians into dystheists; instead, overwhelmingly making them into atheists (if it converts them at all)? Dystheism is as much a logical conclusion of the existence of suffering as atheism is.

MAIN TEXT

This material was either in the 1st Edition, or is in the scope of the 1st Edition.

SELF-SATISFACTION AND TRUTH

1. If something does not kill your heart, you'll yearn.
2. If you yearn you're restless.
3. If you're restless, you move.
4. If you move, you find a new something.

Repeat

unless

5. If the new thing kills your heart, you won't yearn

or unless

6. If the new thing keeps filling your heart continually, you yearn but are not restless

Do I have the measure of love that must accompany finding the truth? For without love, our hearts die, and we are stuck believing whatever we happened to believe when they died... possibly even the propositions that murdered them.

DEADLINES

I have used government websites that weren't as robust and easy to use as commercial websites providing similar services. It is said that the difference is "competition". The private commercial website must be good or else people will prefer to use the competitor's website and give them their business instead.

If this is so, it says that excellence best comes from the struggle to survive, the fear of death.

Is this true?

GENOCIDE

What is genocide? Something like, the systematic killing of a people group. Typically, we think of genocide as occurring to an ethnicity. An ethnicity is an identity, which is shared by many people. Often, it applies to people who do not or even would not choose it.

Isn't poverty an identity like that of ethnicity?
In what ways is it not?

MORALITY

(I presented a version of this chapter at a student-level conference, put on by the Society for Philosophy and Religion at Claremont Graduate University on 5 April 2014. Thanks to participants for their comments.)

(I also presented a version of this to my friend Kevin Siefert, SDSU philosophy graduate student. Thanks to Kevin for comments and reactions.)

Assumed: If God exists, that is, the God of the Bible, there is such a thing as divine morality: that which God has to find right and wrong, because that is his nature.

Assumed: There is such a thing as human morality: that which human beings have to find right and wrong, for whatever reason, ultimately because it is in our nature.

(Or are there other groundings for morality? Does Randian Objectivism, for instance, provide an alternative grounding, neither in human nature nor in divine nature?)

(This human morality is expressed in specific

laws and mores, and changes over time. Perhaps the future morality is no better than that of the past. But here, assumed: that the efforts of human ethicists are not in vain and that current human morality is more deeply true to human nature than past morality.)

Conceded: God is bad according to human morality. (Evidence: from Job 13:15 to New Atheism.)

Assumed: God is good according to divine morality.

How do we judge between the two moralities?

Do we use human morality to say that divine morality is invalid? But why privilege human morality? Why not use divine morality to say human morality is invalid? Are there any other possible ways to invalidate human or divine morality? Logical inconsistency, perhaps?

Is human morality logically consistent? Is divine morality logically consistent? What would the logical consistency of a moral system look like?

It might look something like this: there is an underlying Law, whether a human Law rooted in human nature or a divine Law rooted in divine nature. Does divine or human behavior consistently suggest that Law? If so, our de facto morality and our "official" morality are consistent, so our total morality is consistent. (Assumed: our real moral beliefs are reflected in be-

havior, not assertion.)

What Law does divine (or human) behavior suggest? We engage in many kinds of behaviors. Behavior A seems to disagree with Behavior B. The principle behind behavior A seems to be X, and behind B seems to be Y, and X and Y are not in harmony.

Is divine morality contradictory in this way? God's Law is love. Is love "statically defined", or is it a dialectic? If love is a dialectic or a unity of opposing forces or ideas or a conversation, then God's behavior should be, in some ways, contradictory, in order to be true to the Law of love.

What is the Law underlying human morality? Is there a Law? Does human behavior suggest a Law? Is human morality non-contradictory?

Following the implications of these questions and assertions, we might have an argument for why people should suspend moral judgment of God: we have no authority for privileging our morality above his.

Then again, if there is no way to privilege one morality over another, then why conclude that we should accept God? Why not conclude that we should be true to our own morality and reject him as an enemy -- someone dangerous or deplorable exactly because he doesn't share our values? (Should we accept God just because he's all-powerful? Bow to the ultimate king? Or

rebel to the death against the ultimate tyrant?)

So, there are at least two meta-moralities applying when you can't determine which morality is valid. That is, two moralities of how to choose moralities:

1. If you have no way to judge between two moralities, you ought to suspend judgment of either.
2. If you have no way to judge between two moralities, you ought to be true to your own nature and follow what you naturally believe.

(This suggests

3. If you have no way to judge between two moralities, you ought to adopt the other's beliefs

--which seems not to be in use.

Assumed, then: there are just two, 1 and 2 -- what if there are others? Opening for attempted objection.)

When Christians argue that "God seems bad, but we don't know enough to condemn him, or have enough authority", they use meta-morality #1. Atheists, however, tend to reply "So?" according to meta-morality #2.

It is in human nature to suspend judgment under lack of information, but it is also in human

nature to be true to one's own nature. Even humanistic #2 ("true to self") can appear, naturally, to contain #1 ("suspend judgment"). That is, #1 is understandably a tenet of human morality, thus, under #2, human morality is implied, and thus #1 is implied. Therefore, humans are confused at the level of choosing between meta-moralities, the meta-meta-moral level.

(Assumed: humans are confused at the meta-meta-moral level. Opening for attempted objection.)

Out of that confusion comes a choice. If everything were clear, there would be no choice, or the choice would be simple to make. It would be like filling out an arithmetic worksheet for a grade, choosing to write down the right answers, rather than being like choosing who you are and what your life's work is to be. Let me clarify: when you fill out an arithmetic worksheet, the answers are clear. You just have to find them by following clear rules. When you choose what to do with your life, you might say there is no "right" answer. But there certainly are wrong ones. Otherwise the decision would be trivial -- just flip a coin at the guidance counselor's office -- or you'd never even bother to make it. But for many or even most of us, a hard choice was necessary, because of the high stakes, and our state of deep confusion. Because of this deep confusion, in life and in meta-morality -- the stakes of our meta-morality are, of course, how we live life itself -- we have a difficult and inter-

esting choice ahead of us.

JUSTICE

Here are two approaches to hell: the hell of justice and the hell of cleansing. The hell of justice is what you deserve to receive, what it is acceptable for you to receive, because it was acceptable to you for others to receive it. It is necessarily finite, and necessarily a torment.

If you affirm a standard as authoritative and binding on others, why not be judged by it yourself?

THE NEW WINE SYSTEM

What is the nature of hell? Why would the God of love send people to hell? Hell is a place of destruction, where people are burned up like trash. But who would go to hell? Would God really want to destroy anyone he didn't have to? God goes through a lot of pain to keep this world going, seeing all of our sins in motion. Our sins are bound up in us. We must be greatly valuable for him to permit so much sin.

What is the nature of heaven? Is it a place of supreme wealth and pleasure? Maybe so. But I think it's more essentially a place of complete trustworthiness, and trust. Some wealth and pleasure can be untrustworthy, and such would be excluded from such a sustainable place as our eternal rest.

Some people are trustworthy, but most, to some extent, are not. Some can become trustworthy, but a few, at least, will not. There is a process of becoming trustworthy. Love is the most trustworthy thing, and we are taught by love to become like love. Anyone who has hardened themselves to this process, who has cut themselves off from the voice of love, can't be trusted in a place of absolute trust. We have as our example the garden of Eden. Eden was as trustworthy a place as humans can imagine (at least, that I can), except for one aspect: the serpent; and Adam and Eve's naivety. Though the serpent

were to be chained, and we were to have lost most or even all of our naivety, serpent-like people could still grieve us and put us on our guard. And so such people can't be around us. The slightest burden must be cast off when borne for too long. This is the separation of the hell of cleansing.

Untrustworthiness, sin, is a leaven, a yeast. The defeat of sin requires a purification. We've eradicated smallpox -- or have we? There are still cultures of it existing in the world. We keep them in case somehow smallpox re-emerges (from someone else's laboratory?) and we need to make vaccines. In this life, it's risky to purify things. But our hearts long for a place of eternal rest and peace, in which we can let our guards down, and walk without fear.

What is the nature of sin? Sin is that which I do, I myself, which is unacceptable to God, to love himself. If I yell at you because I am tired and irritable, have I sinned? Perhaps. But it is not in the yelling that I sin. It is in my heart.

God could send supernatural mercy on me so that I never feel tired and irritable, under any circumstances. Would I be done with sin? Perhaps. But it isn't in the freedom from fatigue and irritability, the lack of a risk of yelling, that I would be made pure. It would be in my heart.

If I lose my temper and yell all the time, I may feel that I am a slave to my temper. And then I hear someone talking about a treatment for bad

temper. But I am uninterested in taking it. I am okay with my helplessness toward my temper. I am okay with the ill effect I have. Then the sin is in my heart.

If I die and go to heaven, can God make my heart pure? God can make some of my heart pure. Could he make all of it pure? Would it be possible for me to exist, as myself, if he made my whole heart pure? He would go further than I was willing to go on my own. Wouldn't that violate my will?

If it is in God's power to get rid of all sinfulness by overriding our choices, and if sinfulness is that which is inherently unacceptable to God, then why has he not done so already? In fact, if it's possible for God to get rid of all sinfulness by his unilateral will, and he does not do so, then isn't he responsible for our sinfulness? Would God be on the side of sin -- that which is unacceptable to him?

We ourselves through the living of our lives have to come to decide to not sin, to give over our hearts to God so that he cleanses us, so that we no longer sin. Does this process end at death? Would you want that to be the case for you?

Yet you may say that in the drama of sin, we are taught to trust God and appreciate God. Then, I will say, in learning to trust God, you are deciding not to sin any more, in your heart.

Perhaps you may say that like Paul, it is not you

who sin, but it is sin in you that sins. You long to be freed from your “body of death”. Perhaps you are right. Perhaps you already repented of all of your sins on the day you were converted and asked Jesus to be your Savior and Lord of your life. And you have been laboring under your sinfulness ever since, wishing, with all of your heart, that it could be removed. After all, your sinfulness poisons life for you and the people around you and therefore, in some small way, the entire world.

Or, perhaps you have had times where you realized that you were self-deceived about that initial repentance, that, sincere as it was (or seemed), you had not really repented of all of your sins, the evidence being, that NOW you were repenting of them in a way you never had before. “Judge a tree by its fruits” you say to yourself. “Who am I, really?” you ask yourself.

Part of repentance is coming to understand that what we thought was not our responsibility really is our responsibility. And part of it is to know that though we were convinced we were right before, and felt no pangs of conscience, in fact we were wrong, and we should have known we were wrong. Who are we if we are wrong in that way but feel no pangs of conscience? I would be very cautious in assuming that it was not I who sinned, but sin in me.

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In order to be in the final harmony of heaven, we

need to come to choose to no longer sin outwardly, and no longer have sinful hearts, so we must be prepared to enter that rest, by walking a path of growing in righteousness (and trust of God), which in some ways necessarily has to be hard, and for many of us, will be long as well.

Therefore I assert that there is a need for a time and place in which we complete this journey, after we die.

How can we know that such a time and place in fact exists?

It is possible that in our dealings with God, we have learned that he is love, and that he is holy, (which is the same thing), and that therefore we will inevitably be made love, and holy, as we are drawn into him. Inevitably, and yet, through our free choices, over time. (Inevitable, unless we harden ourselves.)

Some people listen to God through the Bible. What does it say on the subject?

In Revelation 20, there is mention made of a 1,000 year period in which Satan is chained and righteous people rule on the earth. What are they doing? Who are they ruling over, and what does that ruling look like?

In Isaiah, there is a description of a future time in which “a king shall reign in righteousness and princes shall rule in justice” (32:1). And it seems to be a time in which there are “fools” (35:8).

The word translated “fool” is used in Proverbs of someone who “hates correction” and yet needs correction. Would these be the saints of heaven? Or would they be people still on their journey to full repentance, full trust of God?

In chapter 34 of Isaiah, there’s such language as this:

All of the army of the sky will be dissolved. The sky will be rolled up like a scroll, and all its armies will fade away, as a leaf fades from off a vine or a fig tree. For my sword has drunk its fill in the sky. Behold, it will come down on Edom, and on the people of my curse, for judgment. Yahweh’s sword is filled with blood. It is covered with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams; for Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah, And a great slaughter in the land of Edom. The wild oxen will come down with them, and the young bulls with the mighty bulls; and their land will be drunken with blood, and their dust made greasy with fat. For Yahweh has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion. Its streams will be turned into pitch, its dust into sulfur, And its land will become burning pitch. It won’t be quenched night nor day. Its smoke will go up forever. From generation to generation, it will lie waste. No one will pass through it forever and ever. But the peli-

can and the porcupine will possess it.
The owl and the raven will dwell in it.
He will stretch the line of confusion over
it, and the plumb line of emptiness.
(Isaiah 34:4-11)

Compare this to Revelation:

I saw an angel standing in the sun. He cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the sky, "Come! Be gathered together to the great supper of God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, and small and great." I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him who sat on the horse, and against his army. The beast was taken, and with him the false prophet who worked the signs in his sight, with which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. The rest were killed with the sword of him who sat on the horse, the sword which came forth out of his mouth. All the birds were filled with their flesh.
(Revelation 19:17-21)

Immediately following this passage is Revelation 20, which begins like this:

I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. He seized the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole inhabited earth, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were finished. After this, he must be freed for a short time. I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as didn't worship the beast nor his image, and didn't receive the mark on their forehead and on their hand. They lived, and reigned with Christ for the thousand years. The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over these, the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him one thousand years. (Revelation 20:1-6)

John, the author of Revelation, certainly had Isaiah in mind when he wrote Revelation. (Or, God had Isaiah in mind when he gave John his vision, from which Revelation was written.)

This connection is suggestive of the idea of a time in which we grow in holiness, that is to take place in the future (both Isaiah's, John's future, and our future). However, anyone experienced in reading the Bible will have many more questions about this idea and its implications throughout Scripture. I am not qualified to answer them, but there's a book on the subject that satisfied me when I read it, and I can point you toward it so that you can investigate for yourself¹. The book lays out what the author calls the "New Wine System" of interpreting the Bible, which is more developed, more Scriptural, less philosophical, than what I've written in this chapter, but which is essentially the same.

The New Wine System says that God has forgiven us all from the beginning of time, (I suppose) because he decided to forgive us from before time by the inevitable death of Jesus. We all start in the Book of Life, which contains the names of all people destined for the final harmony, and it is only through our self-hardening that we are blotted out of the Book of Life. Self-hardening makes us into wicked people. But if we keep growing, though we are foolish now (hating and needing correction -- possessing some hardness), we will become wise (not hating and yet not needing correction).

Those who are wise will rule over other people.

¹ Its title is *New Wine for the End Times* by Philip Brown, (see newwine.org for more information). Don't be misled by its appearance.

If you can think of a person who is mature and has deep understanding and yet who would abuse his or her position of authority -- that is not the wisdom that the New Wine System is talking about. There is a wisdom that is truly trustworthy.

We need a better government, one with a good leader as king. Jesus, the man of sorrows, is that good leader. Jesus is perhaps the only man who has ever really loved, the best lover we could elect to be our ruler. No government has ever really loved its people.

Jesus walked a path of connection with the Father, of submission to love. Jesus died, not only to satisfy the sacrificial systems that reign in our minds (in both Jewish and pagan and even modern minds), but also to show us that we need to love God to the point of giving up our lives, and that this will save us. But we also need to love God to the point of obedience.

The main thing I get out of the New Wine System is: "You will have to overcome all your sins through a process of allowing God to work in you. This happens more and more as you are a follower of Jesus, becoming like Jesus, doing what Jesus did, or would do, with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. You will overcome, it will inevitably happen. So you might as well start now."

But I also get this: "No one will go to hell for lack of God's evidence."

THE FALL

The Fall is man's own choice to reject God. Because humans rebel against God, the world doesn't work the way God intended it to. In various ways, it appears that God does not exist. No one can actually prove that God does not exist, yet no one is forced to believe in him.

Not all people learn to love best under conditions of knowing that God exists. Knowing that is a form of power, and some need to learn to love before they can govern that power well. (This goes mainly for the more irreligious and the more religious.) You learn to love God, then you learn how to see God, instead of having his sight forced upon you before your heart is ready. If your heart is unready, you would make some kind of "official" show of compliance to "hard, cold reality" without real responsiveness within.

Because of this, not everything handed down to us by nature is a good thing. For instance, I have bipolar disorder, the more severe kind if untreated. I am not ashamed of being bipolar, but at the same time I am not so proud of it as to fail to take my medications.

--

Because of the Fall, God's chosen people are too hard-hearted to listen to God's perfect Law. Sometimes they have the Law but ignore it with

their hearts. Other times they simply wouldn't recognize God's Law as perfect, would turn away from God if it meant they had to love as much as God does. Instead, God gives them the best particular statutes they will listen to.

