



### PART 1 – My Story – A Spiritual Journey “Ask-Seek-Knock”

**PREFACE:** The Christian God revealed in the Bible is profoundly relational. God seems to like people, especially those who seek Him out. The highest praise for those who sought and followed God are statements like “he walked with God,” or “he was a man after God’s own heart.” Jesus encourages His followers to pursue God, trusting His desire to be known. Notice the “ask-seek-knock” verses of Matthew 7:7-11 from the “**Amplified Bible**” translation – “Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking [reverently] and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps on asking receives; and he who keeps on seeking finds; and to him who keeps on knocking, the door will be opened.” Or what man is there of you, if his son asks him for a loaf of bread, will hand him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will hand him a serpent? If you then, [as corrupt] as you are, know how to give good and advantageous gifts to your children, how much more will your Father Who is in heaven [perfect as He is] give good and advantageous things to those who keep on asking Him!”

**Zondervan’s NIV Bible Commentary** explains the meaning of the “ask-seek-knock” verses in this way, “In three imperatives (“ask,” “seek,” “knock”) symmetrically repeated (in v.8) delivered in the present tense to stress the persistence and sincerity required, Jesus assures His followers that, far from demanding the impossible, He is providing the means for the otherwise impossible. Far too often Christians do not have the marks of richly textured discipleship because they do not *ask, seek, and knock* or they do so with selfish motives (James 4:2-3). Like a good human father, the heavenly Father seeks to teach His children courtesy, persistence, and diligence.” **The Bible consistently invites us to explore the reality God is, with the promise that He will provide the means we need to find what we seek. In other words, God is inviting people to know Him! Moreover, God is seeking us long before we finally incline our heart and mind to seek Him.**

The pictures above are a whimsical portrayal of two different explorers attempting to go beyond their ordinary physical limitations to connect with something beyond. It would seem these explorers know someone is out there, and the need to discover this someone beckons from outside our normal physical limitations. The idea of a “God” out there in the Supernatural plane, who is calling to people anchored in the natural plane, begs the question how could we ever connect? The answer is clear we could never find

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God unless He wanted to be found. So, presuming God wants to be found, would He have left a back door open? Some sort of passageway between the Supernatural and the natural realm we could discover? For me, the more I think about “ask-seek-knock” sequence the more curious I became. It made sense to me that if God is out there, I could never find Him on my own. First presumption, God would want to be found, and second presumption, He would have to reveal Himself. Exploring the ask-seek-knock sequence is something Jesus invites us into, but we get nowhere unless God wants to be found and reveals Himself.

The Bible has much to say about God’s Self-revelation to humanity, and of our human desire to explore. The “Penultimate” or second highest goal of exploration is of the “Physical World and Universe.” It’s clear many men and women seemed compelled to explore our physical reality. History has long documented humanity’s quest to discover all that can be known of the natural realm, and there are an amazing number of heroic individuals who have undertaken quests to understand and document this reality. However, the “Ultimate” or highest goal of exploration is the Supernatural realm. The rewards of the ultimate and penultimate searches are necessarily life changing; but the Supernatural quest promises not only to be informational, but to be fundamentally transformational. Not surprising, numerous passages in the Bible beckon humanity toward Spiritual exploration. Here are a few of my favorites:

### Psalm 19 from the Living Translation:

*The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship.  
Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known.  
They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies;  
yet their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to all the world.  
The sun lives in the heavens where God placed it.  
It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding.  
It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race.  
The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end.  
Nothing can hide from its heat. The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.  
The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.  
The commandments of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart.  
The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight to life.  
Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever.  
The laws of the LORD are true; each one is fair.  
They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold.  
They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb.  
They are a warning to those who hear them; there is great reward for those who obey them.  
How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults.  
Keep me from deliberate sins! Don’t let them control me.  
Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin.  
May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be pleasing to you,  
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

The first line (in italics) is captivating... “The heavens declare the glory of God.” King David is the writer of this song and offers this as a statement of fact. David sees the cosmos as a reflection of God’s perfection

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and an invitation to explore the reality God is, and it comes with the promise that we will find what we seek. In my estimation, seeking God is the ultimate goal worth exploring. In my own exploration, I have found there is a Creator God out there, and I agree with King David that Creation itself testifies of His existence. As we explore the natural realm, we discover order and interdependencies, of symbiotic relational communities. The natural realm is a system of interconnected, mutually dependent, and integrated realities of physics, biology and chemistry and so many other factors. Logic dictates that order begets order, and chaos begets chaos. Thus, a symbiotically interconnected and interdependent community points toward a purposeful Creator, it points toward an intelligent purposeful process, rather than a random and arbitrary natural process.

### **1Corinthians 2:9-16**

This is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.” But we know these things because God has revealed them to us by His Spirit, and His Spirit searches out everything and shows us even God’s deep secrets. No one can know what anyone else is really thinking except that person alone, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit. And God has actually given us His [Supernatural] Spirit (not the world’s [natural] spirit) so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you this, we do not use words of human wisdom. We speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren’t Christians can’t understand these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them because only those who have the Spirit can understand what the Spirit teaches. Christians who have the Spirit understand these things, but others can’t understand at all. How could they? For, “Who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who can give him counsel?” But we can understand these things for we have the mind of Christ.”

**In other words, the Supernatural is beyond the reach of the natural, and only the Spirit of God can reveal the Truth of God, which is by definition Supernatural. Summing up... the first passage says that Creation itself testifies to the existence of God, and the second passage says that only the Spirit of God can reveal the Person of God.**

### **John 14:16**

Jesus told him, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through Me.”

**If ever there was a challenge worth exploring, this is it. If Jesus is who He claims to be, the incarnate Son of God, then to know and follow Him is the imperative of any sane individual.**

### **Matthew 11:27-30**

“O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding the truth from those who think themselves so wise and clever, and for revealing it to the childlike. Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way! “My Father has given me authority over everything. No one really knows the Son except the Father, and no one really knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son reveals him.” Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my

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yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light.”

**INTRODUCTORY ARGUMENT:** Together these passages provide an effective opening argument or premise for Spiritual Exploration. First – that “God is there and wants to be found.” Second – the “Bible is God’s Self-Revelation to humanity providing a view of God and of the Spiritual realm we could not otherwise discover.” Since we humans are physical beings, we are bound to the physical realm and cannot enter the Supernatural realm on our own initiative. Thus, if God wanted to be discovered, He would have to reveal Himself to us. This He has done through the Bible through which He has progressively revealed Himself over time through Spiritually inspired prophetic writers, and ultimately and most spectacularly through Jesus and the Spirit. The Bible is not a textbook or an owner’s manual; rather, it is a long love letter where God introduces Himself to humanity and encourages us to get to know Him. The Bible opens us to “Spiritual Life” and progressively draws us closer to God. It is obvious this knowledge and the ensuing Spiritual life does not originate with humanity, instead it is a gift from God. As a student of the Bible, I found Scripture clearly reveals, “God is Here, and He wants to be known.” God desires relationship with people and enjoys engaging us both to encourage and perfect us, as well as furthering His redemptive purposes in and through us.