God seeks a holy people, a set-apart nation. They serve as a living example so that all people will be brought to righteousness. He started working on his nation thousands of years ago. Our relative soft-heartedness now comes on the back of their adjustment to God's voice.

SUFFERINGS

Being hungry.

Being rejected.

Being frustrated.

Being ridiculed.

Being sick.

Being thirsty.

Being addicted.

Being neglected.

You can't get warm.

You can't get cool.

You can't stop aching.

You can't stop burning.

You can't stop itching.

You can't stop thinking.

You can't stop feeling.

UNFORGIVENESS

It hurts to hold onto a wound. You can hold onto a wound out of weakness or out of strength.

--

Out of weakness, you hold onto it because you are afraid that you will be hurt again. You don't allow yourself to forgive because you fear that if you do so, you will make yourself vulnerable to the Other and the Other may injure or enslave you once again.

What can the Other do to become trustworthy? When your friend has hurt you, and professes a changed heart, you are not prudent to completely trust him or her just because of these words and your friend's sincerely-felt emotions. The heart hides unexamined background assumptions, "attitudes", that could still betray. Your friend can't see them, and can't question them and can't doubt them. And so they rule him or her.

But you will not know what attitudes are really in your friend's heart without the experiencing of your friend, to see if any unguarded words or actions reveal a heart that actually wants to betray. You will have to try them, or in other words, give them a try, or in other words, give them a chance.

--

Out of strength, you hold onto the wound in order to put yourself above the Other. You remain at a higher level, and keep the Other in a compartment beneath you. You ridicule the Other as morally inferior. You keep the Other at your feet. Perhaps you really do this out of weakness, in a way. If you've given your heart too freely, if your admiration has left you open to slavery or injury, then if you admire no one -- or certainly not the Other -- then you are safe.

But perhaps you do not feel any weakness at all, and you put yourself above the Other simply for the pleasure of putting yourself above another. Do not lie to yourself. Those who close themselves off to admiring or accepting others close themselves off to being taught by others and are at particular danger of only knowing what serves the person they already happen to be.

FREE WILL

Defined: A determination is that which decides how things will be.

Defined: A will is the part of a personal being that decides how things will be -- the personal determination.

Defined: Freedom is undetermination.

Assumed: Everything needs a determination, or is an undetermined determination, or determines itself and other things. (Perhaps there are things that are undetermined and determine nothing else, but these are left aside as they affect nothing and are affected by nothing and so are effectively not part of our universe.)

Is the universe an undetermined determination? It is said that the physical universe began with the Big Bang (or *a* Big Bang). That cannot be explained. It simply is. Why did the Big Bang unfold in the way that it did? How can one reason from the singularity at the inception of space and time to all the particularity of the present world? But let us say there is some rule for this. Then what explains that rule? Perhaps it is “the very nature of reality” -- then what determines that? Something just is just the way it is.

Under this story, of materialism, it seems impossible for the human will to be free. This human

will emerges from the interaction of determined physical particles. Therefore it must obey the one true undetermined, the Big Bang (or if there's anything more primary than that, then that reality). Or there must be some kind of intervention, some way in which the neurons can rebel, apart from that which emerges from the Big Bang. And we don't see any physical evidence of such an intervening thing existing, and anyway, where else would that intervention have its determination but from the one true undetermined -- the Big Bang or whatever might come before it?

But materialism may not be true.

Is there a hard logical reason to suppose that there is only one undetermined thing? It seems as though there can only be one thing that is completely free. Otherwise, some equal thing could impinge on its freedom. Of course, if that equal power had the same will, then there never would be an impingement. In that case, there would be only one will which was completely free.

Concluded, then?: There can be only one completely free will.

But could there not be a number of partially free wills? That is, wills that can be limited in scope by outside determination.

We could picture the universe as being a field in which wills or determinations interact. There

could be one primary determination that brings about the existence of numerous derivative determinations without determining their natures. If one undetermined thing exists, why not a number of others, if not powerful enough to resist all influence, at least possessing some originality of determination? And then all of these free or partially free determinations could interact, to produce all the rest of the universe's development.

(Think of a board game. Each player is constrained by the rules of the game and the structure of the board, but each makes some choices as to what his or her piece does, and these pieces interact with each other to form the development of that particular playing of the game.)

But how can this primary free will give birth to more free or partially free wills? If it creates them out of some material, won't that material have to have been made the way it is by the primary free will, the creator? And thus determined by the creator. It seems a will that is built by another will cannot choose against how it's built.

But what if the primary free will makes them out of its own uncreated nature -- and that very nature entails freedom of the will? It does not create it by writing its essence down as instructions in the pages of a book, but by offering pages out of itself -- the real thing that makes a thing the way it is is its material, not its abstract definition.

The human body is like a machine, and so I suppose that God created the body like a mechanic designing and interconnecting the parts of a machine, bringing into physical reality a pattern only existing, before, in the mechanic's mind. But the will of human beings, if nothing else, cannot be created in that way. Instead, God gives himself into a limit, a finite pond washed up by an infinite ocean. (In the Hebrew of the Bible, humans are both "made" and "created".)

Because this human free will is limited in power, it cannot rule the entire person, and so humans have only partially free will. There is an aspect of the human's nature which does come from a friend or a parent or the physical body or some accident of the weather or digestion or physical illness. Yet "the pond within" is a piece of God, and cannot be denied its "little God"-hood. It is materially free.

Can God be free? If freedom is an inexplicable quality and therefore objectionable, then which is worse, that the Big Bang has it, or that God has it? Freedom has to exist, magical as it is.

But can God impart his own material into a limit? How can an infinite being separate a finite reality from itself? The Big Bang singularity is said to exist without time and space. Can there be limits to a physical entity without time and space? No spatiotemporal limits, at least. So the singularity somehow falls out of its own infinity into limitation. This is inexplicable to

me -- perhaps it is only “magical” and is explicable to some other human being. But explicable or not, it happened. And so if that is possible for the Big Bang singularity, then what would make such a move impossible for God? He could impart himself into limited regions of space-time, numerous times, and thus create us.

And so I see a way in which, if God exists, there can be human free will.

“My Son”

My son is a real charmer. He has beautiful blue-green eyes -- I can read them either as all green or all blue. He is so smart -- he has the funniest mannerisms, wit, a way with words. I love him so much -- in every way. He is my child, the one I pour my life into. And he is my delight, the reminder of hope.

I am unsure how it is that I have a child. I know I am the mother -- I can't forget giving birth. But if it weren't for that, I would almost feel as though my child was without parents at all. All I know is that he is a beautiful gift, one which I have tended like a tender gardener training a beanstalk on the beanpole. I can see myself in him, of course, but there is so much of mystery in him, so much that is some kind of gift from the loving universe.

--

Now is later.

I was putting away the dishes after a 5PM supper, and heard a knock on the door. “Oh,” I thought “Someone wants to sell me something.” I went to the door hoping it was someone in need. I opened it and there stood the most uncanny man.

He was goodness itself -- he looked exactly like who he was -- good. I set him down at the table with the offer of a drink of water -- It was

still hot out. I couldn't do harm to a good man, or withhold such a simple good thing from him.

We spoke about the hot, humid weather -- becoming an August tradition in San Diego. I wanted to ask him why he came to my house, but he had other things to speak of -- his projects, his business, the funny things that happened to him that day.

I stared at him with longing -- why was he here? I didn't ask that of him -- as I did with my eyes -- because I was irritated or suspicious of him, but rather because I wanted what he wanted, wanted to be united with his will.

Finally, as my expectancy reached its height, he offhandedly opened into the subject. "Well, so I guess you're wondering why I came here. Well, I was wondering if you could do me a favor. I mean -- you don't have to if you don't want to. But I was wondering if I could have our son stay over at my house on the weekends."

At that moment, I had to say yes. But the next day, Saturday, with my precious son off to be with this man, I started to feel an intense anger toward him. He just came in and took my son away! And I didn't have the will to think in the moment and say no. He took advantage of me.

So on Sunday night, when the man came back, I gave him an inarticulate and quavering tirade -- or the very beginning of one. He looked at me with grave concern. "Oh, no, you must be adjusting to your son being away. I'm sorry." Then he talked about all the fun my son had with him, how everything about it was good. "So," he said, in a way that said "I am at your

mercy,” “Do you think he’ll be able to come next weekend?” “Oh, um” I said “Yeeeaah. Yeah, he can. But he has to do his homework.” “Oh yes, we took care of that.” he said, without having to think about it.

--

The weeks have been passing, just like this, and I guess I’m beginning to be more alright with what’s going on. I feel twinges, sometimes. But I don’t want to mess up what has been so good for my son and this man.

My son’s grades have been improving -- his intellect is going farther than I would have been able to take it. Although, part of that has to do with the books the man has me pay for, so that my son can study extra during the week. I said, at first, “Is this really worth it? I don’t know...” and he said, “Don’t worry about it. I can reimburse you.” And it just never seemed like a good time to bring up that reimbursement, he always had such nice stories to tell about my son.

But yes, my son is really blossoming with this man’s attention. Yet, for some reason, I can’t feel grateful to him. I just feel like he’s okay for now.

--

I don’t care! I’m fed up! This man is asking too much. I’m going to get rid of him the next time I see him. But tonight, I have to sleep, and it’s hard to sleep when you’re angry. I guess I’ll just lie here and try to sleep.

(...)

Ah,

... I guess I've been wrong. I'm not a perfect person. And the reimbursement for the sports camp is something I guess I could do without. I must be sore because it wasn't my idea.

Oh God, forgive me for being so bitter and petty and unforgiving.

(...)

Ah... such peace. I should have prayed sooner.

--

Time has passed, it's springtime now, and my son is unbelievable. I must admit, he's an athlete, and I never knew he could be one. Playing sports has made him so self-assured, so outgoing. I didn't realize it, but he wasn't ready to go out into the world before.

--

This time, I'm moving out of here! I'm selling my house and taking my son somewhere this man can't find him!

Ah, but we've lived in this neighborhood so long... But I really have to make a clean break! But then, maybe this man isn't so bad after all.

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Now the man wants my son to stay with him for the summer, back where he's from, on the East Coast. I'm not having it.

--

We spoke about it, and he was going on about "influence." I've never seen him try so hard to make a point before. I said, "I want my son to just, get away. He's so precious to me." And he said, "Why do you think he's precious?" And I said "He's so witty and considerate, and intelligent and warm." And he said, "I taught him that." And I said, "Sure, yeah, but before you came, he was precious." And he said "Don't you remember? I taught you to be good. I told you everything you know about being a parent."

"You did?"

"I know it's hard for you to remember things, but I think you can do it."

"Huh..."

...

Oh!"

It dawned on me then -- those eyes! His eyes were a beautiful green -- and mine, regular old blue. I stared at him, unable to speak, and he rested in the silence.

"Oh..." I finally said. "I see."

He spoke then, about the fun plans he had for my son, yacht lessons and math camp and hiking in the Appalachian Mountains, and some other things I'm having trouble remembering.

As he left, he said “Don’t worry, you’re doing a good job raising our son. When you’re ready to listen to my advice, I can tell you some things that will really allow you to do well as a parent. Our son deserves the best.”

--

I went about my work that night, at first confused, then seething, then spent. I lay in bed, too tired to sleep, and suddenly an image leapt to my mind, the man’s green eyes, blank with possession, staring at my torn clothes, his body raping mine.

Everything fit. I cried a little for what had happened to me, and then lay with thoughts racing, and then fell asleep.

--

But I had a bit of doubt about this image. If it had really happened, and if I was really seriously violated by the sexual encounter that led to my wonderful son, then why didn’t I have a clear memory of it? When people really care, they remember. But I had gone so many years without thinking about where my son came from -- I guess I was content for it to be a mystery.

But no, I thought, I’ve got to stick up for myself! So the next time I saw the man, I treated him pleasantly, and then, with my whole body shaking, accused him. I needed to know what he would have to say.

He laughed, and my indignation shut off. It was a laugh that said “Hah! What crazy things

people say!" Then he reminded me that we had been lovers, many years ago (fitting my son's age), that I had always been oversensitive, and inconsistent, but he loved me anyway, that I had thought there was something better for me than to sleep with him, but of course, I came around, enough to get pregnant, and I loved it when it happened -- somehow I broke up with him shortly after the birth, and moved to San Diego.

I asked him why I didn't remember any of this, and he said "Huh. I guess you have a bad memory. It's okay, everyone has their little quirks."

"But I do remember," (I quivered.) "I definitely remember something. I have a clear memory of you... the way it was... what we were talking about before."

"Could it have been a false memory?"

I said that that was possible. I let him go, shut up inside.

--

Ever since then, when I see my son, I see what escaped me those many months: My son looks so, so much like the man, and now, my son who gave me joy, the sight of him fills me with horror. Every bad thing in him is bearable, but all his beauty makes me sick to my stomach.

Yet I can't blame the man. He might be right, he could be telling the truth. He certainly seems to have a better command of his memory, and the facts, than I do. But my son has still become something horrible to me, although I love him deeply.

He wants to go to college on the East Coast, near the man, and I will let him go. Maybe I won't. I shouldn't, especially since I know part of my motivation for letting him go is so I don't have to face him. So no, I won't let him.

--

Well, he went. The man helped him get a nice scholarship. That is why I let him go.

The man calls me to tell me about my son. He wants me to come out to the East Coast sometime. On the phone, I agree because I have to, because it's the only reasonable thing to do, and then on my own time, I have no motivation to buy the plane tickets. Ah well, what's this? Some mail came. Ah. Tickets to the East Coast, from the man. I wonder if he'll get mad at me if I don't use them. He paid good money for them.

I've been a woman too long, I think.

RESPONSE

It's easy to blame the woman in this story for being the way she is.

--

Is God like the rapist in this story?

In my experience, no. Rapists say "You are cheap" but God says "You are valuable." God permits me to suffer, but in such a way that I am strengthened. He judges and rebukes, and this builds me up. The rapist soothes and distracts and pleases and appeals to the eye. Yet he wounds and keeps the woman weak.

She isn't even permitted to be justifiably angry with him, her ability to accuse is broken down, even within herself. God allows me to accuse him full-heartedly. Like Job, I am made worthy of accusing him, not because I am in a position to judge God as being inferior to me, but because God wants me to have a voice.

God must see me as weak, in some sense, but he doesn't lean over me or treat me in a patronizing way, or disrespect me for being weak. He doesn't have the lust to disrespect. When I am closest to God, I do not relate to him as superior, or inferior, or equal. Status is irrelevant. All that is there is "you and me" -- God and me.

The woman is the rapist's property, but I am part of God's body. The rapist is dead to the woman, she's just a peripheral thing, not fully real, something external to him to manipulate. But I am part of God's being. God exists, in part, through me. God is alive to me, that is, alive in my direction, probably more alive to me than I am toward most of my own parts.

The rapist claims to have created the woman, in a way, by his insistence on her acknowledging his influence. God created me. Is the rapist like God, then? The rapist was lying, but what if he was telling the truth about having created her? God created me to value me and respect me, to build me up in him, and whatever the rapist did to help the woman has the effect of keeping her his dehumanized emotional property.

The rapist helped the woman, and in doing so destroyed something good in her, some kind of good pride. I have to trust my ability to trust others in order to trust others. This is a kind of good pride. God helps me -- does this destroy good pride in me? No. People let me down, they misuse what things of mine end up in their hands, they misuse me myself, but God does not.

I think what makes the difference is that God does not see my inferiority, as do rapists. It really doesn't matter to him, compared to me.

“How to Steal Everything”

“So you say you own the Mona Lisa?”

“Yeah. That’s right. I own the Mona Lisa.”

“How does that figure?”

“I’ll tell you the story: I was an art thief for many years. I was good. They didn’t ever catch me. But I wasn’t just an art thief. What made me such a good art thief, why I studied and practiced my moves so much so that I’d be perfect, was my love of art. I would take these things home and just tremble. I’d mount them on my wall and try out different lightings until I got the right one. Then I would lie down next to them and look at them from the floor. Art gave me such pleasure.

“Well, after some years, I started getting tired of appreciating art all alone. There were other art thieves who knew about what I was up to, and I could trust them not to squeal, but I never invited them to my apartment, because they just wouldn’t care. They were in it for the cash.

“Also, I was filling up my storage units with all these pieces. I got a little worried that they’d have the wrong humidity and the paintings would get ruined. So I decided one day ‘Hey, why not share this art with other people? Why not put it in a place where it’ll be well-cared for?’ So I started putting my art back up on museum walls, for safe-keeping. It was just as excit-

ing to put paintings up on museum walls, I found, as to take them off. All my thieving skills, the stealth, suppression of evidence, planning and timing were still in play.