### **PART 1 – MY EXPLORATION OF THE SUPERNATURAL THROUGH THE SEASONS OF MY LIFE:**

I have often asked God the question, “why me?” It seems I’ve always known that God was out there somewhere, I just didn’t know who He was. As I have looked back upon my life, I now see where God showed up through the years both before and after I became a Christian. Looking back through the “rear-view mirror” view of my experiences, I definitely see God’s fingerprints all over my life. God was always there as an active agent seeking me out, I just didn’t understand it at the time. I think it’s true that many people have such God-experiences like me, but maybe didn’t take the time to orderly evaluate them looking for God’s subtle nudges and engagements. I’m hoping as you read this, you’ll be encouraged to look at your own life and see God showing up through your own rear-view mirror perspective.

### **CHAPTER ONE – Birth and Before:**

*Some people do... but I think most people don’t have a plan for their life. Instead, they just seem to find a way to work things out as they go. Sometimes things work, but maybe not as expected or hoped for. But when things start to go south and you know they aren’t working out, it’s always wise to get a second opinion... and better yet to have the situation bathed with prayer.*

My dad’s a wonderful man, a blue-collar carpenter by trade with a love for playing tennis. Obviously, I wouldn’t be here without him, so it’s not surprising that God would have looked over him in amazing ways to make sure I came into the world. He was born to Dutch immigrants who fled World War One in Europe. They came to America full of hope. As carpenters they practiced their home building trade in the greater Los Angeles area. Dad was practically raised with a hammer in his hand. When the USA entered World War Two came around Dad was drafted into the Army Corps of Engineers and attached to the First Division Infantry. Along with thousands of other soldiers, he traveled across the Atlantic on the Queen Mary that had been hastily converted into a troop carrier. Dad had never been away from home before and found



himself part of the Big Red One spearheading all the major invasions... Africa, Normandy, Sicily, North Africa, the Battle of the Bulge, dad was in them all. In his four years of service, he saw a lot of combat and way too much death and destruction. He never talked about it, but he told me he prayed a lot. “There are no atheists in fox holes” was a common slogan of the invasion forces. Through all his years and adventures in war, remarkably he was never wounded or injured.

When dad returned to the States after the war, he found work as a policeman in Los Angeles. One day he asked for a day off so he could attend a family event. His replacement responded to a call of a domestic disturbance, he knocked on the door and when it opened, a man pointed a gun at him, and he was shot dead. When dad got the news, he quit his job. When his boss wanted to know why, he told him that he didn’t survive four years overseas and numerous invasions to come back and die on the streets of Los Angeles. God’s protection over dad was obvious to him, and without it of course I wouldn’t be here. My Dad went back to working as a carpenter in the post-World War Two housing boom of Los Angeles, and it was in his spare time on the tennis courts that he met my mom. She was the beautiful daughter of Italian immigrants who had a passion for learning and worked in a doctor’s office as a medical assistant. She also loved tennis.

I was my parents’ first-born, but what is it with us first-borns? Since there is no owner’s manual that comes with the kid, they seem to bear the brunt of their parents learning process. A female comedian named Erma Bombeck once quipped that “Children are like waffles, you have to have to be prepared to throw the first one away.” It seems obvious that parents and their first-born children are figuring out the parenting-child thing together. When it came time for me to enter the world dad took us to the Methodist hospital in Los Angeles. Of course, I have no memory of the events, but my folks told me the story many times. Mom was in labor for two days going on three. The doctor attending us saw what he took to be my head crowning but was actually my knee. They finally called in an expert who realized that I was breech and couldn’t be born naturally. By this time however, mom had grown too weak for a C-Section, and they needed to act quickly out of fear for her life. They decided they would reach in and reposition me and pull me out to save mom and, hopefully, me as well. They told dad the plan and saying this was the only choice at this time. Dad went into the hospital’s chapel to pray. When I finally emerged, mom witnessed that my head was blue (due to a lack of oxygen), and my legs were black (due to a lack of circulation), and I did not make a sound. Obviously, not good. Mom begged the doctor “spank him, SPANK HIM... make him cry!”

I ultimately did cry, but they feared potential consequences because of the difficult birth. Years later I had a friend whose older brother had a similar difficult birth experience, and as a result suffered from mild cognitive disorders. I’ve always joked, “I’m doing pretty well for a guy firing on six out of eight cylinders” (automotive humor). But seriously, a lot had gone wrong, and the opportunity of an unhappy result had definitely beckoned. But in the midst of this problem, dad prayed, and things worked out. We’ve since come to accept that it was a miracle mom and I survived and I’m normal and healthy. Thanks for praying dad! And thanks, that someone had the clarity of mind to obtain a second opinion. To say the least, my life started out in an exciting fashion, it was definitely a bumpy ride but had a happy ending! I’m convinced that

dad’s prayer had an impact. Though dad didn’t go to church or talk much about his faith, it was definitely there and showed up at the right times.

### CHAPTER TWO – Young Childhood

*It’s said that the innocence of youth is fertile ground into which God plants seeds. Young minds and hearts tend to be more open, but because they don’t yet have a context for their developing story, they don’t always understand how to process all their experiences at the time. The fruit of understanding often comes much later.*

Many folks don’t believe in the supernatural or in paranormal experiences such as visions, but I do! I had my first vision when I was around eight years old, though I didn’t understand what was happening at the time. The Bible relates many stories about people having visions, dreams and “hearing from God.” Such events where supernatural messengers enter our world and engage people. The Bible takes it for granted that these things happened, so should we be surprised if they still do? I remember having two visions in fairly close proximity at a relatively young age.

The first vision was at my grandparents’ home when my family was staying overnight. I was sleeping in bed with my grandmother [Nona] while my grandfather [Nono] was sleeping on the couch in their room. I woke up during the night aware of someone in the rocking chair next to the bed on Nona’s side. I sat up to see over Nona at what I presumed would be Nono, but instead I saw a lady all in white who was softly glowing sitting in the chair. REALLY! She was lovely and quietly watching me. Then she smiled at me. It was a sweet smile, but it startled me, and I pulled the covers over my head and started to cry. Nona was awakened and comforted me, but when I looked over at the chair the lady was gone. I was not dreaming this; I was wide awake. Today as a Christian, I would understand it was an angel watching over me.