“Other thieves heard about what I was doing and tried to spite me by stealing my art out of the museums. They failed. I only stole from the best museums, and only to the best museums did my paintings return. So they came to accept my ways.

“I got older and I started getting allergic to adrenaline, so to speak. I was still in it for the art, but the excitement didn’t excite me as much any more. Then, a few years ago, it hit me. Why not cut out the intermediate step of taking the art home and returning it to the museum from whence it came, and not simply take ownership of art and simultaneously declare it stored on the walls of the museum? I was the best art thief of all, I had stolen everything.

“One of the other art thieves, one of the sharper ones, tested my ownership. He said, ‘You say you own the Mona Lisa, over there in the Louvre, right? Prove it to me. Take it down off the wall and keep it for yourself.’ But see, the thing he doesn’t understand is that the nature of ownership is that you do what you want with your property. I want people to be able to enjoy the Mona Lisa, and I think the Louvre is doing an adequate job. If I did what he suggested, I’d be compromising my ownership by bowing to his greed and cynicism. In that way I’d relinquish the legitimacy of my claim to all art.

“So yeah, I own the Mona Lisa. Just for fun, when I visit Paris I pay the entrance fee and go

in and wait and see it. But it's mine. It's right where I want it to be."

RESPONSE

What is ownership? Is it as described in the preceding story?

I would be happy to own everything in the way that the art thief owns all art. I would be happy to have everything in the universe in its right place. I would be happy to have my will in harmony with God's will, and for everyone's will to be in harmony with God's will. In that way, everything could be placed in such a way as to please everyone, that would be possible.

Would I have to exert power over all of those things? Would I have to say that I and I alone am responsible for the positioning of that "art"? No, I don't need to assert myself like that. I don't have to say, "That art needs to be over there, in a place that is inaccessible to everyone else and therefore contrary to everyone else's will, just to prove that I own it." I don't have to make losers out of anybody else to value myself.

And what is power, if not the ability to dispose of some aspect of reality so that it is "in its right place", in your eyes? So, too, I would be happy for my eyes to see things as God would see them, for everyone to see things that way, so that all our actions, all the exertions of our wills on reality, would produce harmonious actions.

Yet, would I deny that there is any special con-

tribution I make to reality, nothing uniquely my own to contribute? I do not wish to make that denial. Yet, did I make myself? I don't know. I feel like I did, but I only had the universe as my materials, all the things that were handed to me by the past. And where did I come from? If I have any ability to assert myself against the world, it is a magical gift to me. I can't claim my autonomy as my own.

When I am closest to God, the question of status is irrelevant. In the same way, when I am closest to God's will, the question of autonomy is irrelevant.

THE ATONEMENT

God is not invulnerable. He is infinite in responsiveness and receptiveness, just as he is infinite in power. In his delight in us he can be grieved.

Yet that is God's way of being vulnerable. Our way of being vulnerable involves powerlessness. Out of powerlessness comes the need to look to others for help. But where do we look? We look to people who hurt us instead, and a God who looks on. The good things we put in God's hands get handled roughly.

Jesus died to reconcile us to God. He was God, he was God's firstborn son. He let go of his "equality with God" and became vulnerable to us in the same way that we are vulnerable to each other and to God. God put the son he loved in our hands, and we failed God, and God stood by while it happened. Jesus was betrayed by us. God was betrayed by us. God, in the person of the Son, was betrayed by God, in the person of the Father, yet Jesus ascended to be with God, after the Resurrection.

Because of this our sins will be forgiven, because we will learn to forgive.

WHY DO I TRUST GOD?

One reason I trust God is the child's reason. People that I trust trust in God. I trust in their trust. This is a valid reason to trust, if my ability to trust is trustworthy and their ability to trust is trustworthy, but there are other reasons I trust, as well.

God is real. God is more real than we are. When you experience God, you experience something more real than matter and energy, more real than human thought and emotion with all its fakeness. That reality is trustworthy. The bare presence and existingness of God is trust-producing, when you are close to him. You question God, as Job did, only until he shows up. You are convinced of God's goodness and reliability not with arguments about God, but with God himself.

It is not as though God brainwashes you when he is present to you. God doesn't drug you to get you to love him. People do that, but God wakes you up.

What is more real and substantial in personality than love? The most real and substantial people are those who love the best -- deepest, most realistically, most constantly. Love does not betray. Sometimes it hurts us because we put things in its care that are actually bad for us, and for us,

it damages them. But it does not betray us, in an eternal sense.

We put ourselves in its care, that is, our entire beings. Love does not destroy who we are, except that some of who we are is fakeness. We choose to be fake. Love makes us real, and this hurts and is a betrayal of our fakeness -- but not of who we are. Fakeness is not worthy of our being.

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Does God say contradictory things? If yesterday he said one thing, and today another, can I rely on him? As I grow in love, I become better able to discern the true nature of God. I know that God is love because I have been with him. If the Bible only seems to contradict that God is love, then I will search out the truth, and in this case, because it only seems to contradict this, I will find out that there is no contradiction, because I looked at the text more carefully and saw the way in which the contradiction does not really exist.

Yet if the Bible, as I understand it, contradicts love, as I understand it, what can I do? The Bible has taught me so much about God, I can't abandon it easily. Here there is the Bible, God, and my understanding. I trust all of them as friends. When friends disagree, what is my habit? I am speaking descriptively. I maintain my regard for them without demanding that they agree. In time, they either grow closer or

grow apart. In time, if they remain apart, I must choose between them.

In the end, I will choose God. The Bible agrees that “God is love.” If I trust the Bible, then I trust “God as love.” So, in the meantime, I follow the Bible’s command to love, first, because of this I am most sure.

I already trust God, and God has been my teacher, and so I seek his explanations of things and wait expectantly for his revelation.

And what have I been taught of love?

THE BOOK OF JAMES

The Letter from James

1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are in the Dispersion: Greetings. 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various temptations², 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 Let endurance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed. 7 For let that man not think that he will receive anything from the Lord. 8 He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

You start out life addicted to consolation. You want to keep going in the way that has worked for you so far, according to your purposes, secur-

² “temptations” is a translation of the Greek “peirasmos”, which means either “temptations” or “trials” or both simultaneously -- “testings”

ing your own well-being. James says, “Redefine consolation. Be consoled by desolation, because desolation turns you into a perfect, complete person.” Or more precisely, be consoled at the deepest level, by the acquisition of wisdom, and be flexible or indifferent to being consoled in other ways. Then you won’t be addicted to those other consolations.

When the Bible says “wisdom”, it often means “the ability to teach” and, especially, “maturity”, which includes moral excellence, to the point of perfection, as well as some measure of the thinking needed to be effective.

In contemporary English, a “perfect person” is one who makes no mistakes, or who never falls into trouble, or who can successfully present that front to themselves and others. Such people are rightly considered suspect. A morally perfect person makes mistakes, may even harm others in the process, but has a pure heart.

So if you want wisdom, ask for it from God. I don’t know if there’s anything that God definitely always wants to give you other than this wisdom. You’ll be complete in wisdom by the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ, if you continue to seek God.

Do you think God isn’t the source of wisdom, or that he doesn’t want that for you, or that he doesn’t have the power to instill that in you? Then you’re like “a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind”... you’re mixed up, you’re

what the Bible calls “foolish”. You dissipate, you don’t mean anything clearly, you are entropic. You think you’re going to get something from God, but it would be better if you didn’t think that, because then you might do something about your double-mindedness, which is a deeper problem than being tempted by most or perhaps all of the sins that get us down.

9 But let the brother in humble circumstances glory in his high position; 10 and the rich, in that he is made humble, because like the flower in the grass, he will pass away. 11 For the sun arises with the scorching wind, and withers the grass, and the flower in it falls, and the beauty of its appearance perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in his pursuits.

Huh, how does this section relate? We will see soon. For now, it just sets up the basic idea that riches are temporary. “Riches” might mean, in the broad sense, investment in and security from this world.

12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him.

Be rewarded with the true reward, the crown of life, not with earthly riches. Temptation or trial is inherently a deprivation of earthly security and investment, an insult to our consolation-ad-

dictions.

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God,” for God can’t be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. 15 Then the lust, when it has conceived, bears sin; and the sin, when it is full grown, produces death. 16 Don’t be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, nor turning shadow. 18 Of his own will he gave birth to us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Naturally, we are ruled by our desire for consolation, and every sin comes out of that. One of the biggest addictions we have is to living. But this addiction itself brings about death.

Everything that is good comes from God. Nothing good comes from our human nature, in this addiction to consolation. He gave birth to us through his word, and we need to grow up by receiving the gift of wisdom from him.

19 So, then, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man doesn’t produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore, putting away all

filthiness and overflowing of wickedness,
receive with humility the implanted
word, which is able to save your souls.

How does this connect? We will see.

22 But be doers of the word, and not
only hearers, deluding your own selves.
23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word
and not a doer, he is like a man looking
at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he
sees himself, and goes away, and immedi-
ately forgets what kind of man he was.
25 But he who looks into the perfect law
of freedom, and continues, not being a
hearer who forgets, but a doer of the
work, this man will be blessed in what
he does.

So, are you wise? Be honest with yourself.

What is the perfect law of freedom?

26 If anyone among you thinks himself
to be religious while he doesn't bridle his
tongue, but deceives his heart, this
man's religion is worthless. 27 Pure reli-
gion and undefiled before our God and
Father is this: to visit the fatherless and
widows in their affliction, and to keep
oneself unstained by the world.

Are you wise? Don't lie to yourself. What are
you saying about other people in anger?

2:1 My brothers, don't hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory with partiality. 2 For if a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, comes into your synagogue, and a poor man in filthy clothing also comes in; 3 and you pay special attention to him who wears the fine clothing, and say, "Sit here in a good place"; and you tell the poor man, "Stand there," or "Sit by my footstool"; 4 haven't you shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brothers. Didn't God choose those who are poor in this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which he promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Don't the rich oppress you, and personally drag you before the courts? 7 Don't they blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called? 8 However, if you fulfill the royal law, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well. 9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak, and so do, as men who are to be judged by a law of free-

dom. 13 For judgment is without mercy to him who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Two themes of James are “Judgmentalism is bad” and “An addiction to earthly riches is bad”. In this section, people are told not to judge people for being poor, not to show favoritism to the rich. The law of freedom, I think, is “Mercy will be shown to those who show mercy”. It is a law of laws: if you insist on a moral standard, you will be judged by it as well, with as much mercy as you showed other people.

14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man says he has faith, but has no works? Can faith save him? 15 And if a brother or sister is naked and in lack of daily food, 16 and one of you tells them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled”; and yet you didn’t give them the things the body needs, what good is it? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself. 18 Yes, a man will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

Are you wise? Do you hold onto consolation in your shallow needs and deny it to other people in their deep needs? Do you hold onto physical riches? You think you love other people, but you spend on yourself luxuriously in a way that lets them starve and freeze? (Or, just as much, neglect their spiritual needs.) Are you really

wise? Don't lie to yourself.

19 You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But do you want to know, vain man, that faith apart from works is dead? 21 Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith worked with his works, and by works faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that by works, a man is justified, and not only by faith. 25 In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute also justified by works, in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way? 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead.

You think your faith will save you? It will, when it's full-grown. Is your faith full-grown?

3:1 Let not many of you be teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive heavier judgment. 2 For in many things we all stumble. If anyone doesn't stumble in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also. 3 Indeed, we put bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, and

we guide their whole body. 4 Behold, the ships also, though they are so big and are driven by fierce winds, are yet guided by a very small rudder, wherever the pilot desires. 5 So the tongue is also a little member, and boasts great things. See how a small fire can spread to a large forest! 6 And the tongue is a fire. The world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire by Gehenna. 7 For every kind of animal, bird, creeping thing, and sea creature, is tamed, and has been tamed by mankind; 8 but nobody can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the image of God. 10 Out of the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring send out from the same opening fresh and bitter water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, yield olives, or a vine figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh water.

Not only does the tongue deceive us, by all our pronouncements to ourselves, and deceive others, by our pronouncements to other people, keeping us from seeing our need for wisdom, and flattering our hearts with consolation, but it also judges other people, condemns and curses other people. (Lest you be tempted to condemn some-

one else for having “faith” without deeds, for instance.)

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good conduct that his deeds are done in gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast and don't lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition are, there is confusion and every evil deed. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Are you wise yet? Are you still judging other people? Are you talking like you're wise, but you're not? If you want to really pass on God's word, you have to make peace with others, so that in peace they can receive it.

4:1 Where do wars and fightings among you come from? Don't they come from your pleasures that war in your members? 2 You lust, and don't have. You murder and covet, and can't obtain. You fight and make war. You don't have, because you don't ask. 3 You ask, and don't receive, because you ask with

wrong motives, so that you may spend it for your pleasures.

Consolation addiction. Don't forget.

4 You adulterers and adulteresses, don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who lives in us yearns jealously"? 6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Be subject therefore to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament, mourn, and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Your heart is in love with so many things that aren't God. Perhaps you can love some things other than God, but you have to love God the most. The devil tempts you with loves other than the love of God. He can't tempt you if you only love God. And he can't tempt you if those loves do not rule over you, if they are not addictions. So put to death your addictive nature. The only addiction, the only love that should

rule over you, is the love of God, not even the love of other people. So, as part of your detoxification, deprive yourself of consolation, or when deprivation comes, welcome it with joy.

11 Don't speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. 12 Only one is the lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge another?

The law says, "Have mercy and you will be shown mercy." Don't set yourself up as a judge. Your tongue will tell you "So and so has a problem with adultery. They are ruled by loves other than the love of God." Don't listen to that deceitful speech. If you judge, you set yourself up as God. You are guilty of the same thing. Take all the harsh words of James and apply them to yourself. As in Mark 9, let the purifying fire of Gehenna salt you, and hold onto that salt, so that you live in peace with others. Don't fool yourself by being harsh with others. Which is more a problem for your consolation-addiction? Righteous anger toward yourself, or righteous anger toward others? (But better, if you can, to lose your sins without anger.)

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow let's go into this city, and spend a year there, trade, and make a

profit.” 14 Whereas you don’t know what your life will be like tomorrow. For what is your life? For you are a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. 15 For you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will both live, and do this or that.” 16 But now you glory in your boasting. All such boasting is evil. 17 To him therefore who knows to do good, and doesn’t do it, to him it is sin. 5:1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming on you. 2 Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be for a testimony against you, and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up your treasure in the last days. 4 Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you have kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of those who reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Armies. 5 You have lived delicately on the earth, and taken your pleasure. You have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous one. He doesn’t resist you.

To some extent, you might divide the world into those who prefer judgmentalism and those who prefer wealth. The wealthy do not escape just for not being very judgmental, any less than the judgmental escape for being less wealthy. Judg-

mentalism is a great sin, but so is being wealthy, and anyway, they're just different kinds of consolation-addiction, and you do yourself no good by preferring one over the other. You rich get caught up in your earthly pursuits, forgetting that your brothers and sisters are in need. You condemn them to annihilation -- do you really have the faith to completely believe that they'll be resurrected? Part of you condemns them to death and doesn't care at all, is perfectly okay with their suffering and destruction. You think your life belongs to you, but it really belongs to God. Your love of wealth will burn you up in the next life -- a purifying fire which, if you resolve to love God, will leave you naked enough to be clothed with righteousness. But while you can fail to feel guilty now, thinking of the future guilt as just "some guilt", when it falls due, you will have to feel it and really know yourself as a murderer. But you want to pretend otherwise, using your tongue to convince yourself that this life matters above all, or alone. You nourish your heart with consoling flatteries on the day of slaughter (and today is a day of slaughter, and the sheep being sacrificed by us are the suffering of the earth).

7 Be patient therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receives the early and late rain. 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Don't grumble, brothers, against one another,

so that you won't be judged. Behold, the judge stands at the door. 10 Take, brothers, for an example of suffering and of perseverance, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we call them blessed who endured. You have heard of the perseverance of Job, and have seen the Lord in the outcome, and how the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. 12 But above all things, my brothers, don't swear— not by heaven, or by the earth, or by any other oath; but let your "yes" be "yes", and your "no", "no"; so that you don't fall into hypocrisy.

You might be tempted to judge the rich harshly. But you are not the judge. Are you wise?

Be patient. Wait for the judge. Don't deceive yourself or other people with words.

13 Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praises. 14 Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the assembly, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, 15 and the prayer of faith will heal him who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess your offenses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The insistent prayer of a righteous person is powerfully effec-

tive. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it didn't rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 He prayed again, and the sky gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

So, how do we get through this life? Pray, sing praises. When you feel good, devote that feeling to the praise of God. When you are sick, hope in the coming resurrection bought for all by Jesus' death, and God will surely provide. He won't necessarily give you any other consolation in response to physical sickness. Hope in that, not in this world. God will forgive you, and that's what's really important. Pray for each other, say what's wrong with you, personally, use your tongue well. Pray for righteousness and the return of Jesus, the revelation made flesh, and you will be satisfied. (3.5 years has apocalyptic significance.)