The second vision was not long after. My family was living in an old farmhouse in Woodland Hills while our home was being built in a new housing project where dad worked. My brother Denny and I shared a bedroom near the back of the house with my bed on the outside wall and Denny’s bed on an inside wall across the room. We usually had a lamp on at night sitting on the floor in the middle of the room so we could find our way to the hallway and bathroom. One night I woke up sensing something on my bed. I sat up and looked and saw a man sitting on the end of my bed. He had his back toward me. At first, I thought it was dad, but then I realized I could see the lamp on the floor through his body! NO KIDDING! I shook my head and rubbed my eyes, but when I looked again, he was still there, and I definitely saw the lamp through him. He must have become aware that I was watching him, and he turned around abruptly and then he came at me with a snarl on his face. I did what any kid would do and went under the covers. When I had enough courage to look out, he was gone. It was frightening for sure, and I did not understand it. Today as a Christian, I would identify such an apparition as a demon.

Through these visions, I was introduced to the supernatural at an early age. I understand them as Spiritual messengers of good and evil. I understand them in terms of a concept C.S. Lewis wrote about, that humanity is so important to God that both He and His adversary Satan contend for our hearts and souls. The Bible teaches that there is an ongoing Spiritual battle between good and evil that plays out in the

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material world and we have a Godly advocate standing for us and an evil condemner standing against us. Needless to say, these two visions made a lasting impression on my young mind. I wasn't aware that God was preparing me for more to come.

### CHAPTER THREE – Teenage and High School

*These are often described as the awkward years, and they were definitely awkward for me! At 14 years old, I was 5'-1" and 105 pounds when I started High School, not much more than a child trying to find my place in the world of mostly young adults. Some people seem to sail confidently through these years but not me. I was quiet and shy and lacked self-confidence, which made these years all the more difficult. I found myself having to work things out mostly alone.*

My Southern California high school student life was socially divided into “Greasers” (who loved motorcycles & fast cars, and slicked their hair back), “Surfers” (who loved the beach & sun and waves, and usually had straight hair parted on the side or middle), “Jocks” (who were the sporting elites), and “Soches” (the socially popular kids). I was a surfer. Like most surfers in those days, I wore a “Saint Christopher” medallion on a chain around my neck. In the surfing community, Saint Christopher was believed to be the saint of protection, and as surfing waves could be dangerous, a little help was always welcome. One day body surfing at Malibu with my neighbor Steve-o, we got caught in a riptide in Malibu's famous shore break. The wave break would knock us down to the sand and when we fought our way up, we'd get knocked down again. This happened three times and I was gassed when I finally broke to the surface. I looked over and Steve-o had just broken through as well, and we both headed for shore gladly sucking wind. We agreed one more knock down and we were done. While sitting on the shore together we chatted about our experience. It was definitely the closest either of us had come to death. Though not religious, I made it a point to regularly wear my Saint Christopher afterward. Hey, it couldn't hurt.

I remember the early Christian movies that were produced in Hollywood. The Robe, King of Kings, Spartacus, Ben Hur, and others came to TV on “The Million Dollar Movie” on KHJ Channel 9. One of my favorite movies was The Song of Bernadette. It's the true story of a simple peasant girl who sees a vision of a lady in a grotto near her village of Lourdes, France in 1858 ( [Saint Bernadette of Lourdes | Biography, Life Story, Miracles, Patron Saint Of, Facts, Body, & Feast Day | Britannica](#) ). The movie fascinated me. She saw something obviously supernatural, and when she innocently told others, nobody would believe her. The authorities at the time kept trying to talk her out of what she saw and heard. She was not a liar or a fabricator of these fantastic events, she was a simple young girl speaking the truth and she couldn't understand why people wouldn't believe her. Likely because of my own visions, it awakened a curiosity in me. The idea that a person both saw and interacted with a spiritual being piqued my interest. Bernadette was encouraged to change her story by the local authorities, but she refused to deny her experiences. The movie portrays a community divided with those who had faith believing, and those that didn't refusing to believe. Ultimately, the Catholic Church validated her story, and she spent the rest of her life in a convent.

In 1917 another spiritual event occurred, this one in Fatima, Portugal ( [Our Lady of Fátima | Britannica](#) ), where a series of visions seen by some children were reported, investigated, and validated by the Roman

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Catholic Church (<https://gritdaily.com/the-historical-realities-behind-fatima/>). These visions were also considered to be prophetic about evil events that would soon occur under the Bolshevik Revolution including religious repression, the growth of secular humanism, and widespread abortion which was considered an extreme atrocity at the time ([100 Years after The Apparitions of Fatima, this “Error of Russia” Continues to Wound the Heart of Mary and Threaten World Peace \(priestsforlife.org\)](#)).

To have both these spiritual events occurring in the modern period is pretty interesting. The Biblical record is two thousand years ago, and it's difficult to connect with what Biblical visionaries observed. But to have these events occurring in the past two hundred years created a renaissance of interest in Spiritual life in an era of religious silence and growing secular humanism. This environment was not unlike the era Biblical Samuel lived in while serving in the Temple under Eli the Priest in 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1. Samuel heard his name called and assumed it was the priest Eli (whom he served) calling him. The third time he responded to Eli, the priest realized something was up. He suggested it was likely God calling him and advised Samuel how to properly respond. The Biblical text says Samuel was called in an era when supernatural occurrences were rare. In all of these stories, God's message of judgment, consolation and hope breaks through common ordinary young people. A concluding line that I remember from the Song of Bernadette movie was, “For those who have faith, no explanation is necessary; for those who don't, no explanation will suffice.” I think that's as true today as then.

Maybe because a Spiritual battle was intensifying in my life, I began having trouble sleeping about this time. I had a tough time falling asleep and staying asleep mainly due to fears that emerged in the dark for which I had no understanding. In defense I took to placing my Saint Christopher medallion on the floor next to my bed for protection. Silly, but it was all I could think to do at the time. My family did not go to church or practice any religious life. I accepted the supernatural as real because my own experiences had been burned into my consciousness, and the memories are quite vivid all these years later. I didn't really understand at the time, that “God was present,” however I accepted the reasonable option that “He was around somewhere.” My Nona was a woman of faith, gentle and kind to a fault. Whenever we went over to see mom's family, Nona would make me a pan of fried potatoes with onions and an apple pie, my favorites! At the holidays she would make Zeppole's, sort of an Italian doughnut. Delicious! I remember years later when she was having health problems and my parents advised us kids that Nona was old and would likely not be around much longer. This was the first time I remember praying to God. I remember asking God since I had many years of life ahead of me, I could surely offer some to help Nona. She did live longer but they were not good years. I thought I must have done something wrong in my prayer as it didn't have the effect I'd hoped. Looking back, I think God probably smiled at this youngster who was willing to bargain something precious out of love, something that would appeal to God's own heart though I wouldn't find out until years later the price Jesus would pay for me. At the time I accepted that “God was around and out there somewhere,” but I had no understanding of a personal God who wanted to have a relationship with me, which would come many years later.