19 Brothers, if any among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Wealth isn't worth being addicted to. Judging is wrong. With both of those in mind, turn people from the path to the final destruction, to the path to wisdom.

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The thing to realize about James is that *you* are the person in need and *you* are the judgmental person, and *you* are the wealthy person and *you* are addicted to consolation. So become wise. Don't stop praying for wisdom. Don't judge your brothers and sisters. Ever. (You're not wise enough to stop judging yet. Don't stop praying for wisdom.) Be generous, sharing your well-being with others in need. Although you need some consolation to keep going, to keep doing what is good, don't be luxurious toward yourself or stingy toward God and those he puts before you to help. Ever. (You're not wise enough to be able to not be luxurious or stingy, nor wise enough to be generous, not yet. Don't stop praying for wisdom.)

[Do you understand what you have read? You do not really understand unless you change your life.]

LOVELESSNESS

Lovelessness is all the addictions that take the place of love in your being. It is stupid -- deaf, dumb, blind, insensible. It has no aims. Or if it can be said to have an aim, it is simply to exist and keep on existing. It is powerful, but it is not truly alive.

Speaking in a biological way, it is a virus. It is an empty tendency. Who would pledge allegiance to such a thing?

Yet everything you do furthers something, in the end. You serve God, or you serve something else. Maybe you serve the Invisible Hand, or Evolution. In the end, when you put yourself on the throne, you are the puppet of lovelessness.

WHAT IS LOVE?

The book of James contains a sort of call-and-response pattern, laying out moral precepts and then urging that you not judge. When your eyes are opened to sin, you'll see it too fresh in other people. In a similar fashion, I offer a chapter in response to my interpretation of the book of James.

It's important to know what love is, because God tells us that he is love. The assertion "God is love" is in the Bible, in 1 John.

Is love a fight against evil, the reduction or remediation of injury or slavery? Is it bringing about a good state of affairs in others' lives? Yes. Doing good works to other people and making them better off is love. Don't forget that. This is the emphasis of my interpretation of James. But that is incomplete. I have learned, with pain and turbulence, that there is more to love. Or, I have been reminded. Here, I quote Paul, who offers another view of love:

If I speak with the languages of men and of angels, but don't have love, I have become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but don't have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my goods to

feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but don't have love, it profits me nothing.

Love is patient and is kind; love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag, is not proud, doesn't behave itself inappropriately, doesn't seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil; doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will be done away with. Where there are various languages, they will cease. Where there is knowledge, it will be done away with. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is complete has come, then that which is partial will be done away with. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known. But now faith, hope, and love remain—these three. The greatest of these is love.

(1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

Consider:

“Love is patient”

You let people take their turn.

“Kind”

- You don't hurt people.
- "Does not envy"
You don't look on other people as enemies exactly because of how good they are, nor do you call their good nothing, or evil, so as not to be inferior.
- "Doesn't brag"
You avoid that aggressive act.
- "Is not proud"
You make room for other people, you don't put principles ahead of people.
- "Doesn't behave itself inappropriately"
You are sensitive to the expectations of others.
- "Doesn't seek its own way"
You yield your own will for the sake of others.
- "Is not provoked"
You don't become angry, you are not offended.
- "Takes no account of evil"
You don't see what's wrong in other people, it isn't important to you. You don't keep a list of wrongs done to you.
- "Doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth"
You take joy in love and truth, not in lovelessness and loveless things.
- "Bears all things"
You take on burdens for others.
- "Believes all things"
You take people at face value, rather than interposing suspicion.
- "Hopes all things"
You see the possibility of good in every-

one.

“Endures all things.”

You live through injury.

I believe James and Paul had the same view of love. But their writings had to emphasize different views.

James said “Your devotion to God, your faith, is false if you do not live with mercy and actually live out your principles of love in action. If you are rich, then share with the poor.”

We are representatives of the personality of God. If we don't care about other people's well-being, nor show them mercy, why would they adopt our faith that God loves them? Throughout much of the book, James' tone is rebuking. There is value in speaking against evil.

Paul said “You are full of zeal for God, for religious observance and exercising your spiritual gifts.” -- (He was talking to patently immature Christians, but his words apply to those who are less obviously immature as well, those who sort of know better.) -- “But you aren't living in harmony with each other. You are full of quarreling. In the end, your ambitions for bringing about good will be irrelevant. Love remains, though.” In the end, everything will be safe and everyone will be well-off. But if you are quarrelsome in Paradise, what can be done with you? What can be done *for* you, for that matter? So Paul wants to help us prepare for heaven.

It's hard. You want to fight evil. I want to. This means that you have to be in disharmony with evil. Some people are evil. There is evil in almost all of us, and evil in all of our pasts. But you have to be in harmony with people. You have to know how to be in harmony with people, while being in disharmony with the evil status quo. But the status quo includes the things that make life good for the people who do have good lives. The status quo includes some love. But you have to be willing and able to break things in order to fix things. But you have to reconcile yourself to yourself and to other people. But you can't be too generous with people, to the point that you aren't drawing them away from lovelessness and are instead, yourself, drawing toward their complacency or cruelty. So you have to wake people up from their complacency or cruelty. And pain wakes people up. But causing people pain too easily is cruelty. If you're going to hurt someone for good, you have to have a very pure heart. You have to know the cost of what you're inflicting on them -- you have to know how to not destroy people. But hurting people for good is what we need more of as a world, because too many of us are too blind of heart to simply be shown the way of love. But we are inadequate to the task of this beneficial judgment. But we have to do something -- the world remains broken and in a stupor. So we have to grow in love.

You might be attracted to the prophets. For instance, Amos:

Hate evil, love good,
and establish justice in the courts.

It may be that Yahweh, the God of
Armies, will be gracious to the remnant
of Joseph.
(Amos 5:15)

The zealous person wants this, the zealous atheist even wants the first part, the first sentence. The zealous atheist reading Amos, I think, will be cheering God on and reviling God at the same time. Cheering him on for attacking complacency and injustice, while reviling him for his wrathfulness. How can wrath and goodness coexist? But for the zealous person to bring about good in the world, it is necessary to learn how wrath and goodness coexist, because goodness is brought about by wrath. Awakening is brought through pain, maturity through deadlines, love is sometimes stern. But to be wrathful without love is cruelty. The greater the wrath -- and our world aches for an enormous wrath -- the greater the love that is needed, the more love must rule. The zealous person has to learn how to love, because he or she knows that cruelty is not acceptable, and apathy -- which adds up to cruelty in the end -- is also unacceptable. That is, the only spirit acceptable is love. Love is sacrificial, love is zealous and awakening, love is harmonious. Love tears down, but in the end, love always builds up. We are working for a 1 Corinthians 13 reality, that's our *telos*, our final image; by way of James (and Amos); to relate to the God we find in 1 John, which says "God is love"; to

relate to the love we find in 1 John (the loving God and the godly love -- God is love, God is love alive, love is the image of the living God).

God is exclusive, to some extent. But so is goodness. Can goodness be 100% inclusive? The zealous atheist can't believe this. Some things are evil. Yet goodness can't be 100% exclusive either. What good is goodness that doesn't include anyone? Can love shut everyone out?

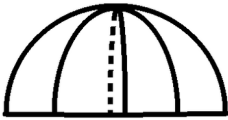
The zealous atheist, I think, can understand how God could be exclusive. But in the end, the zeal that attacks wealthy complacency, the zeal that opposes self-inflation and self-satisfaction and wickedness and deceit, will have to rest in peace, its part in the drama done, although the love that is perfected by the opposition of evil will remain. What must remain, in fact, is wealth, the riches of heaven.

But we are not yet in heaven, and are wrong to be satisfied with earth, as though it were heaven. Our artificial heavens are a lie that all is well. Not all is well.

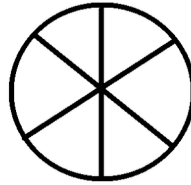
The concept of love isn't simple. The concept of love is a conversation. Love demands your all -- in that, it is exclusive -- and that includes your mind. It has to be something you keep thinking about. It demands your heart. You have to be genuine, so you have to give of your strength, you must act, and fight, and reconcile, and rest. You have to give your soul, the unity of your

person, and so you have to be at peace within yourself, and you have to love others, so you have to learn to be in harmony with other people.

Tent: side view



Tent: top view



When I was younger, I went camping. We pitched a dome-shaped tent with three poles. Each pole bent in an arc, to fit in the six cloth sockets on the outside of the bottom of the tent, arranged equally around the edge of the circle of the tent floor. To be pitched, the whole shell of the tent had to be held up in tension by the three poles, each end in its socket. The tent could only be advanced a little at a time, in a messy way, one step at a time, shapeless or half-shapeless in the meantime, but as each pole reinforced the other, it was eventually able to be set up as a completed tent, smooth and in shape. No one pole could be set up all at once, properly, without the support of the others. But we had to start somewhere, and put poles into a partial state of upbuilding in order to permit the others to take their next step in the process. So it is with love.

HOW DOES A PERSON KNOW GOD?

After all this, if you want to, how do you know God?

Here is the passage that says “God is love”:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves has been born of God, and knows God. He who doesn't love doesn't know God, for God is love. By this God's love was revealed in us, that God has sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, if God loved us in this way, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love has been perfected in us.

(1 John 4:7-12)

So love.

Perhaps you wish to be able to know God in an intellectual way, in a way that is accessible to your consciousness. Then you will be able to align your will with God's will, deliberately, by

your conscious choice. This may help you to accept God's forgiveness through Jesus' death and to open yourself to being helped by Jesus to enter God's rest, to be filled with the Holy Spirit. At some point, this knowledge is necessary, and is something you must seek, and wait for, because in order to know God in this way, God must reveal himself to you.

God will not speak to you openly until you prepare your being to receive him.

If God showed his face, would you be too much an enemy of him? Then he will hide, in hopes that you soften. Or would it give you too much of a power trip to be certain God exists? Then you must die to power and become alive to love before you can be allowed to not doubt.

Perhaps there is some other block. Perhaps it is not given to you to see God in this life. But the promise given by Jesus is that if you are pure in heart, you will see God.

Speaking more specifically, what can you do to prepare?

This may not be the only way, but here is where I would start: The kind of person ready to begin to see God with the eyes of "official" perception must be gentle and respectful.

Gentleness involves not forcing things. Don't force yourself. Don't force your perceptions, or the truth. Don't force gentleness itself. Let re-

ality speak to you with its own quiet voice, don't put vivid, obvious words in its mouth, or else you'll only be listening to yourself, reinforcing your own views, with all the limitations you impose on your own mind just by being yourself.

Respectfulness involves seeing that which has value in everything. There are a few impersonal things that have no value. But they are few. There are no persons who have nothing of value in them. When you respect, you perceive the other person as having a voice, something to which it is possible for you to listen and to learn from, with all the receptiveness of your heart and mind.

Gentleness and respect are "spirits". I have a spirit of gentleness and respect (when I do!). They are ways in which I emote toward other voices, ways in which my background assumptions about other voices are reorganized, ways in which my foreground thoughts are deliberately directed, a way in which all of my will is brought to peace, in agreement with itself and my deepest happiness.

These spirits of gentleness and respect are like a neighborhood in which all of my being resides (when it does!).

It is in this place that God appears.

God responds to our requests. He doesn't always respond immediately. Some requests he will never honor, because they are contrary to

love. However, he wants you to know him consciously, and will answer that request when it is to your benefit.

To some, God can first appear as Parent (as a certain kind of Father, or a certain kind of Mother); to others, as Creator; to others, as an unnameable Reality, or Force. All these are faces of love. The real nature of God is love. Follow deeper into love to know the reality of God.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Material added to the 2nd Edition.

INTRODUCTION

The following are instructions that I think are useful to those who take to heart what is written in the main text of the book. I don't intend these writings to be exhaustive. I think that it is best to begin, and it's better if you, the readers, have a beginning, rather than something finished. Then, you will want to complete what I say and you will have begun. Yet, I do want to provide a good beginning.

PATH-FINDING

SPIRITUALITY

How can you seek righteousness and closeness with God? What should your spirituality be?

In the book of 1 John, the model is to walk in the light. When you are in the light, you do not sin. You love your brothers and sisters, you do not hate them. Sometimes, you sin and the Holy Spirit leaves you. It's as though there's deep sin in you, which you hold all the time, and there's the flowering of that, when you have sinful thoughts and behaviors. The Holy Spirit protects you from the sinful thoughts and behaviors when you walk in the light. But if your heart is still bad in some way, it comes up and the Holy Spirit backs off. And then there's a lot more flowering of sin, although perhaps you can minimize the harm to other people and yourself through self-control.

In the book of James, the model is to acquire wisdom from God. You can try to make sense of life as a follower of Jesus on your own, and get a certain distance. God doesn't always sweep in and make decisions for you. To a large extent, you have to take on God's nature for yourself and try to live it out on your own. So you reach a point where you're desperate for wisdom. How can you love? You need to be taught something. Unfortunately, you're often, or even usu-

ally, double-minded, not really intending to pursue God. There's a degree of self-deception. So, sometimes you have to go so far as to break yourself, humble yourself, before God, and he will lift you up. And then you can receive new wisdom, both because you're ready to learn, and because you'll use your wisdom for God's purposes instead of your self-deceived ones.

In the book of Matthew we have the promise "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Here, we can imagine a spirituality of impossibility. We say "I want to become like Jesus." And then later, "I have decided to become like Jesus." And then later still, "I am desperate to become like Jesus." And after a time, "It is impossible to become like Jesus."

And yet we remember, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." We continue to hunger and thirst, to desire what is impossible for us to attain. There is a desert spirituality here. God retreats from us, and we continue to cry out and even demand. We are the "persistent widow" of Jesus' parable. We lose the ability to directly believe that God will fill us with righteousness. On many levels we despair of it, yet we go on. But we remember that it will happen. We can't imagine how, we can't even trace out, in our minds, God's hand potentially working for us, but we keep our minds set on that goal, of being like Jesus. And then when God brings us closer, we have great joy.

In the book of Romans, we are told to “put on Christ”. Here, we can imagine a spirituality of identity. We can say to ourselves, “I am Jesus” -- but with some caution, with some nuance. But... “I am Jesus”. I (myself) am still James Banks, but... I am an anointed one, and the pattern for my life is Jesus. I am playing the role of Jesus in the play of life. Could this be a fake thing? Could I still have sin deep within my heart? Yes. And this is a danger of any of the more positive spiritualities (this, and that of 1 John, for instance), that we get disconnected from the reality that is that we haven’t made it yet, and that though we are becoming more and more trustworthy, we could still betray ourselves, our fellow people, and God.

In the book of John, Jesus says that those who were doing the Father’s will would recognize him. Seeing God is powerful. To really see something is to be able to respond truly, properly. You can see pain and joy, dark and light, evil and beauty, and if you see properly, you will turn what you see into love.

And in the book of John, Jesus says “Come and see”. We follow a little, and see with our own eyes what Jesus has led us into. There’s a spirituality of life. Life is not God, but God speaks powerfully through life. As we live life, make choices, and are exposed to events that are beyond our control, and find ourselves in some kind of flow, headed down some kind of path, we intuit, we “live our way into” the unspoken, always-growing conviction of our destination,

which is the final harmony. This “pathness” is both a consolation and a reassurance, as well as a driving energy toward spiritual growth.

And if I think of another spirituality, or come across it, I will try to add it before I release this edition, but for now I will conclude with the thought of, “What is the spirituality of spiritualities?” How do we select a spirituality?

In the book of Matthew, we have the greatest commands: love God with all aspects of your being, and love your neighbor as yourself. So, we should love more, as we have not made it yet. And we should sin less, as we have not made it yet. Sin less, love more. Does your spirituality cause these movements in you, of sinning less and loving more? Then trust it. But trust it provisionally, “for now”. There may come a time to trust another one.

We also have in Matthew the “Great Commission”: Go make disciples, people baptized into Christ, being taught to obey everything he commands. It’s important to make disciples -- but are you a disciple? What does it mean to be a disciple, if not someone who is being made into his or her master? Perhaps in some ways we will have to, and want to, be ourselves. But as with the spirituality of identity, we seek to relive the life of Jesus. Ask yourself if your life path, your spirituality, the way you walk in life, is aimed at, will cause you to arrive at, Jesus, being Jesus (along with whatever “you-ness” is inherent in your particular life situation). Aim

to actually get there, because someday you'll have to, just as everyone will who eventually ends up in the final harmony. Read the Gospels to understand who Jesus was, what his character and his personality were. Whatever you can take from his life path and inner nature, take, make your standard, and use that standard to evaluate the way in which you walk.