Dad embarked upon a homebuilding venture with two partners that promised to make him rich. For three years he worked hard and had little income. Then the housing market went into a recession, and dad was



struggling to make ends meet. I remember at night he had trouble breathing and was diagnosed with “emotional onset asthma” due to stress. His doctor prescribed a desiccating heat lamp for my folk’s bedroom to ease his breathing. I remember seeing the red glow of the lamp when I’d wake up at night hearing him struggle for air, and I would pray for dad. The venture failed and dad went back to work as a general contractor with his brother doing home remodeling work. I worked on the weekends and during summer vacation to help out, which gave me some practical experience in the construction field. These were hard days, but they were good days working alongside my dad and uncle. Finally, the recession ended, and dad found work as a project manager for Braemar Homes, a local homebuilder. I wouldn’t say the experience made me risk adverse, but it sure made me more cautious. I worked part time with Braemar and several trade contractors, which allowed me to pay for college expenses and a used car, a 1967 Volkswagen Fast Back! Great car!

### CHAPTER FOUR – College and University

*No longer a kid and not quite an adult, I was in the tweener years trying to make sense of who I was and who I might be becoming. You don’t learn perseverance by following a lesson plan or proscribed path, you discover it grinding out life in real time through difficult situations.*

I attended Moorpark College completing my undergraduate requirements and continuing my High School interest in science. Science courses came easy for me, English and history not so much. I was working and needed to drop a class. I asked my advisor if I could do that and make it up in summer school without losing my college deferment from the Vietnam War draft. They said that should be fine. I dropped the class and was soon reclassified 1-A. I filed an appeal to the draft board, but now it was a foot race as to whether I could finish my class in time of be drafted. Then I got my notice to appear for my pre-induction physical. Dad took me to the bus station and told me not to worry, that he’d drive me to Canada himself to avoid my being drafted. YIKES! I finished the class, and my deferment was reinstated. That wasn’t part of my plan!

After completing my AA, I was off to the University of California at Santa Barbara and my first time on my own away from home. Open Registration was intimidating coming from a small town. I had never seen so many people in one room all doing the same thing. I got in line and waited my turn in selecting classes. The advisor I was assigned reviewed my transcripts and commented about my having made the Honor Roll my senior year in High School, and the Dean’s List at Moorpark College. I had listed Bioscience as my major and “environmental zoology” as my field of interest as I had become interested in how human activity (especially insecticides such as DDT) were affecting animal and marine life. He proceeded to advise me, that I would need to take organic chemistry, and not the lightweight class for biologists but the high chemistry class for chem majors. I was advised to take genetics as well, and calculus, and a fun class like philosophy to round things out. My first quarter and I was loaded for bear! I was so naïve and did not have a clue that the chem and genetics classes were the make-or-break courses for the pre-med program, and that nobody took them at the same time especially in their first year, but what did I know? A few weeks into the quarter I knew I was in trouble and went to my org-chem professor and asked him to sign my class-drop request. He assured me that I would do fine and talked me out of dropping his class. After his encouragement I remained in class, but as the term went on, I found out the hard way that the courses at Moorpark though

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they were accredited for UC study, were not equivalent. There were many gaps in what I had been taught at Moorpark. I also found out my professor’s class size had been at the minimum and if I dropped as I had planned, the department would have cancelled the class. Anyway, my first quarter was an academic disaster with a D, two C’s and a B. I’d been used to getting A’s and B’s and an occasional C. The result was to be placed on academic probation. This was the worst failure of my life, and I was crushed.

I could understand my org-chem professor’s self-interest, but I could not understand why this academic advisor would have deliberately seemed to have sabotaged my plan of a degree in the field of science. He had to know he was setting me up for a beatdown. It seemed so random. Years later I learned that six of the top students from Moorpark who had also transferred to UCSB all dropped out, and I was the only one who graduated from UCSB. Looking back, I understand God was in this. Scripture reveals that God is in all the details, and what someone may have meant for harm, God can work for good. Anyway, I was forced to take my studies in another direction and decided to make the best of it. Humbled and angry, I set aside bioscience and decided I would explore some other courses and see what interested me. I took an anthropology class titled “Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft” taught by world renown Professor Brian Fagan. I was part of a class of some eight hundred students meeting in Campbell Hall. It was a very popular class and for good reason. Dr Fagan was a wonderful professor, and his teaching style made the material fascinating! I usually did well in courses that interested me and ok in those that didn’t. I did very well in this class and started taking more courses in Anthropology which soon became my new major.

Cultural Anthropology at the time focused on three components – religion-ideology, government-social organization, and science-technology. My studies focused upon world cultures and their attendant religions. I considered myself something of a hippie truth seeker, pretty corny, but those were more innocent days of self-discovery, at least they were for me. I found myself particularly interested with humanity’s search for meaning and purpose, something I was searching for. Studying cultures and especially their religious practices and philosophies had me reading a wide variety of texts in addition to the main textbooks: 1) Native American Indian (Black Elk Speaks, Teachings of Don Juan, Ishi in Two Worlds), 2) Hindu (The Bhagavad-Gita, The Vedas), 3) Islam (The Qur’an), 4) Buddhism (Teachings of the Buddha, Tibetan Book of the Dead, The Way - Watts), 5) Taoism (Tao The Ching, TAO - Watts), 6) native African (the Nuer and the Dinka), 7) Asian cultures and beliefs including Confucianism, Jainism, Shintoism, 8) Greek Culture and Philosophy – Aristotle & Plato, and others that I cannot recall. I was particularly captivated by the mystical practices of American Indian and Eastern Asian faiths. In these cultures, the metaphysical and physical worlds merged. Turned out the “Truth” I was seeking was not merely scientific, and anthropology opened a door into a universe that was both physical and metaphysical as well. I loved it!

My first year at UCSB I made a lifelong friend named Dane. He’s a tennis player as am I, and a character. A brainy electrical engineering major, brash and self-confident, and a musician. He had the confidence I surely lacked. One day he was playing and singing, and I happened to know the song and started to sing along. He said, “Hey, you can sing.” (I did not know I could sing as I really had not sung much since my voice changed in High School being a late bloomer.) We started singing songs together and he taught me to play guitar. In time we formed a band including Dane, Jimmy, Alan, Kevin, my brother Denny and me. We played together

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regularly, and Dane and I also enjoyed playing as a duo, and often added Jimmy and Denny to polish our four-part band harmonies. We became very popular on campus. Over the years we became union musicians playing many nightclubs in the area, as well as road shows at other universities, high schools, and private parties. At one point we played and won a regional “Battle of the Bands” at the Earl Warren Showgrounds Auditorium and as a result we were asked to open for two main-stream bands that were coming to the area, namely “The Kinks” and “Boston.” The band and anthropology were definitely the highlights of my UCSB experience, and my bandmates became my best friends, and we had many adventures and great times together. The shy and quiet young man I had been had emerged as a lead vocalist... the ugly duckling was becoming a swan.