ECONOMIC SIN

One of the implications of the book of James (and also 1 John) is that inaction with regard to other people's material needs is sin. It's either murder or akin to murder. You put your own needs above those of other people, and they die.

The Christian may do this with some sense that other people are going to die and go to heaven so it will work out in the end. However, most Christians do not have perfect faith in the truth of the Bible, otherwise, they wouldn't sin. Most Christians are double-minded in the sense that deep down, they're half-atheist, half-believer. They are, we are, double-hearted, in the sense that deep down, we're half-callous, half-loving. When the callous heart-half overlaps the atheist mind-half, the Christian believes and assumes, deep inside, that other people suffer and die, will never experience the eternal rest that in some sense makes this life's traumas irrelevant and thus in some sense acceptable.

People live lives of stress and desperation at all or almost all income levels. Life is lived in the survival mode much of the time, even by those who live at a higher standard of living than many other people on earth. Perhaps most people are good at heart, but are wrapped up in an evil system. Perhaps there is far less economic sin than I once thought there was.

Nevertheless, the heart is deceitful. The person

who “barely survives” in their heart has some time to be wasteful and selfish. If the thought of economic sin does not help you love more and sin less, then forget about it. Assume that you are one of the survivors of the earth. But if your conscience or your need to interface with painful reality bothers you, calls to you, then listen to it. How can you do better? How can you love?

We live in the modes of survival, healing, and flourishing (and perhaps some others, but these three account for most of the picture). When you are surviving and healing, who can speak against you? There’s no law against that. How can you do anyone any good if you are dead or broken in every respect? But the process of surviving and healing has a momentum toward flourishing. Then, when you are in flourishing, you are responsible, have a sudden problem, the possibility of waste.

In what ways do you flourish? Do you flourish for flourishing’s sake? Do you flourish in order to heal others, or help them survive? These are the main options that I see.

I try to apply this test to myself. I try to remember evil. There are people suffering right now, in agony. There are people in a state of hard-heartedness toward the voice of love, and that hard-heartedness is its own awful reality. Are my thoughts, attitudes, behaviors in keeping with those people immersed in evil? I dishonor them with mirth (although not so much with

joy), with cruelty, disrespect (of anyone), with boastfulness in what I do. Am I using too many words? Am I building up culture with my writing instead of love?

Often things don't seem necessary when looked at in a different light. To repent of economic sin may involve more a willingness to see things differently than to make a sacrifice, make your own life harder. At the root, we may not be so much murderers by our economic sin, but rather lovers of the wrong things, or people who have substituted automatic desiring for love. And yet, a "love" of the wrong thing could be the motive of murder. Do murderers look at their victims as human beings? Or do they look at them as obstacles?

When I was young, I think about 10 or 11, I had two pet mice. They escaped from the cage repeatedly, so finally, I put them in the shower stall in my bathroom (in those days, I didn't take showers). The shower stall was tall and smooth and had a door that closed securely, so the mice stayed in. And I forgot about them. Eventually, my mother opened the stall, and we found one of them eating the flesh of the other to survive.

That's who we are. I never meant to kill my mice. I just couldn't deal with them, so I put them somewhere I could forget about them, I went on being "good old me" (that is, in my estimation, in my background attitudes, "a basically good person"), and yet I didn't love them, and

they starved, and killed each other. This is the dreadfulness of flourishing. We turn from being the mice in the story to being the pet owners.

In the long run, who is better off, the “mice” or the “owners”? Those given talents are judged on their use of their talents. If we misuse our talents, we have to bear the responsibility for what we could have done. We’ll have to see ourselves as sinners some day. But if we are humbled now, we can begin to become wise now, and have less to regret. So I will call you a murderer, or so coldhearted that you kill, but my intention is that you be happier with yourself in the end. And, so that the people you help after your repentance are spared some of their agony.

And I am in this process of repenting of economic sin as well. I need encouragement (this is a significant part of why I seek readers).

LOVING MORE ANYWAY

What if there were no such thing as the concept of sin? What if we just enjoyed other people's spiritual and physical health and were grieved at their spiritual and physical oppression, and therefore responded to them and their needs? There are moments in which we are so beautiful that we don't need any kind of law.

I think this is the best approach, rather than gritting our teeth and pushing principles on ourselves. The Law is brutal and kills. You hope it kills the right things. But Life gives you strength and responsiveness to the world.

Perhaps we would like to wait until we "really love" in order to act. But love works in desolation as well as consolation. Pure love requires a time of desolation. Lifeless love may be the purest. There's always going to be some "anyway" in living out love, something a bit like defiance. You love even though you are insensitive to Law -- you love anyway. You love even though you don't have any Life.

How do you live out love, with economic sin in view?

I only have the beginnings of what to say here. Partially this is because I am only so far along in my life. Partially this is a good thing because this way you are given an open book to fill, you can fill in the blanks, and go beyond me, having

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picked up some energy or momentum from me.

A first step is time management. You can try something like this:

If you have an overall flourishing life, do the following. Work to secure your survival. In your time off, add responsibilities that involve healing people or helping them survive. Also spend time educating yourself, in the direction of some sort of healing or survival work. If you're tired on a given day, spend less time educating yourself. There comes a time of night, perhaps, when you have to "waste time" in order to be able to fall asleep (but you're not wasting time, if that's necessary rest). If you're tired over the long run, reduce your responsibilities. With the method sketched here, you don't waste time, but you have the flexibility to avoid burnout.

Some people find themselves with heavy responsibilities because they are parents. Then, the issue isn't as much time management (because there isn't as much flexibility there) as it is, what are you teaching your children? If you can, think through what kind of values you're passing on to your children. Are they aimed at becoming Jesus?

Are you? If you are, your life will show that to them. And in fact, this is something for childless people to think about as well, because we do (or will) influence all kinds of people.

What about socializing? If you can, fit your so-

cializing into your work life. You can bond over working together. Perhaps you can meet up at a cafe to self-educate at the same time as your friends. There's nothing wrong with socializing, as long as it's socializing "so that", so that you move out to the rest of the world. Little groups of people can put up a "shower door" to the rest of the world. But little groups can form strong bonds which then can help the group or its members go out and heal others by the groups themselves flourishing.

If you are led by God to a certain extent, you will find yourself doing things you don't understand and can't rationalize. You'll find yourself investing time in people who appear to be uninterested in being a part of love's work. Or, if you don't have control over your own life, you will find yourself doing things you don't understand and can't rationalize. Or, you may not know the difference between the two, between being led by God and not having control of your own life. How should you evaluate those relationships that you find yourself a part of?

Judge by love. Are the people you're spending time with alive inside? Are they honest on an important level? Are they a good influence on you (or at least not a deadening influence)? Then, even though they may not be "heroes of altruism", they may be people worth spending time with, because who knows what good you will do in their life, or what good they will do in yours? You may be educated by them in the focused work you do, in ways you couldn't have

imagined. See them and you as having potential.

Yet there are other people who are dead ends for you, people who deaden you and end you. There's a lack of heart-honesty that is a warning sign.

I can't tell you the specifics of what kind of responsibilities to add, what kind of path of healing to pursue. Many professional skills can be turned toward healing or survival. Choosing a career can be hard, but you have the "fire under your feet" of your own survival, and so you tend to find some sort of job. In the case of your healing work, keep your urgency up by your growing understanding that other people suffer.

How should you feel? As mentioned above, there are some emotions and attitudes that fit the fact that people suffer horribly in the same "house" as you (not behind some "shower door"). There may come a time where you are devastated by the truth of your brokenness, the world's brokenness, and your contribution to the brokenness of the world. This can be a good thing, if it's about paying respects to the reality of the world. Devastation can rob you of your Life, can have a "life" of its own, and this does no one any good. But I think it best if you can have a devastation that you carry with you, which is the full measure of Law (which is what breaks you) and yet also the full measure of Life. Devastation is a situation, encompassing both Law and Life.

Law and Life are both good things together, to have nothing extra in you and yet to be overflowing with life. Devastation, in a good sense, leaves you quiet inside, without any of the false wholenesses put together by the desperation to survive and the pride of life and callousness and whatever else. When you are ruined, you love in ruins, and you love ruined people.

Even in Life, there's a good weariness in devastation. There's an impulsion to move forward, to work diligently and thoroughly, but there's a weariness toward evil, a doneness.

Jesus is called the Man of Sorrows, and I think that it is best to follow in his footsteps. Both Life and Law are on the side of responsiveness to other people's suffering. Those of us who are well-fed will find ourselves feeling joy or "joy" (we can't always tell the difference). We should be humbled to feel that joy, feel a sense of quietness, something like dread, but not as obvious or strong, a whisper conveying what dread would say, because our apparent joy is a sign of our flourishing, and flourishing-for-flourishing's-sake (when there's healing to be done) is a seductive and regrettable evil. Better to feel sorrow, in Life and Law together, and yet to keep working, not eaten away by out-of-control sorrow and responsibility.

GIVING UP

If you take on a point of view that is not popular, if you take on a system, a cultural norm (such as economic sin), then you will certainly have times where you want to give up. Oh the sweet relief of keeping silent about your beliefs! And then after that the sweet relief of believing what everyone else does!

Perhaps there will come a day when overcoming all your sins is as popular as mainstream Christianity (or secular humanism). Certainly if the New Wine System is true, there will come such a time. But that day may be far off. In the meantime, you will have to try to keep yourself going, despite isolation and negative reinforcement.

If your will is strong, you can hold out. Perhaps your will will be strengthened by your trial, or by the occasion of your trial. But then, even your will will have trouble persevering if your mind doubts. You will think of all kinds of reasons to believe or live differently when you aren't getting the approval of other people. If things go well, we tend not to doubt our basic understanding of things. It's when we have some pressure or drive to doubt that we seek out the other point of view, and find the reasons to doubt that apparently were there all along. If believing can be wishful, so can doubting.

There can even be a state in which doubting and

believing alike are not options, a state of inability to hold a position. You may become distant from your own beliefs, your own drives and pursuits. The monks called something like this *acedia*. You don't care, and you even don't care that you don't care. In fact, something like this process of *acedia* itself is widespread in our culture. Those who were idealistic when young "shut the shower door" because of, or through, *acedia* when older. My will is strong, and my beliefs are growing stronger, but *acedia* (or nihilism) sets in, and so does weariness.

The power of little groups of people helps here. What a power we have as humans to shape our own reality, to fill our own horizons! It's a power that leads to disconnection from the outside world. But it's also a power such that we have to surround ourselves with encouraging people. If the world is against you, at least you have each other. You lose on one axis, and yet by sharing your losing with your fellow, you gain on the axis of solidarity. If you are weary, you can hand your work to your friend, and when your friend is under attack, you can protect your friend.

TALKING TO OTHERS

“You’ll never measure up.” You could say that outright. Or, you could say “You don’t measure up.” or add-or-imply a “yet”.

“You don’t measure up, yet,” you say.

When your listener is strong and healthy, they will say “OK” and perhaps work harder or learn something. But as they become weary, they begin to lose hope in their own ability to measure up, and so “You don’t measure up” turns into “You will never measure up.” The message is not in the words, but in the effect of the words as processed by the listener.

This is a challenge. The world needs to have Law brought to it. But if a person doesn’t have enough Life to process the words of Law, they turn from purifying words to destroying words. It isn’t even as though, in many cases, they purify to the point of destroying. The listener can look ahead a few moves, and sees destruction rather than purification (whether this is true or not), and closes off the voice, finds some mechanism to discount it. Perhaps they hear in you something disgusting, or find you to be a horror. Suddenly you become prideful in their eyes, or stupid; self-satisfied, or unstable.

The Law is easily communicated in words. But Life is not. This very book is a book of Law, and I don’t know that it’s well-suited to all peo-

ple who might read it. Philosophers are well-experienced in handling (and bracketing) Law. I have tried to market this book as “offensive”³ in order to select for my readers at least the people who think they have Life, enough to confront what’s in it. Whether “Life” or Life, people in the mode of strength, secure in themselves, are the ones who can take on an intense Law. I dove into an intense reality, not realizing how alienating intensity can be.

³ This was true when I initially released the second edition. As of 2020, I don’t feel that this book is as purely “difficult Law” without providing its own Life. I don’t feel that it is necessary to market this book as offensive. But I feared that some people would get caught up in the Law of it, and maybe some people will. I think this book is safe if you pay attention to what it says.

ENMITY

Who is our real enemy?

We might also ask, who are our real friends?

We go to hell, not for sin, nor for love of sin, but because we fail to love God enough to seek him and be made perfect by him. Our enemies might not be sinful, nor (apparently) love sin, but yet fail to love God to the point of cleansing.

But are people our real enemies? Or is our real enemy something beyond people? Perhaps Satan. Is Satan the ultimate evil reality? Behind Satan, there is something. "Lies" we might call them. A "reality" made up of lies. False images of God and of the good. Power for its own sake. Wealth for its own sake. We learn to taste which things are empty.

Do you remember Berkeleianism? Or perhaps, out of caution, I should call my understanding of it "quasi-Berkeleianism". This is the belief that fundamentally, reality is made up of personal beings, and that all else we think we perceive is a virtual reality, made up of communications by personal beings. So there are personal beings, in relationship. Just as life is an expression of God, often but not always, relationships are an instance of love, often but not always. Berkeleianism, as a lens, biases our minds toward seeing persons and love as fundamental. And all else is

speech, stories, made up things. And the things that speak against persons and their love are destructive stories. The things that claim that love is not the fundamental reality are lies.

Lies can be true, but only in our minds. Virtual reality is true, but only in our minds. We respond to the lies as if they are true. Our inner reality responds. But we are living in a place that does not exist. So Satan, the father of lies, creates just as God creates. But he only creates in our minds. And we have the power to create in our minds, and with a measure of fear and trembling, we flourish this as an expression of love. Our imaginings and discourses are intended to correspond to reality. Or, they are not. We need to grow in wisdom and understanding of God in order to discern our intentions and effect.

So, in a debate, is it the other person who is our enemy, or is it the lies they may believe? Is it perhaps the lies that we believe? What about the lies that we both believe, which our debate does not directly address, but which underlie the very act of debating? What about the lies that neither of us believe, and then also the lie that we need to debate over our differences, when our similarities are more significant?

Lies can take the form of “realities”. The Invisible Hand is a “reality” which crushes pitilessly, mindlessly, stupidly. Similarly with Evolution. Similarly with Progress. These “realities” are tendencies. There are some other tendencies

which are our enemies, such as the tendency to crave to flourish and to fear death (which together lead to overflourishing and desperate self-protection -- we flourish to outrun death by a “healthy margin”, which leads to the overconsumption of finite resources). This is the “lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes” -- and the “pride of life” is worse: the tendencies toward self-satisfaction and complacency, the assumption of invincibility, safety, completeness, beauty, and lovingness, when in fact your heart is full of infectedness and death.

Our battle is not with flesh and blood, but with tendencies, and cultural viruses. In the end, it is with the human heart and soul when they are whole with evil, not, in itself, the human flesh when it sins outwardly. It is only with people when those people have irrevocably identified themselves with the dead and growthless self (and our eyes can’t discern this certainly, we must not close the door on them), and in all other cases, we discern the person who is separate from death, who could be, or is, divided and broken away from that false wholeness. When we most need to be enemies with ourselves (in self-satisfaction), we are not; but we can always be friends with ourselves, friends who hold ourselves to high standards, who warn ourselves away from false leavens.

Our real friends are those who help aim us and encourage us toward being Jesus.

YOUR WORK

It is important to be responsive to the whole world. It is necessary to keep one end of yourself open to the world in all it is. But the other end of yourself has to contact the world at some particular point. You need to have a specific thing that you do. The things that you actually do are always specific, whatever they may be.

You're looking to unravel the whole world, but you need to find a specific thread to pull. The thread will be something concrete. You'll think you understand it, but as you pull on it, it will draw you along into new thread, and overall into the process of pulling on the thread. You will be falling into the future, into a "beyond", along the path marked out by your pursuit. And this will give you an energy and an overflowing, to draw the world itself along toward a destination, marked off by the law of love that marks the boundaries of your path, but developing in ways that you, and it, cannot predict, according to your, and its, own life.

How can you find that thread to pull? Perhaps you already know what path you're on, what beyond you're falling forward into. You're already pulling on a thread. Is it "unraveling the whole world"? Can you see a connection to that? You have the power to shape your path, to some extent, to keep your gaze and focus on the whole world, and then for your individual path to nat-

usually be attracted toward its most world-unraveling form.

Perhaps you need to find a path. How can you see the world?