I visited my friend Lee in Roseville to play a tennis exhibition at the Sierra View Country Club where he was the teaching pro. Later we attended a concert with one of his friends. On the way home I was tired and dozing in the back seat when I had a vision. Up to this time I was relying more upon my intellect and academics to seek this “Ultimate Truth” I pursued. This vision was more of a supernatural message to redirect me. My vision roughly followed a thread of thought of a Buckminster Fuller<sup>1</sup> seminar I had recently attended on campus. Fuller invented the geodesic dome and spoke extensively on physics and technology. In this seminar he effectively integrated the disparate disciplines of physics, biology, chemistry, engineering, technology, and economics into a cohesive cultural picture. It was very memorable! In my vision, my mind followed the thought development of a particular academic discipline as it developed from general concepts into increasing complexities. As the thought process developed, I felt myself rising upward toward a determinative conclusion or breakthrough. Far above I saw a bright light, the goal I understood to be perfected knowledge. As this developing thought process moved me toward the prize, I felt an inward pressure increasing in my chest. The closer I got when it seemed I could almost reach out and grasp it, I realized it was hopelessly beyond my grasp; while the inward pressure had been building to the point where I’d thought I’d explode. At this point of crisis, I inwardly cried out, “Oh Lord help me!” and found myself alert in the back seat where I had started. This cycle happened a number of times, each on a different discipline of study. After the final discipline I found myself in a peaceful place in the middle of a gently flowing river. Here there was no more struggle, no more work; just peace and calm comfortably floating and trusting the river to take me to my destination. It was a wonderful feeling, and the antithesis of the intellectual striving! In the river there was no stress, just effortlessly gliding peacefully with the gentle current. Reflecting on this experience, my takeaway was that intellectual pursuits alone would not achieve my goal in finding meaning and purpose, that science and academics alone would not suffice. The spiritual-mystical component was what I needed to explore. As a result I began reading the works of authors like Alan Watts ( [Alan Watts - Wikipedia](#) ) who wrote about Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism, T Lobsang Rampa who wrote about Tibetan Buddhism ( [t lobsang rampa books - Search \(bing.com\)](#) ), Carlos Castaneda in his Don Juan series ( [Carlos Castaneda - Wikipedia](#) ), and other such mystics. The academic approach seemed more of a wrestling match to gain wisdom, while the mystics offered more of a guided tour in supernatural exploration.

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<sup>1</sup> [Who Was Buckminster Fuller? | The Buckminster Fuller Institute \(bfi.org\)](#)

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Thanksgiving break came and while most of my friends were going home to be with family and friends, I had a paper to finish and had to stay at my UCSB apartment. Alone and feeling sorry for myself, I began praying for guidance to this still unknown God who I knew was out there somewhere. Ten minutes after praying, I heard a knock at the door. A guy who identified himself as part of a local Christian community had seen my light on and invited me over for Thanksgiving dinner. I declined, explaining that I had work to do and thanked him for the invitation. We chatted for a while, and he asked if I knew about Jesus. I told him I was an anthropology student and taken many classes on world religions but hadn't gotten around to Christianity yet. (Actually, Christianity was very unpopular with the anthropological community at the time for the damage they were accused of doing to indigenous populations.) Though he tried to argue the merits of his faith, he soon conceded that he could not out argue me. He said he had been like me pursuing a mystical life that went nowhere. He discovered that Jesus was the only way to God and if I wanted to know Truth, I would have to know Jesus. Experiencing the Truth available in Jesus had changed everything for him. We said goodbye and I was left to digest the encounter. It was clearly not co-incidental that he would appear so soon after I had prayed for guidance. Since I had not experienced Christianity, I could not dismiss his experience. I remember thinking, “God, if this is true, I want to know it... but you are going to have to hit me over the head with a 2X4 because I do not want to believe in Christianity's exclusiveness.” I never saw him again, but it was a memorable meeting, and I am sure I will see him in Heaven and will have much to discuss. Life trajectories are often influenced with gentle pushes such as this. I am confident all believers will be surprised at the impact they had on others without really understanding it at the time. As Christians, it is our responsibility to “influence” people with our faith, and it is the Spirit's responsibility to “convict and transform” them. I had been influenced, but it would take some time for me to be convicted.

A while later a couple of friends suggested we attend a Psychology class offered through the UCSB Extension. Bandmates Dane, brother Denny, Jimmy and I decided we would attend together. The class was titled “Psychic Phenomena” which sounded cool, and it promised to be an easy two-unit Psych class. A significant component of the course was a metaphysical exploration led by the psychic boyfriend of the professor, (Eric I believe was his name). After a number of sessions, the class culminated in a physical séance led by Eric where we were encouraged to open ourselves up to explore the spiritual world around us. As the séance progressed into a more meditative state, I found myself being pulled into a trance. My solar plexus contracted, and my head was being pulled toward a bright light on my right, and I felt this powerful force coming onto me. It scared me and I fought it off. When the teacher asked us to share our experiences, I told him what happened to me. Eric studied me and after a while said, “You have two spirit guides, a protective mother and eastern sage trying to contact you. You should meditate on this, get to know them, and see what they have for you.” I already knew the mystical world was real, but I did not want to open myself up to just anything out there, not knowing what the spirit intentions were or what the consequences might be. I discussed the matter with Jimmy who was similarly interested, and we decided we would go to the nearby Vedanta Society Temple in Santa Barbara to get some coaching on meditation. We had high hopes about a meeting we set up with the director. When we got there, we were told the director was “unavailable”, and we would have to return another time. I would come to realize that this “non-meeting” was actually God's providence, a blessing protecting me from a darker side of mysticism that

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was beckoning me. Jimmy would later leave the band and became a devotee of the Guru Maharaj Ji ([Guru Maharaj Ji and the The Divine Light Mission \(prem-rawat-bio.org\)](http://GuruMaharajJiandtheDivineLightMission.prem-rawat-bio.org)). However, I would be having a different sort of encounter in the not-too-distant future.