THE NEWS

You might find the answer, in part, from the news. If you listen to the news, you will be given pieces of information about the world. The news may not be telling you the important things about the world. Most likely it is not. You can trust the news in particular (when you can), but on the whole, don't rely on it to give you a picture of the world.

When you watch the news (listen, read, etc.), you need to be able to process it right. I listened to a radio program about agricultural practices. It talked about pesticide use and other dangers to farmworkers. I felt anger. Did I feel self-righteousness? No. I felt anger, and a mourning kind of sadness. And then the program ended. Now what? Now, I am writing this entry in this book.

Maybe I should do something direct for farmworkers. The program spoke about strawberries. Do I need to eat strawberries? No. Why should I torment someone in a field, so that I can have this delicacy? But I am afraid that I will forget, get caught up in everyday life. But I am hopeful. I will try to remember about strawberries. However, I can certainly work on this book.

In processing the news, you have some kind of rudder. It's as though the news is a "vector", with both energy and direction. With a sailing ship, you can convert any kind of wind into en-

ergy in a particular direction, with the skillful use of a rudder. (Some winds are more beneficial than others for going a particular direction.) We all hear things, and what we hear sets off a chain-reaction in our minds, which results in... something. Investigate that something, find out what it is. The something for me is that the energy I received about the farmworkers is directed into writing this book. This book is directed toward addressing various spiritual problems which, incidentally, contribute to solving (or helping to solve) farmworker problems. If I listened to all of the news about oppression, about farmworker oppression or whatever else, and made this book (and if this book is read by people, and influences their lives in a fruitful way), I'll be addressing each of the different kinds of oppression. So I work on this book.

So whatever the news is, let it drive your work. Or, refrain from listening.

Yet, I still need to acquire some thread to pull, some path to investigate. And the news can be helpful in that. Perhaps I have some affection for some group of people, or for some aspect of the natural world, which I awaken to by consuming the news. Perhaps I hear of some cause that speaks to me, of some organization addressing that cause, even of some specific person to seek out. Yet remember, the news leaves things out. If we all rely on the news to find things to do, we will have too many people devoted to what is "newsworthy" in our culture, and not enough devoted to what is not as newsworthy.

THE "ENCYCLOPEDIA"

What is the long-term, basic nature of the world? Capitalism is king. We use fossil fuels. People are somewhat selfless, but tend to be selfish. In democracies, party politics are king. These are a few simple, basic, long-term truths. (And there are other truths. To find them is a thread for you to pull.) They were true 50 years ago, and are highly likely to be true in 50 years. They operate around the world, affecting people who aren't looked at by the news media.

You can find these ideas through reading encyclopedias or through learning experiences resembling that. The news is built around narratives, while still containing facts. While there are narratives in the encyclopedia, it is more a field of interrelated facts.

How might this encyclopedic investigation go? Here is an example.

Because we use fossil fuels, we will eventually run out (fossil fuels by definition run out). How will we provide energy for ourselves? Agriculture is reliant on fossil fuels (and other non-renewable resources). How will we feed ourselves? At some point in the future, a great deal of misery will be caused by our lack of attention to this. Or, we will pay attention to it, preventing the misery. Or, we will prevent part of the misery.

I, personally, do not see myself working on this problem directly. But what if you do? What if you are excited by the prospect of finding new energy sources? Then you've found a thread to pull, if not to "unravel the world", then to keep the unravelled material from being lost to the elements.

THOSE WHOM YOU KNOW

The news is selective, and encyclopedias are selective. The underlying ideas of an encyclopedic approach are general, although they can lead to more specific applications. None of these means of finding how to address the world are perfect, in themselves.

An additional imperfect method is to listen to the people whom you know. Your friend has found her world-problem to address. She keeps up on the in-depth news about it. Additionally, she has her own personal problems. She can tell you the most interesting news from her personal “world-unravelling” work, and about the reality of living with her personal problems. She’s a window into another world. So, you can learn from her. She’ll tell you things, alert you to concerns and directions, that you wouldn’t have sought on your own. Her taste and method in thread-pulling is different than yours, and you can learn to emulate some of her ways, like an apprentice who learns by being around his or her master.

In some ways, this is the best way to find out about the world and how to address it. Unfortunately, you are limited to the friends you can come into contact with and form functional relationships with. You will need to make the world itself into something like a friend. By loving the whole world, you motivate yourself to seek relationships which help you to help the whole

world.

WORLD-FRIENDSHIP

There are different senses to the phrase “the world”. Here, I mean, “the planet Earth’s inhabitants as they form a system”.

This kind of world is what God loved when he gave his son. (There’s another kind. If you’re friends with it, you’re enemies with God. That’s not what I’m talking about.)

The encyclopedia, the news, and your or your friends’ personal observations of “the way things work” around you, will lead you to forming some concept of the world. The world is a vast multitude, a cloud, a system. Can you love a system? You can hate a system, so why not love it, care for it? Good engineers are like the good shepherds of a system. Can you love a cloud? It’s elusive, hard to think about or understand. But cloudy things have their own beauty. Some peoples’ minds can tolerate vagueness, can even thrive under it, or despite it. Can you love a multitude? Apparently, Jesus did. You can do what Jesus did.

A shepherd is someone who loves and guides a multitude. As you develop the traits of the original good shepherd, Jesus, it becomes your task to shepherd, to guide, to encourage, build up, protect, and even give your life for whatever flock is yours. But you are not working alone, you’re part of a multitude of shepherds, who are organizing themselves (formally or not) into a

mass that shepherds the whole world.

You love the whole world by loving your flock, and you love your flock by investing in yourself, to grow fruitfully into the life of Jesus. Your vision is to see the whole world and live for it, as Jesus did, yet Jesus worked on the whole world by working on a small part of it. The key is for your smaller work to be work “so that”, working on the individual so that the work has a momentum beyond, to the group; and on the group so that it has a momentum beyond to the world. Avoid overly static definitions of your mission. Seek a mission that is a path with some closure, some boundaries on the sides of it, yet with an opening to, or “toward”, saving the whole world, as you go further forward down it.

NOW WHAT?

Once you have a path, a thread, a form of work to pursue, what do you do?

It is now a source of responsibilities and a direction for your self-education. It may shape your work for hire or your socializing. It is your ministry. It is a “passionate hobby”. It has a potential to consume the sin in you. What once seemed necessary may not seem so in the light of your work. Many sins come from not having something excellent to focus on, something real.

Work as a form of love, and then love will fill you more and more, as you devote time. (Work may cease to be a form of love, and then it is time to seek a rest, or new work.)

PLACES

A place is like a mood, a place is where your heart stays for a time. Is there any place you should be at all times?

DEVASTATION AND JOY

In the Bible it says to “Rejoice in the LORD always”. Yet, Jesus is described as the “man of sorrows”. Certainly it is possible that he felt joy at different times throughout his life, but when his emotions are remarked on in the Gospels, they tend to be heavy-hearted: anger, grief, compassion, pity, sorrow.

In the book of James, you will recall that we are asked to “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various temptations”. What is this joy? Is it a feeling of pleasure and excitement? This is one meaning of joy. Is it a feeling of simple-hearted and wholesome pleasure and excitement? This is a more specific, and I think more trustworthy definition.

I think sometimes you really can approach a temptation with an attitude of “Excellent! A temptation! Now I can grow spiritually!” But I don’t know that this is what James was talking about.

James advises that we “Lament, mourn, and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the

sight of the Lord, and he will exalt you.” It seems that there is a joy that must be purged from us, at least temporarily. Or perhaps permanently -- there are joys built on a false foundation.

How can a joy have a solid foundation? In times past, the word “happiness” meant “To be in an objectively good state, to have good fortune.” “Unhappiness” meant “To have bad fortune.” But now, to be happy is to feel good. There is some feeling that naturally or rightly follows from a recognition of good fortune. And then there is the good fortune itself.

A well-founded joy is one in a state of “happiness”, the old meaning of happiness. It’s connected with reality. Unfortunately, the reality of our lives and our world is not all pleasant. It’s pleasant, and it’s unpleasant. In order to have true joy, to be connected to all the good realities, you have to be connected to all the bad realities, you have to have true devastation.

“Devastation” is a word that I give a specific meaning. First of all, it’s a state of being laid waste on the inside. It’s a state of being broken down. It’s a state of relaxation, no tension. There’s nothing to hold onto. It’s a state of honesty. It’s a state that recognizes the brokenness of the world, and the brokenness (the mistake-proneness and sinfulness) of me, and how my brokenness contributes to the world’s brokenness.

This devastation has an old-style happiness to it. Is there any misfortune in being devastated? No, it is good fortune to be in touch with reality. It is good fortune to be more able to see things as being problematic, and thus to be willing and able to help fix them, good fortune for the other people whom you will help, for the world as a whole.

Devastation is accomplished by repentance, the process of lamenting and “turning joy to gloom” and humbling yourself. In fact, devastation is something like remaining in repentance at all times, repentance carried forward in time. It’s an act of self-love. You are more truly yourself when you are in touch with reality. At the same time, the highest level of self-love is forgetfulness of the self, of having something beautiful fill your gaze, such as the beauty of other people, or a healed world.

Devastation may make you more prone to negative emotions. Or, I could call them heavy emotions. Yet, it brings peace. And Jesus was noted for his heavy emotions.

Joy (in the sense of simple-hearted, wholesome pleasure and excitement) has a great virtue, that it crowds out fear. The heavy emotions of devastation tend to crowd out this kind of joy, leaving a person vulnerable to fear. Note that Jesus felt fear and anxiety at at least (possibly only) one time in his life, in the Garden of Gethsemane. When we are put to a great test, we have Jesus as our example: we may be in anguish at

the thought of what is to come. Yet Jesus, in his strength, tended to favor the heavier emotions, as far as what stood out about him.

With enough strength, we do not need pleasure and excitement, and this gives us a great clarity and focus to address the world's problems. But, like Jesus, we have our limits, and joy can help us to get through our lives.

It is valuable to spread joy, because joy itself empowers people, frees them from darkness. Yet, we live in a society that favors joy so much (and consequently propagates a false joy so much) that we are overbalanced in that direction. I can't speak against two types of joy in any way: that in the beginning of the book of James ("Count it all joy when you face temptations" -- find objective good fortune in your trials and temptations) or that said to have motivated Jesus at the cross, from the book of Hebrews ("Jesus, for the joy set before him, endured the cross." -- presumably, the good fortune of us being saved.) But our cultural trend toward joy has left us underdeveloped in strength.

I said before that to have true joy, we have to open ourselves to reality, and that opens us to the dark aspects of reality. "In order to have true joy, to be connected to all the good realities, you have to be connected to all the bad realities." How could we possibly survive being connected to all the bad realities?

We don't really see everything, not in one mo-

ment. If you live in a world in which there is pain, there is a continuity between you and the person suffering. But if you live in a world where there is no pain, there is no continuity. You are not connected. You only see what comes up in front of you, in your life, or someone else's, or in your reflections on the world as a whole, as you are led into them. But even this might threaten to be too much.

Not everyone is born with a sense that they are strong, but we can find strength sometimes. Maybe the brokenness you acknowledge in devastation is that you are not able to really see whatever darkness is in the world, even which has come up in front of you. Then you are living in the same world in which there is pain. But there is a need for people who can see more of the darkness of the world without being overtaken by it, so it is desirable to try to find strength, or to discover how much is already in you.

Suffering, lack of trustworthiness, lack of harmony and the hardness of human hearts are temporary, so we must address them while we can. This is the precious opportunity we have, while stuck in this grievous life. We have a job (or many jobs) to perform, and this shapes our emotional response. What is the emotional response that works the best toward the final harmony, in the long run? This is what we should cultivate. God himself is not so self-satisfied by his infinitely beautiful creation that he is not deeply grieved by our finite sins. God is the one

whose feelings fully correspond to reality, as it is his task to take into account all creatures and the interweaving of their lives. The only being surely in hell right now (in the common meaning of hell as “a place of transcendent torment”) is God himself.

MOURNING

In devastation or out of it, we can mourn.

When people are angry, disgusted, or judgmental about something, there's invariably a reason to mourn. Mourning is an intentional act, like putting on black shoes and black shirt to go to a funeral and pay your respects. Mourning is a "paying of respects", an inherently respectful motion and behavior. Mourning draws me toward compassion. Whereas disgust and judgmentalism draw me toward hate, and anger can as well. Mourning is a practice by strong people to stay in touch with love.

WEARINESS

For obvious reasons, we tend to not like weariness. But weariness has a value to it. Devastated, mourning people have a weariness to them. They may have a normal amount of physical energy, but as much as they hate sin, they are deeply weary of its presence in the world. Conflicts between the brothers and sisters of the human race are something looked on with weariness. What we are weary of, we become done with. If we all wearied of sin, we would be ready to ask for God to deliver us of it.

This weariness is a decision your heart makes, rather than a fatigue imposed by forces foreign to who you are.

LOSTNESS, FOUNDNESS

Mourning is something done by you when you're "in control". Weeping is something done by you when you have "lost control". Devastation hits you hard, and you have "lost control", but then your control returns and perhaps the best you can do is to mourn. It may take great self-control to lose control or give up control, when in the house of foundness.

Foundness is the mode of "of course", and of having a house that doesn't get broken into, and of having answers, and a plan, and of self-control.

Lostness is the mode of speechlessness, and of having an open house (the pain and joy of it), and of seeking answers, and of having no plan, and of not having self-control.

A problem of foundness is complacency. Another is, when one has self-control, to present a false image of perfection to other people. To appear unbroken, to get some kind of image right (even if the image is of Christian humility!).

A problem of lostness is destructive behavior. Without self-control, without an inner wealth, your longings shine through, and your longings may well be covetous or dishonorably desperate.

The world says that maturity is foundness. But don't be deceived. A false maturity, identified

wholly with foundness, leads to lovelessness and self-satisfaction, a far more sure road to hell than anything lostness can produce. Yet, the goal of healing is often to bring foundness to the lost, and there are many more reinforcers for foundness than there are for lostness. And so the believer must fight and long to be lost, even in foundness, where the fight and longings are deleted or comfortably muted -- the believer must fight even that mist of "health" and push to be laid open to the sufferings of the world and to the possibility of devastation and of hungering and thirsting (for righteousness, the Kingdom of Heaven, for the completion of the path, for the inclusion of our brothers and sisters on that path).

PEACE

The only true peace is a peace for all people at once, for all time. Anything other than that is not true peace. But we have to partake in some local peace, in our own lives, to survive. With strength, we can take on the lack of peace of the world. But we are not always strong.

Except in the case of fearing God, fearlessness is trustworthy. A fearlessness that leads to complacency, and then self-satisfaction, to the point of wickedness and thus to hell, is not trustworthy. But the other fears are best to be set aside. Peace resolves these things.

Peace is a state of relationship between people. We tend to constitute our relationships based on the rewarding emotions that we get as we form them or renew them. We form friendships based on the pleasure we give each other. We form enmities based on the possibility of “cleansing the world” or acquiring some contested resource. Peace is another way to constitute a relationship. We can seek to be at rest with each other.

Peace and healing go together. In fact, peace simply is to be healed. When we’ve had a successful surgery and have recovered, we are at peace. When our relationships are healed, we are at peace.

If you have fight left in you, calm will seem boring. Peace is not calm, nor serenity. Peace is

rest, when you have been utterly weary. Peace is for the devastated, those worn out with effort or tears, being responsive to the world.

TRUST AND ANXIETY

Underneath it all, what is there? An abyss? Or the arms of love? Each of us exists with a mood on this deep level, either one of beginning and ending in love, or of being abandoned to what hates us or doesn't care.

There is a great foundness in having the basic trust that we begin and end in love, which permits a lostness on all other dimensions. Yet, there is even value in lacking this great foundness. God permits his children to be half-atheists, or even to have times of conscious agnosticism or doubt, because there is value in learning to set your teeth, walk into the wind, and persevere. There is value in terror and insecurity, if it teaches us to love, to empathize with and, better, to be in solidarity with, those who are terrified and insecure.

This foundness is a foundness in a being who is lostness. It is to be on a path that has a beyond. The beyond is wild and on one side of it there is the unknowable. We move into the unknowable on our near side of the beyond, and the beyond is a flow from our known place into the unknowable. The foundness that really is in love is not an ordinary foundness, but one which destroys formulas, because God destroys formulas. As long as we are actually trusting in God, we are safe in this foundness, because it is actually a lostness which it is safe to fall into.

Yet, it is possible to be presumptuous or callous. Instead of honestly and quietly facing our fears, seeing them as frightening, and still trusting in God, we can easily pretend that we are invincible by never really looking at the threats, and calling that invincible assumption and feeling “trust in God”.

To trust in God, you have to be close to God. If I were dying a slow and agonizing death, in order to trust God I’d have to be with God in every hour. If I were in a powerful spiritual storm, in order to trust God I’d have to trust God in every step I took.