### CHAPTER FIVE – Graduation and Decisions

*As the relatively safe ‘academic learning’ environment of my life was coming to a close, the more challenging ‘what am I going to do next’ took center stage. I would later find out that God is all about ‘next steps’ taken in faith, rather than working out the ‘overall plan’ all at once. Instead of just fixing us, God is more interested in doing life with people and seeing them blossom into something they could not have done on their own. Christian discipleship is not a quick fix, it’s a lifelong process.*

The academic year had come to an end, and I would soon be graduating with a BA degree in Anthropology with a focus in Comparative Religions. I had taken most of the classes on world religions offered, including one on the New Testament of the Bible, which was my first real exposure to Christianity. The highlight of the New Testament class was a survey project including an in-class presentation. Four classmates and I devised a questionnaire on spirituality that sought to understand how different congregations engaged in worshiping God. I was the only male member of the team and the only one that wasn’t a Christian, having had no real church experience. We developed a questionnaire and chose several local congregations including Jesuit-Catholic, Black-Pentecostal, Mormon-Latter-Day-Saints, Baptist, Quaker-Friends, and Anglican. The Jesuit and Quaker-Friends churches were by far the most welcoming and actively participating in our project. While I found the church worship experiences interesting, I especially enjoyed the Black-Pentecostal church. It met in a small storefront in a strip mall, a small and humble venue, but their enthusiasm was contagious. There were several white adults with a few children who were disabled and in wheelchairs. Rather than placing them in the back, they were seated in the front row, given positions of honor. A few of the churches we visited had placed those deemed “less presentable” toward the back (me included as I had long hair and the best clothes I had at the time were blue-jeans and tennis shirts); but here these less presentable folks were placed right up front. I thought that was pretty cool. While I wasn’t offended when singled out, I noticed the difference conformity meant.

At each church we explained to the ushers what we were doing for our class project. The Jesuit Catholic usher opened the loge seating area for us so we would have a better view of the whole service. At the end of the service as people were filing out, he even helped us hand out our questionnaires. We received by far the most responses from this church. Susan, the fiery red-headed leader of our group, led the class presentation which went very well. Susan was a dedicated person of faith, and when our professor would embark into areas controversial in Christianity she took a measured vocal stand correcting him. I really didn’t understand the issues at the time, but I was impressed with her knowledge, courage, and demeanor. The churches I enjoyed the most were the Friends-Quakers and the Jesuit-Catholic. Both had a decided mystical meditative component that resonated with me. While the others were predominantly lecture oriented.



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After graduation, summer vacation arrived, and my band had a rare weekend off from our club work, so I went home to visit my folks. I had been pondering a master's degree thinking I would like a career as a Anthropology professor at the Community College level, but I had several friends who already had such degrees who could not find work. Thus, not finding additional education as particularly beneficial at the time I found myself at a crossroads. At the local shopping center, I ran into Cathy, an old girlfriend I had not seen in a while. We had a great time catching up! When she asked about what was going on in my life, I told her about my studies in Anthropology and of Eastern mysticism and in particular my intention to meet with the director of the Vedanta Society so I could properly explore the practice of meditation. I thought it all sounded pretty cool and she'd be impressed. Instead, She suggested I meet with a friend she knew, someone who had knowledge of Christian mysticism. Intrigued, we set up a meeting at her home.

On an early afternoon of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend in 1974 I met Dave at Cathy's home. He was a big man with a great smile and an easy disposition. I liked him right away. We talked about music as he was a singer also, and we talked of our experiences in mysticism and metaphysics. As he talked about his experiences in Christian mysticism, I discovered we had much common ground. This was no chance meeting. The more we talked the more we understood each other and the more engaged we became. Our conversation became very focused and intense which I enjoyed! He explained the Christian metaphysical conflict between the forces of good and evil lying behind what otherwise seemed innocent mystical experiences. These forces at work were deceptive and often destructive. This was something that I had intuitively known. He explained the nature of the struggle between evil and Good, the reality of mystical experiences Christian and non-Christian. One side offers the promise of wisdom and power that tempts humanity, but often leads to personal destruction rather than enlightenment. While Jesus offers wisdom, life, enlightenment, and personal fulfillment as a gift. Where the end game of eastern mysticism was more about human nature merging with and disappearing into the cosmic consciousness, Jesus as eternal God who entered the world in human form to reach humanity with His free gift of Truth lead to eternal life.

I had never heard the Gospel, but I understood what Dave was saying and found it totally compelling! I had already figured out to receive Supernatural Truth, a person would need to either enter the Spirit realm to discover it (which eastern mysticism advocated), or someone from the Spirit realm would have to come to earth to reveal it (which was why Jesus came to earth). The latter making the most sense to me. Dave finally asked me, “Would you like to begin a relationship with Jesus and discover the Ultimate Truth for yourself?” I wasn't expecting this, and immediately thought of the young man at my apartment door at Thanksgiving. I knew I was at the point where I had to decide if this was going to be another academic pursuit or an experiential one. After a thoughtful pause, I said, “Yes”, and we prayed for some while together. I remember sitting with my eyes closed and the sun shining on my closed lids with tears streaming down my cheeks. I had certainly taken the roundabout way to Christian faith, but once I got there, I knew it was real and embraced it. Dave asked me to breakfast the next Saturday at the El Camino Restaurant in Camarillo. We began a discipling relationship that turned into two years of regular Saturday sessions and a life-long friendship. I can honestly say, I do not know what my life would have been without that pivotal meeting, and I am so grateful for it. Bless you, Dave! Friends forever. I did not understand God had a plan for me. I did not understand the opportunity was always there. I did not know God was seeking

me. All this time I was seeking Him, He was seeking me. Looking back, I can see God’s fingerprints on my life from birth. How crazy is that! I can say with conviction having explored both sides of the matter, what a blessing it has been to find the Truth I had long searched for. God has been very gracious to me. Right at the precipice, where I was planning to step off into what I had thought was enlightenment but actually was deception, God caught me and redirected me.

### CHAPTER SIX – Life Course and Career Redirection

*When discovering what God had intended for my life and occupation, I wanted to follow Him well and expected He would reveal to me what He wanted me to do and how I should serve Him. But that wasn’t what God did with me. Instead, I heard Him ask, “how do you want to serve Me?”*

**DIGGING IN:** Back at my apartment in Isla Vista I told my bandmates what had happened, and that I needed to make some lifestyle changes. They listened in shock and disbelief. No more smoking pot? No more sleeping with your girlfriend? No more partying? They did what any good friends would do when faced with a buddy making sudden and significant life change they could make no sense of, they arranged an intervention. They set up a counseling session at the Campus Religious Center. The meeting was with a priest along with brother Denny, buddy Dane, and girlfriend Wendy. I expected the priest would be supportive of my decisions and help me articulate my ideas in a way they would better understand. Instead, the priest surprised me by saying I did not have to make any lifestyle changes, God would be happy with my confession of faith alone and I could keep on doing what I had been doing. I remember thinking, this can’t be right. All at once four pair of eyes were focused upon me to see what I would say or do. I was surprised (and my friends relieved) that he advised me not to make any sudden lifestyle changes, instead I should participate in local church services, pray about it and I’d figure things out in time. Intuitively I knew if I remained in Isla Vista I would fall back into my old pattern of living, and I had this inner conviction that I needed to change. My friends were relieved because of the meeting, but I left confused. This didn’t work out as I’d expected. Since school was over for now, I decided I would leave Isla Vista and return home to create some space and think things out.