This is a trustworthy foundness.

(There are other foundnesses that are not trustworthy, those which deny us life and close us off from greater living, and at the same time from giving our lives to other people.)

DEVASTATION AND POIGNANCY

I am laid waste. The world and I are broken. Yet I think a sinful thought, and by this I try to console myself with something cheap. How poignant. I'm trying to cheer myself up.

I am laid waste. I tried so hard to devastate the people around me, but now I am laid waste. It was as though I had the strength to tear down strength. I have one kind of strength, the ability to get through my day, but I lack the other kind, to tear down other people's strength.

There is peace in devastation. It is a trustworthy peace because it connects me with brokenness. I may be very active, in one sense, while devastated into lying on my back, in the other. I see everything fall away except for what it is I must do. I don't even see what I must do, although soon I will do something. I am not impressed by my ability to do. I see the world, broken, and myself, laid waste and broken, and I know I can do nothing. What will God do with this situation? While looking to God, and waiting for God, I see what it is that I must do, while I wait.

LIMITS OF TRUST

ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

It is possible to be in an abusive relationship. If you are in an abusive relationship with God, leave. True love will not abuse you. The real God will not abuse you, so seek love, leaving behind whatever it was that had you in thrall.

Sometimes, your body will tell you when you are in an abusive relationship, even when your mind can't figure out what's going on. You'll feel an overpowering feeling to leave.

You obviously got into whatever relationship you're in for some powerful reason. Perhaps you have benefited greatly from the abusive person. Perhaps you once loved them, and they once loved you. Perhaps they still do, in a way. It's hard to disentangle yourself. You may be a loyal person, or loyal to this particular person. "Love always hopes."

However, there are many people to love, on this planet, and not enough time. Does the abuser really need you? If you are destroyed on the inside, you'll have to spend a lot of time healing (and you should start as soon as possible), but in that time, you will be preoccupied with your own troubles, and to some extent, less able to help others with theirs. If you love the world, you have to back off of certain relationships,

which demand from you or elicit from you more devotion than they need. This may require you to find new relationships to draw yourself out and away from the old stuck place of your abusive relationship.

Some relationships are so abusive that it's physically dangerous to leave them. There are resources, beyond what this book can provide, for such situations.⁴

Relationships that threaten your well-being, and thus your ministry to others, require that you break off with the other person, not that you hate them or fail to eventually forgive them, but that you remove yourself from their influence.

⁴ For instance, in the US, the National Domestic Violence Hotline, thehotline.org or 1-800-799-7233. An Internet search can find other resources.

PATHS

The people you travel with help determine what path you go down in life. When you are bound in friendship with someone, your friendship has a path of its own, a life of its own. It develops in a way neither you nor your friend can entirely predict. You two have a loyalty to your shared life, a commitment to something beyond you.

Though neither of you can predict the future, each of you shapes the future of this path, sets up the boundaries of it. (Paths have sides as well as a forward direction into the beyond. Paths are particular paths and not other paths.) This sharing of life is a kind of trust that you engage with, with another person. You can even share it with a job, or some other open-ended pursuit.

You will end up going down whatever path you are on, and yet not all paths are trustworthy. Some end up going through the highlands, in honor and beauty. Some end up going through the strip malls and suburbs, in monotony and false pleasure. Some end up, in the end, in destruction itself. You can have some indication of where a path is headed, by observing its spirit, and by looking ahead to where it is aimed, what's on its far horizon.

You may need to abandon the path or a path that you are on, although this may cost you a relationship or the closeness and time investment

you have in a relationship.

NARRATIVES

Your life has an origin (your past, as it is relevant to who you are in the present), and a path (your next step, and each one after) and a destination (your final goal, your final life).

In your mind, you have “narratives”. Narratives are stories you tell about yourself. They imply an origin, a path, and even a destination. They are very much like paths. Some of them are trustworthy, and some are not.

Other people will push their narratives on you. There’s a kind of worldview that implies that some narratives are valid and others aren’t. We’re always pushing out our worldviews onto other people, often without meaning to, just in the course of believing what we do. And sometimes we even make explicit statements about other peoples’ narratives.

When someone else is spilling out their narrative assumptions or implications on you, evaluate it like you’d evaluate a path. Where does this lead in the end? If you believe what they believe about you, or believe about yourself what their worldview limits you to believe, who will you become? Will you become like Jesus? Or will you settle out at some other level?

DISTRUST

Distrust is a motion we engage in in order to improve the trust we do have. In the very process of limiting trust, we enact some form of distrust. Yet distrust itself can have destructive effects.

Have you ever been distrusted? Someone's distrust will hit you, and all of a sudden, you're shocked into a different narrative. If that narrative "takes", then you are on a different path. But that new path may be one that neither you nor the person who distrusted you will really benefit from in the long run.

Have you ever distrusted yourself? It's highly likely that you have. The very motion of opposing complacency in yourself is a form of self-distrust.

You go through life with a sense that you understand things, and that you're doing the right thing. Then something breaks in on you from some unreal place (you knew reality so completely before, so it seemed). And then you question everything. And perhaps you continue to question yourself, with the desire of avoiding the fate of being any less than the best person you can be in each moment. After all, the consequence of not being your best is that other people suffer. You bear a destructive leaven, or you directly hurt people, or you fail to help people.

Yet, anti-complacency can go too far. Your anti-complacency will cost you something. To open your own eyes to something costs you something, may make you weary of looking.

Further, you may lose your trust in yourself. You need a certain amount of trust in yourself in order to trust any of your perceptions or judgments. If you have doubted yourself too much, you'll be unable to believe anything fully, to trust anyone fully.

This weariness, and lack of self-trust, take life away from you, and you need life in order to grow. The purpose of anti-complacency is not to simply break you, or goad you, but that you grow, continue along the path. (If you goad a worn-out horse, will it go very far?)

A distrust that does not lead to growth in righteousness and love of others is not, itself, to be trusted. It's something poignant. You're trying to avoid the worst of evils, and you're using the best method you know. What you want is not to attempt to devastate yourself forever, but to be devastated, and then in the next moment, to do what is simply required, given the brokenness of the world, and at times, given the brokenness of yourself.

CYCLES

Humans are cyclical. Sometimes this can be a good thing. As we are cyclical, we wander, and as we wander, we discover new things. Cycles, like any force beyond our control, can help to unstick our complacency.

Sometimes, human cyclicalness is a bad thing. There's something wearying about cycles. A cyclical person is likely to be inconsistent, or find it difficult to maintain consistency.

You can tell, sometimes, that you've found a trustworthy place. But then it slips away. There is surely some benefit to losing your foundness. But there are different lostnesses and foundnesses. Perhaps there are scenarios where your whole life is of more benefit to other people because you're done with something, for instance some sin. Now, you can be lost in a forward direction, falling toward the unknown future along the narrow path, rather than falling to the side, crushing the delicate plants beyond the edge of the path.

At first, you will experience these trustworthy places seemingly at random. You may despair of seeing them again, even forget you experienced them. But as time goes on, you "bump into" them with greater frequency, and develop an expectation or a taste for them. You'll long for them, maybe even desperately. Or they will

come to you gently. If you want to stay there,
how can you do it?

I'm sure each trustworthy place has its own way
of staying in it or returning to it. Therefore you
will have to discover on your own, observing
yourself as you go in and out, thinking about the
nature of what you want, and what it consists
of.

SIN, REPENTANCE, SALVATION, SIN

This is the chief cycle of the Bible, and is something that occurs in each of our lives. We sin, we draw away from God. We are driven back, whether from some outward circumstance, some awakening rebuke, or our own recognition of the depths of our sin. We repent, we turn to God, we are close to him in our devastation. God lifts us up and we grow strong again. And in our strength, God disappears. Soon we are lost in sinfulness, without even the ability to return, it seems.

Can this cycle be broken? As long as it operates, we must sin. Does God like this cycle? Wouldn't God prefer that we remain in repentance and salvation at all times? And it seems that as we grow more mature, we spend more time in these states, and less time in the wandering and hardening states. It is as though we are building up our spiritual muscles to remain in the light. Or, it is as though our sins arise from within us in our time of salvation, eventually hardening us away from God, and then they come to a head and are surgically removed from us through repentance.

What if we kept ourselves open, to let the sin out at all times? This may be possible in devastation. What if in salvation, we kept ourselves as simple as possible, to not become burdened

with built-up emotions, desires, thoughts, and formulas? (There's a certain tension in these built-up things.) This may also be possible in devastation. In this way, devastation attempts to lengthen the time we spend close to God, remaining as much as possible out of overflourishing, complacency, and the false assumption that we are done with sin. Overflourishing, complacency and the false assumption that we are done with sin make it beneficial for us to openly sin, at some point necessary, though this grieves God and harms other people.

HEALTH, COMPLACENCY, ANTI- COMPLACENCY, SICKNESS, HEALTH

We find ourselves with reserves of health, and this health, being a form of wealth, is a temptation to complacency. When we are healthy for long enough, we develop a fear or a horror of sickness. To what lengths will we go to remain healthy? Perhaps we will stay away from people. It is necessary to stay away from some people. But some other people are painful and yet it is good to be with them. Loving health too much, with too much anxiety, narrows our lives, and leaves others in their sins and sufferings.

Any kind of wealth can narrow our world, by creating an invisible shield between us and those who suffer. It takes discipline to care about people outside our happy reality. Happiness says “the whole world is OK.” (Unhappiness tends to say “the whole world is messed-up.”)

And so we lay on ourselves the burden, the goading, of anti-complacency, but this wears us out, opens us up to darkness, and brings us down into sickness.

This sickness affects us until we get well. While we are sick, we may, at the very least, need to spend time apart from other people, or perhaps talk to some person who must bear some part of our burden. At the worst, this sickness can dis-

able us, drive us to desperate thoughts, or even produce certain sins, a lack of generosity toward other people in need.

And then we recover, and are in an uncomplacent health for a time.

Neither complacent health nor abject sickness are healthy for the community as a whole. Yet anti-complacency and recovery yield periods of temperate, beautiful weather, sometimes rough, sometimes smooth (like the seasons of fall and spring). Does God want us to go through this cycle? To the extent that it necessarily involves sin (through complacent health), no. And abject sickness is a powerful counterargument to anti-complacency, and can drive a person away from God.

Devastation attempts to resolve this cycle by simplifying us, so that we are close to both sickness and health at all times, at rest and at peace in our own brokenness. Perhaps in devastation we are more healthy than we are sick, but we are always close to sickness, and to sick people. Perhaps we have strength, physical strength. Then, in simplicity, we fall into doing what is called for next, to help heal the world.

PHYSICAL CYCLES

The previous two chapters concerned spiritual cycles. There are also physical cycles or moods. For instance, we are hungry, then we eat, we are full, then grow hungry again. These physical cycles can sometimes make the spiritual life irrelevant. You need to deal with the physical world to keep the cycles going. In that, they are a form of poverty or sickness, which prevent both our accountability for the sins of wealth and health, as well as our ability to bless or be blessed through them.

The physical world and the spiritual world are not entirely unrelated, but each has an undeniable reality. You may not need to eat as much as you think you do: this could be spiritual. However, you will need to eat something to keep the hunger cycle going (that is, to keep living). You may be able to satisfy all your physical needs with near-perfect regularity, but someday (luckier for you if it's sooner rather than later), you'll leap toward God, something you can't attain by your physical powers, though you can attain so much else.

***BELIEF, COMPLACENCY, DOUBT,
BELIEF***

Those who have never doubted their faith tend to be complacent, unless at the same time they do not sin.

There are different stories about the nature of reality: all is matter and energy; all is spirit; all is matter, energy, or spirit. What should you believe? Is reality fundamentally trustworthy, or not? After answering those questions, I ask you:

Do you really know that?

The question undermines both complacent atheism and complacent Christianity.

In truth, what we really know is very limited. We know what we've seen and we accept certain stories as true, which fit what we've seen. If we've seen God, then let us believe in him and follow him. Other people might not have. Then let them be in their unbelief. God will appear to all of us someday.

There is a kind of intellectual "built-up-ness" which powers much atheism and Christianity. In both faith confessions, this produces a fake-ness, longing to be broken down into some kind of brokenness, something like devastation or nihilism.

Devastation attempts to teach us to focus on the work we have to do, given the brokenness of the world and ourselves. In the simplicity of devastation, I do not try to know everything, I just try to know what I need to know in order to love. I don't try to know as much. I see God rather than building-up God.

The difference between devastation and nihilism (or perhaps, a major difference) is that in devastation there is hope, whereas in nihilism there is despair. Devastation is too broken-down not to hope. The hands that grasped tightly onto a judgment of "all is lost; I'll fall to pieces" were broken open, and can only lightly grip any judgment, always open to the possibility of revising, in light of good and bad news: learning more about reality.

Despair is a kind of mental self-offering, hypnotic and compelling. On one level, it is a comfort.

Complacency has a certain kinship with despair. They both have an "of course"-ness to them, in one case negative, in the other case, positive. They both blind you to what goes against your mood. They're both instances of turning off your connection to reality, and settling into what you already believe.

Here is a common movement. The Christian is broken out of his complacency by an atheist. The Christian passes into devastation and per-

haps through it into atheism, and then into
atheistic complacency. The Christian left Chris-
tianity to leave complacency, but has ended up a
complacent atheist.

Or an atheist is broken out of her despair by a
Christian. She then becomes, in a sense, devas-
tated, and then, perhaps, becomes a complacent
Christian.

DESPAIR AND SELF- SATISFACTION

When you despair, you give up. Whatever good that could have been done, you don't do.

When you despair, you are not yourself anymore.

If you are going to certainly die, will you despair, or will you remain true to yourself, and do what good you can do?

Despair and optimism have one thing in common: they are both out of touch with reality. This is not to say that reality is not, at times, powerfully dark, or at other times, powerfully light. But both despair and optimism are judgments that since things appear a certain way, we can disconnect ourselves from learning more and settle into a particular worldview.

Hope is more work than either despair or optimism. In this, despair is wishful thinking. Life is less comfortable than deadheartedness and in this, believing what kills your heart is wishful thinking.

THE FUTURE

Why would anyone despair? Someone may ask, equally, why would anyone *not* despair? There are plenty of reasons for both hope (optimism?) and despair.

It's difficult to evaluate statements about the future. So much can change. People, at best, can speak about their predictions. But predictions are guesses, based on partial knowledge of the present.

Because of this uncertainty, to the extent that there is uncertainty, we either a) believe what we want to believe or b) carry a burden of uncertainty or c) refrain from thinking at all about the future, focusing on what we do know or d) some combination or alternation of a, b, c.

I will, therefore, speak only in the simplest and surest terms.⁵

1. The US and Russia still have a lot of nuclear warheads. If tensions between those countries become sufficiently high, we could have a nuclear war. During the Cold War, we came close to killing ourselves with nuclear warheads on a few occasions. This could happen again. Would the whole world die out, or just part of it?

⁵ As of 2020, neither of these worry futurists very much. The basic approaches given to these issues can apply to other threats to the future.

Is there anything that can be done to avert this? In the short run, there appears to be nothing. If tensions rise too quickly or unexpectedly, that's that. If we start now, though, we can try to heal the relationship between Russia and the US. Is there any reason why two nations have to be suspicious of each other? But it is likely that any two will at some point, and these two have nuclear arsenals.

If nuclear war is a given, then what? How will we die?

2. We use non-renewable resources. They will run out some day. Our population is large and expanding rapidly. If we run out of resources, we won't be able to feed people and there will be wars over resources. We will have to learn to be sustainable, and have a smaller population. But we are not on that path right now.

Will there be time to change? Maybe. It would require a mobilization of research into sustainability, and a change in global culture so that people have fewer children, and consume less. It isn't certain how much time there is left. The uncertainty here is unfortunate.

One possibility is that there is no time and we will have to face starvation and war ourselves (I'm speaking to my contemporaries, reading this as early as 2016). Then, our response has to be, how best to live through calamity? We always react to what is given to us. How do we react?

Another possibility is that there is time, or that there's at least enough time to soften the catastrophe. In that case, we need to not despair and get to work.

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In either case, nuclear war or resource depletion, we have the brokenness of the world, and of us, and the brokenness of the future world, and now what do we do?

FUNDAMENTAL TRUST

In the end, reality is fundamentally trustworthy; or it is not. The universe is loving; or it is indifferent or evil. Everything will work out in the end (somehow, we don't see specifically how); or it will not.

How can we know if reality is fundamentally trustworthy or not? What if we had the voice of a God telling us all was well? Is there anything about that voice that proves that that God can take care of us? Maybe the voice speaks gasoline into our cars, food into our silos and serenity in our hearts, leading to world peace. Convincing, right? But some would not be convinced that that was ultimate reality speaking. It could be a very powerful entity which could yet be unseated by another. Like Zeus being unseated by the sky-god of some other planet. (Gods as super-powerful aliens.) Zeus was subject to the fates. Why would our God not be subject to chance or destiny as he was?