Returning home, I told Dave what had happened, and he just laughed! Dave agreed it would be better not doing anything crazy or going off the deep end. That taking some time to pray about it would be a good place to start. We also kept up with our Saturday morning breakfast discipling sessions. Dave was raised in the church and attended Christian schools and college in his home state of Minneapolis. A knowledgeable and willing teacher, he made sure I was well grounded in my new faith. We often spoke of the Spiritual realm that surrounds us and how good and evil are engaged in our everyday life.

Most folks do not want to think of the possibility of evil actively engaging them, but the Bible clearly teaches that there is both an Advocate and an adversary. Evil can be subtle, but once I had taken a stand against it the battle intensified. I found this to be true when one day I came under a spiritual attack. My visions demonstrated to me that supernatural presences are real. While angelic engagements bring guidance, comfort, and peace; demonic engagements bring confusion, oppression, and conflict. Most Christians do not like to discuss this aspect of Spiritual life; but I assure you, there is a real spiritual battle

going on and we're caught up in it. My first overt spiritual attack occurred while I was taking a shower. It came on with subtlety at first then intensified, until I was beaten down and literally cowering in the corner of the shower. Finally, I said "That's enough!" I threw the shower door open and jumped out onto the bathroom floor sopping wet and ready to do battle. The evil spirit wanted nothing to do with me. My faith had been settled in my mind and heart, and the attack ended abruptly when I took a stand. I started laughing. I could have remained cowering in fear but taking a stand on who I am in Christ settled the matter. Humanity has an adversary and an Advocate; we have to decide who we will listen to and follow. I could not wait to tell Dave.

Fifty years later as I think back upon this shower attack, and I realize it was an important pivotal experience. C.S. Lewis in one of his best known works The Screwtape Letters, reveals much of our adversary's designs to undermine and render ineffective a Christ-follower's faith and ministry. This is played out in the subtleties of Spiritual warfare. Years later as I was praying, God revealed this attack was a full-frontal assault, meant to intimidate me and derail my faith so that much of my ministry would never come to maturity. Standing in faith that day confirmed I had an adversary and a much greater Advocate. As I've walked out my faith to honor God's calling amid personal setbacks, close friends have prophetically reminded me that I'll "never know this side of Heaven the impact that I have had upon the Kingdom of God." The choice I made to stand in faith believing and being prepared to do battle, put me on the path to where I am today. It's often true that we don't see the importance of such events except "in the rear-view mirror."

A new path: I began attending Bethany Baptist Church in Thousand Oaks. It was a small church that was close to home, and it was Dave's church. It was here that I met Jim, who would become my lifelong friend. Jim and I did everything together and carried each other's burdens as friends and brothers do. Bethany was a conservative church, and to be honest they really didn't know what to make of me. This hippie musician turned Jesus Freak was maturing as a Christian fast thanks to Dave's discipling, but I was what author and pastor Erwin McManus would call a "Barbarian Christian." I did not understand the protocol and gentle ways of community church life and I was somewhat of a challenge for some and an encouragement to others, but there was no mistaking I loved Jesus and was growing rapidly. Though I did not know much about church culture, I did know of the spiritual world I had chosen not to ascribe to any longer.

One evening while Jim and I and a mutual friend, Tom who I knew from high school and UCSB, were at a Continental Singers concert, God opened a door that would prove to be essential for my Spiritual maturity. After the concert I mentioned that I would be interested in singing with a group such as this. Tom heard me and introduced me to Joyce who was the admin to Continental President, Cam Floria, and said she could get me an audition. That week tour leader and talent scout Johnny auditioned me. Though I did not read or write music, he was impressed with my voice and vocal range. I officially became the first 'Jesus Freak' Continental. All together I sang in three Fall Tours and one Summer Tour Overseas as a lead and choral vocalist. Such great experiences! After performing before nightclub audiences for years, I was now participating in and leading musical worship. In addition to the Continental Singers, I did solos at local churches, and a number of musicals with the Cabrillo Music Theater and the Sonshine Congregation. The quiet and shy young man that entered UCSB was finding himself and blossoming. Dane, Denny and I rented

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a home in Newbury Park where we could leave our band equipment set up in the garage and pursue our other occupational interests. Tom introduced me to Robert who needed a place to stay, and we made room for him in our garage. We didn't know it at the time, but Robert was a Navy Seal Team leader who had been seriously injured in Viet Nam. His team was behind enemy lines on assignment, and when they were picked up at their extraction point, their Huey was hit by an enemy projectile. Upon impact Robert was blown out the open-door bay and fell through jungle growth crushing much of the left side of his body but saving his life. The rest of the team didn't survive. Prior to moving in with us, Robert had spent the previous year or so convalescing at a VA hospital where he had become a Christian through the Navigator's ministry. Though discharged from the Navy, he was still physically mending and wasn't yet declassified so he wasn't free to discuss his service. God obviously has a sense of humor to pair this ultra-combat warrior veteran with a semi-reformed hippie musician turned Jesus' freak. Robert and I became great friends, and he credited me with teaching him how to have fun and find joy in life again, while he taught me about discipline and commitment. Bob went on to become an amazing evangelist and served for many years with the Overseas Christian Serviceman's Center. It is amazing about how many times God arranged for someone to enter my life at just the right time for the purpose of mutual growth and transformation.

I was still playing clubs with my band, but several of us began moving away from occupational musicians toward more conventional stable careers. As “house band” at a number of clubs we often backed recording artists who had once enjoyed significant commercial success, but now they were trying to hold onto a piece of it. In the musician community you see that for every major success there are many minor successes and a ton of wannabes that never made it. It is a pretty brutal lifestyle with practicing afternoons, playing evenings 9pm to 2am three to six nights a week. I loved performing music but decided that being a professional musician was not the life I wanted. Working night shifts just wasn't for me.

Meanwhile my dad and I had not always gotten along. Though he was a quite a character and loved coming to our gigs, he also tended to be more of an old school authoritarian as his immigrant parents had been. My brother and sister never rebelled against dad's authority, but for some reason I had. Consequently, our relationship had been strained especially through my university years. One day when we were playing tennis, dad asked me if I would consider accepting an entry level position that had opened at the company where he worked. My first thought was, “NO! The last thing I want is to be a businessman.” But I sensed a nudge from God that, “You've not done a very good job of honoring your father,” which was more than true, and I found myself saying yes. I agreed and started at the bottom of the corporate ladder of a small company, sitting at a small make-shift table in the corner of dad's office. Though not optimal, it had the benefit of providing me the opportunity to hear how he dealt with people, and as a result I learned important communication and people skills. There are no short cuts for learning an occupation, you must be patient and be willing to do the work. I still had an active musical life playing in the band Thursday through Saturday nights, Sunday with the Continental's and leading occasional worship Sunday mornings and regularly leading worship on Wednesday night college-career group Bible study. All in all, things were busy but developing nicely.