So we have to keep suspicion alive, it seems.

If reality is not fundamentally trustworthy, how is it that we come to know things? We have to be on the lookout for not being taught the truth by our attempts to perceive reality. Reality has no interest in revealing itself in a helpful way. We have to make very certain what we think we learn from reality, because error is everywhere.

We have to interrogate rather than simply seeing, before we will follow. This is what our most trustworthy method of coming to know things does, it checks and double-checks and assumes that the universe is not loving.

Using this method of interrogation, we interrogate ourselves. But should we do this? Are we impersonal beings? Can't we just ask ourselves questions, rather than applying to ourselves rigorous method and suspicion? This suspicion turns from a suspicion of logical or cognitive mistakenness, to suspicion of moral error, a cynicism. We (I am speaking of Christians and atheists alike) are often so, so very cynical about ourselves, so cruel to ourselves, and then, often, so callous about ourselves ("Yep. I'm the same as every one else. No hero or saint. Human nature.")

It might be necessary, or at least, fitting, to interrogate untrustworthy personal beings. They might be deceptive on purpose. But we may have been wrong about ourselves, in being so brutal with ourselves, and yet our mistrust of ourselves leads to us being less trustworthy (cruel, cynical, callous -- is this the path we want to go down?). And if our lack of self-trust is strong enough, we don't trust our own faculties when they report that God exists. We consider ourselves to be too prone to wishful thinking, too prone to self-deception. Perhaps we subscribe to the following:

The ontological proof of the non-existence

of God

1. God is that than which no greater being can be conceived.
2. It is possible for something to be too good to be true.
3. God is greater than that something, whatever it may be.
4. God is too good to be true.

One could substitute, for “God”, “the loving universe”⁶. Fundamental trust is the “back of the head” version of believing that God exists. (That is, someone like the God that I believe in, who is love, from whom we are made and to whom we return in the final harmony.) In the back of the head, in our basic guts, we don’t have many words or concepts. We begin to be speechless, or we are fully speechless. We assume things, and though it’s hard to see those assumptions, they speak perhaps the most strongly about what we really believe. They are what we take for granted.

Do our “guts” or “the backs of our heads” learn in the same way that our minds do? Do they

⁶ (Perhaps another helpful way to think about this is to go back to the beginning of the chapter and look at the sentence “Everything will work out in the end (somehow, we don’t see specifically how); or it will not.” How could it be that everything would work out, somehow? Some being would have to both want to do this and do this -- or would it be according to some kind of impersonal law? We tend to think such a thing could only be accomplished by a powerful mind with an abundance of physical power and good will toward us.)

know in the same way? There is certainly a connection between the mind and the back of the head and gut.

The back of the head sees with the same eyes as the conscious mind, but sees things quietly. We see things tacitly that we'd never allow ourselves to articulate in words. A lot of faith, in our age of suspicion, hides out in the tacit self, and yet it can still be powerful there. What is said by the believer is rebutted, out loud, and eventually, is rebutted in the believer's mind by the mind's representatives of "what atheists say", little puppets made by the believer's play-acting, chess-playing (looking-ahead) mind -- rebutted, if not truly refuted. And atheists, trained by their own sense of "what atheists say" in a similar way, often have this tacit faith, this tacit assumption that "God or the loving universe" exists, even though they could never articulate that faith to their conscious minds.

Is this faith irrational? It certainly does not follow from any form of physical evidence, and cannot. We can never prove that we are safe, nor that we inevitably will be safe. Zeus may be trumped by (some unspeakable alien god). In order to know fundamental trustworthiness, we have to know in a different way.

BREAKING IN

When we trust something, we tend to do so until something “breaks in on us”. Perhaps we trusted a friend, in our guts, taking her for granted (that is, her good will), until she betrayed us. We had no idea we trusted her until she betrayed us, although we trusted her the whole time, beginning ... when? ... We cannot say.

It is conceivable that over time, with enough failures-to-be-broken-in-on, we will reach a state of complete trust in the universe. But perhaps not. A habit of suspicion could prevent that trust from forming.

This breaking-in breaks complacency.

In a way, complete trust is a complacency, although the nature of that complacency could vary significantly. What do you trust in? You can trust in something living, or something dead. Something temporary, or something eternal. Something wild, or something under your control. Something statically-defined, or something that can only be described. Something living, or something dead; with a beyond, or with a false wholeness.

Heaven could be looked at as a favorable state of being, or a favorable state of becoming.

Would the loving universe want you to be free

from “breakings-in” if you were trusting in something that would lead to complacency? So we experience jarring and disheartening circumstances, we experience an untrustworthy face of the universe. Yet this is the most trustworthy thing the universe could present us, a mixture of untrustworthiness and trustworthiness until we trust it for what it really is.

Yet, if the way that we know things is in the normal way, that which interrogation uses, why wouldn't we be utterly confused? Why see the universe as ultimately loving and trustworthy, if it necessarily has to be untrustworthy in order to be trustworthy in the end? In order to know the universe as trustworthy, it would be necessary for a different kind of breaking-in.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND THE SOLIPSISMS

We live in a *public reality*. That is what I will call the worldview in which every atom is real, every person is real, each independent of the other, yet held together in the same space, everything “intelligible” or “experienceable” to all consciousnesses therein, everything potentially causally interrelated.

This is where we live, right? But some of us have *private realities*. For instance, the mentally ill person who can hear voices that no one else can. Are the voices unreal? Or is it that the mentally ill person really lives in a partially different reality? We tend to believe that private realities are illusions.

But I would like to present a family of solipsisms.

First of all, the *classical solipsism*. Everything is a figment of your imagination. The books you read are the product of your imagination, which is quite fertile -- your subconscious mind is powerful. You are the only being that exists.

For some reason, people tend not to believe in solipsism. There seems to be something wrong with it. But what is it, exactly? Can it be proved logically that it is not our YOUR reality?

Mostly, people say that “people just don’t believe it” and rest in that.

Perhaps part of the problem is that it denies that there are other people, and we find realities to be more satisfying if there are other people. Perhaps it is also unsatisfying because it implies a kind of godlikeness of us. If we (that is, you, the reader, who are the only being that exists) can be gods, then where do we get our *resistance* from? Nothing matters. A good reality should have some resistance in it, some deep surprise.

Next, I will present something that does not deviate from public reality at all, actually, but which considers public reality from the lens of human subjectivity. I will call it *quasi-solipsism*.

The I lives in a house. It has its mental possessions there. It’s a spacious house, very lived-in. Outside the house there are Yous who float around. Sometimes the I can see them through the I’s window. How interesting. Each You is its own I with its own house. Yet each one appears, so mobile, so small, such a small, strange house. But reality is as it is. Each You is housed.

The Yous form a cloud. Enough Yous and you really can’t keep track of them. This merges into a cloud of Them or They, way out there.

Yes, there is a public reality out there. But the I halfway lives in his own world, with his own TV and paintings and food and a comfortable

couch to sit on all the time. The I is the protagonist of his own narrative, everyone else is some sort of supporting character or antagonist.

Some find quasi-solipsism to be unsatisfying.

Now, I present *semi-solipsism*.

A story: It is my responsibility to save the world. There are other people in my world. We live out an intense drama. The world will likely end soon. It's 2016, Obama and Putin are in office, the price of gasoline is \$2.69 per gallon, etc.

And then I die. Or the world ends in nuclear fire and nuclear winter.

And I wake up in a new place, and I see the people I knew from my life. Each of my friends is there, as well as a few people whom I might consider estranged, or enemies or bad influences. Everyone's there, but they're dressed so strangely. I don't expect to see people dressed as, for instance, Vikings, or Ethiopians, or in the uniforms of outer-space navies. Each of them came from their own world that was ending. Ragnarok was occurring, for one of my friends.

Some of the women are really men and some of the men are now women. And as they talk, there is something I notice, something that I suppose was missing all along. Now I recognize it by experiencing it here: authenticity. There's an authenticity to what they say and who they

are. They've learned their lessons. I've learned my lessons. We're all done, and we can all see each other as we really are.

That's a myth of semi-solipsism.

The theory of semi-solipsism is that each of us has our own reality, our own past, present and future, earth, earth-history, future earth, physical universe. God speaks to me, and I diffract it through my own experience to create the physical universe my consciousness lives in. You speak to me, in word or in action, and that diffracts into the reality that I perceive. And I send out my energy, my intention, to you, and it gets diffracted on the way out, and gets diffracted on the way into your reality. And yet all the love that I send out of myself falls due at some point in your life, and all the hate, and all the callous indifference. And likewise with you to me. Perhaps the love and hate and callous indifference hit at different times in our potentially radically different timelines. But we all end up saying what we're going to say.

Every person exists as they really become who they are going to become, and works through the apparent story of their local, personal reality to make this happen, and God exists, orchestrating all of this. And we send love or hate or indifference to God, and God sends love to us.

Here are two more solipsisms:

1/4-solipsism: You and I are close, siblings.

We've grown up together and stay in close contact. We share the same local, personal reality, in the midst of a basically semi-solipsist ensemble of life realities. Nixon was president at just the same time and in just the same way to you and to me. *Apocalypse Now* has exactly the same script for you as for me, in fact, we saw it at the same time, literally the same time. Everyone we know appears the same to us.

3/4-solipsism: It's just you and God. Nobody else exists. You learn to relate to God and yourself through characters which appear before you. Someday you will meet God face to face, having progressed in your becoming, to the point of walking in his presence at all times.

These are the solipsisms that I've thought of. But maybe you can think of some more.

Public reality has a kind of closedness to it, and there is a kind of openness to the semi-solipsisms.

(Within the concept of the solipsisms there is the idea of metaphoricalness. What I see is not an illusion, but rather a metaphor. Perhaps my brain is in a particular state when I perceive some spiritual, supernatural reality. But perhaps my brain state then just is a metaphor for the breaking-in of that reality.)

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So, how do we figure out what worldview to

take? Public reality? Solipsism? A semi-solipsism?

I think we tend to just know: public reality. But what is this “just know”ing? Is it knowledge in the ordinary sense?

As hinted above, one of the unsatisfying features of classical solipsism is its lack of other real persons. But quasi-solipsism is a common interpretation of public reality by Is such as you and me. Public reality can be just as unsatisfying as solipsism. In fact, people sometimes use “solipsism” to describe what is essentially the quasi-solipsism of public reality life. Many of us know the force of alienation.

How can you *really* know that someone else exists? I suppose if you really knew someone, you would have to fully love them if they were lovable, and fully shun them if they were wicked. And they would have to be present to you (something largely out of your control), in some sort of compelling way.

To follow Martin Buber, are they “it”s to me, or are they “you”s? Do I treat you as a nature to be experienced or utilized by my will, or... are we simply together? (There’s a bit of speechlessness in what I’m talking about.) As long as we live in the mode, the gut, of causality, we see people as things to be utilized. And so how do we know that other people *really* exist, as people (as fellow subjects)?

And yet we do know that other people really exist. We “just know”. Buber pointed to moments in time in which the other is a you to us. There can be a breaking-in of the other into my life, a direct contact between you and me. I don’t explain how. But I know it has happened. Perhaps I notice it by its loss, as I return to the I-It reality.

Do other people feel pain? They grimace. But is it pain that they feel? Or are they just machines? It could be that I’m the only real person in this dreamworld. And yet I *know* that there are other minds, other consciousnesses. This is the foundation of my ethics. And I *know* that something buried in my ethics (if not the expression of ethical truth that I conceive of at the moment) is absolutely true, a nature that is inherently authentic, for my will to gladly trust. Here is the problem of other minds. I think we know many things (God, the reality of other people, and the nature of the world) through the same sort of communion: moments of breaking-in, or a resulting or after-the-fact ongoing reality of breaking in, the state of being broken-into, cousin-or-instance of devastation.

We “just know” according to basic knowledge, according to the “breaking-in” of something, the surprise or resistance of it.

I haven’t articulated how “breaking-in” basic knowledge works. At some level, there must be a contact with reality that can’t be explained, which is basic. I touch reality at some point, so

where I directly contact it, I just contact it. There's a beyond to this inexplicability, a contact with the purely unknown, and from this we get the deepest resistance and surprise -- and thus the deepest anti-complacency.

The ultimate and omnipresent "breaking-in" is that of any sensible or "intelligible" reality on us, the inescapable I-It world itself, that which atheism never disputes, the apparent reality of matter and energy -- exactly in that they are appearances, they make themselves appear to us, or are made to do so. Even in classical solipsism, this can't be disputed. We are not truly alone with ourselves. If an authentic breaking-in does occur there, it is possible in the other cases, and then it is simply a matter of experience whether it has for each of us or not.

This is how we (some of us) know that reality is fundamentally trustworthy.

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Could it be proved that reality is fundamentally untrustworthy? Is there a breaking-in that implies that? Possibly. Possibly every atheist who despairs in his or her atheism was broken-into by some dark reality that prevents belief in the fundamental trustworthiness of things. But what if reality is simply going to speak its trustworthy side to the atheist at some future point? Or perhaps reality is going to break-in-on the atheist, provide direct contact with it, so that the atheist can trust despite the apparent un-

trustworthiness. Of course, this remains to be shown -- to each atheist. But the atheist needs to be open to this possibility, to not despair, but keep his or her hands open to holding new evidence.

Agnosticism is the natural consequence of unchecked reason. Atheism is a step of postulation away from it. Atheists tend to postulate a public reality world of matter and energy, and then by increasing suspicion to the point that only that can be considered reliably believable, exclude all else. Yet, public reality itself relies on basic knowledge. If basic knowledge is admissible for public reality, then why not for the fundamental trustworthiness of reality? For love?

A CHOICE

We have before us a choice. It isn't easy, it's not like filling out an arithmetic worksheet. There isn't a series of formulas that we can use to find the answers. Rather, all of the things that break in on us destroy our formulas, turn us loose into formulalessness. And yet there is a path we can follow, one or the other, or some yet another path. We can't choose where we are going, because we don't know where any path really leads, once it goes over the horizon, but we can choose which path we take, and there's some provisional sense we have of what direction we're headed. At times, we can change paths. Our paths are bounded by laws and assumptions, and yet they permit us to fall forward into the future, without any ground under our feet.

Groundlessness is like jumping out of an airplane: abject terror or total exhilaration. (Perhaps a mix of both.) Yet we will survive the terror, the exhilaration, the jump itself, if we are in the universe of love.

Are we, or are we not? This is a question for you. There are consequences to our answer to that for how we treat other people. If we live in the universe of love, we are subject to love's discipline, and we will be broken out of our complacency (either now, with our cooperation, or later, with greater pain, without it) as we are shown how far we are from love, and goaded and drawn

along into actually arriving at it. If we live in the universe of love, and we do not know it, we may not learn that lesson as well, and that lesson of discipline shapes us and prunes us into more fruitful lovers.

There are certainly good deeds to be done by responsible people, but responsible people who settle for an overly-modest pursuit of love will leave many good deeds undone, will respond slowly, too reasonably, with overflourishing, as they do not go for broke, giving up their lives into love. And there are false images of love to which we sometimes give our lives, which make over-modesty seem worthwhile. And yet a thirst for love can find love -- but who will open their mouths to thirst for something they think they never can or never will find?

It is even possible for us to push ourselves away from love, and in that motion to create a momentum that may draw others with us, to will ourselves to not be in the universe of love and in some sense to be respected for our choice by being left to it -- some of us will end in destruction rather than the final harmony.

And we may not learn the lesson of hope (not of hope's fake kin "optimism" but devastated, uncomplacent hope), which holds its hands open for new evidence; and instead fall to pieces in despair. Out of that despair we fail to provide for others, even ourselves, to the extent that we can. Complacency leads to living a fake life, a life that doesn't bear fruit. There's something paral-

lel with despair, and certainly I can think of a complacency which uses despair as its hostage.

How do we process the evidence at hand?

This is our choice, and the consequence of this choice is how we affect the people who live in the world around us, near and far.

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You are worthy of suffering.

You are growing.

You help other people.

You are worthy of being relieved of suffering.

You are worthy of being helped.

You are strong enough to suffer.

You love the truth.

You survive.

You are capable.

You are worth suffering over, by yourself and by other people.

You are perceptive.

You are trustworthy, and growing in trustworthiness.

You have received enough to give.

You are loved.

APPENDIX

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As I wrote at the very beginning, if you want to respond to this book, my email address is banks@10v24.net. (My website is 10v24.net) There is more to this than what I have written. Because I am still learning and working, I want to start a conversation with you, if you are willing, and as I have time.