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Bethany Baptist Church asked me to join their “Christian Education Board.” They wanted participation from the younger College-Career group of which I had become a leader. I probably should have declined. I was young and way too innocent and naïve about the political machinations that take place in the back room in all organizations including faith-based organizations. I expected the church to be perfect, and I found out it was not. My position on the Board provided me a front row view into the organizational breakdown of an otherwise healthy-looking church. I have since come to realize that the church is ‘bifurcated’ with the ‘Church’ (capital C) as the Spirit indwelt Body of Christ followers, while the ‘church’ (lower case c) is the organizational structure facilitating corporate activities. The Body is where the ultimate value is, and God views the Body as perfect. The organization, however, is an institution of humanity and as such, is part of the Fallen world that needs redemption. Most of the problems in churches are organizational rather than spiritual.

About a year into my term on the board, the senior pastor decided he wanted to make some changes with the church support leadership. First Don, the youth pastor was dismissed; and then Harold, the Christian Education Pastor was forced to leave. I missed the board meeting with Don, but I had a front row seat with Harold. Both Don and Harold were good men and we had become friends. I remember Harold sitting near me on my right, and Senior Pastor, Jim, near me on my left. The church had undergone significant growth development with this leadership team, having doubled in size in the time I’d been there and undertaking a significant expansion and remodel adding a Christian education school. The College-Career community had tripled in size. I remember Jim making his case as to why Harold had to go while he sat there quietly taking in the proceedings. I remember looking back and forth at these two men I knew well. Jim’s case was pretty flimsy, and everyone knew Harold had done well. Jim was essentially bullying the combined lay-leadership team of Deacons, Trustees, and the Christian Education Board members to get his way. Everybody seemed know it because all their heads down as if in discouragement, but to my surprise no one was saying anything. I kept looking back and forth at Jim then Harold, and then scanning the leaders seated in a large circle. It was clear there were no legitimate grounds for dismissal, but why wasn’t someone speaking up? When I could take it no longer, I spoke up. I said, “Something is wrong here. First Don and now Harold, these men have helped build our congregation. There is no question of their competence and dedication. If there’s something that needs to be addressed let’s discuss it and address it. But this is wrong to demand they leave. Something’s not right here.” All eyes were now fixed upon me, I’m not one who likes being the center of attention, but for some reason I had no choice and had to speak out against this travesty. Now, however, Jim focused his attention upon me. His words were unkind and surprisingly angry and disparaging. When Jim finally stopped, I looked around at the assembled men, all their heads were down. “YIKES!” I thought, how did I get here. After what seemed a long time, Ivan spoke up. Ivan was a retired missionary to South America. He would occasionally sing a worship song in church, “Great is Thy Faithfulness.” It was the only song I ever heard him sing, and he was well respected by everyone. After the long silence Ivan said, “It’s shameful the baby among us has to be the one calling us mature men into accountability. John’s right, something is wrong.” I gratefully met his eyes which were riveted upon me as he spoke. Now Jim’s ire was focused on Ivan. Ivan and I just kept looking at each other as he took a verbal beating he didn’t deserve. I’ll never forget his kindness toward me, or the sad resolve I saw in his eyes. I



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had this vision of my church as a perfect ‘Bride in white,’ but found out that while the ‘Organism’ (the Spirit sealed Body of Christ Followers) was pure and being perfected in God’s eyes, the ‘organization’ (part of the Fallen institutions of humanity) is broken and needing redemption.

**A NECESSARY TANGENT:** Just as I was starting to despair of the condition of the church, I was invited to tour with the Continentals on a summer tour to Asia. I didn’t realize it then, but this was a necessary step forward. Sometimes the tangent from the path you were taking is the surest way home. As I had accepted the invitation of my earthly father to go into the business world, I now heard my Heavenly Father’s invitation to go on an extended missional outreach. It made no sense to take a leave of absence from my job for a three-month summer tour, but I knew God was in it and was the right thing to do, and somehow He’s work out the details. My folks weren’t happy when I informed them of my choice. They were fine with my attending church and all, but it made no sense to them for me to leave a good job. My dad advised me to say nothing for now, hoping I’m sure that I’d change my mind. I agreed. In the next few weeks God would show we were both right to wait. Our Boss’s son was out of school at UCLA for the summer and wanted an intern job. He could fill in for me over the summer! I had two weeks to train Brian before leaving, and he would return to school one week before I returned. God worked out the details so I could keep my job AND go on tour. Is that cool or what! Stepping out in faith is often a hard thing to do, but when you see God’s Hand involved, it’s a joy to see things come together! And of course, it was important to wait and not force circumstances to allow God to work the details out. At the moment where my little church was blowing up, God whisked me away on a memorable tour.

Continental Tour “A for Asia” could easily have been “A for Anthropology.” It had me traveling to the homelands of many of the cultures I had studied in my undergraduate degree at UCSB. Billed as the “USA Bi-Centennial Tour” we started touring the west coast then traveled through Hawaii, Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong, and back to Japan, Hawaii and finally the mainland. It was a pretty grueling schedule of a concert each day and three on Sunday and constantly traveling. I was the only “new Christian” on tour who hadn’t grown up in the church. I was often asked to speak about my search for truth in coming to faith in our live concerts, and my story resonated with many people who wanted to speak with me afterward. Overseas I found myself worshipping Jesus with people who could not speak the same language, but we shared the connection of the same indwelling Spirit. This gave actual context to the notion of “One God, One People.” Especially after the debacle at Bethany, I was encouraged to see that God was much bigger than I gave Him credit for and the Church was in much better hands than I thought it was, and God comforted me greatly.

While touring, we were broadcast on radio and TV in the US and overseas. The “China Lutheran Hour” was one broadcast source from Taiwan to communist mainland China where Christians were forced to go underground. It was a way to support the underground Church. Wikipedia the online free encyclopedia states “Confucianism and Taoism, later joined by Buddhism, constitute the ‘three teachings’ that have shaped Chinese culture”, and I had studied all three. Christianity had made great inroads but under Mao Atheism became the dominant religion. In Japan, Shintoism, which is a form of ancestor worship is the dominant faith, but Jainism and Buddhism were also culturally significant. Less than 1% of the population

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are Christian and if someone professed Christ, they were cut off from their family. Professing faith is easy in the US, but in many places in the world such a profession comes at a cost.

One of the more memorable events was a concert we did at the University of Manila in the Philippines. We were guests of President Marcos and were provided a military honor guard for our tour. Marcos was unpopular in the Philippines at the time, and I suppose that was why we had the guard for our protection. At the University, we set up our equipment in the “Quad” the large informal meeting place where there were several stories of outdoor pathways linking the multi-story buildings together looking down upon our set up. The students were clearly not happy we were there, and especially that they had to be there. We found out later they were “required” to turn out and observe us. When it came time for the keynote speaker to talk about their faith journey, our tour leader Ken asked me to speak. “You’ve got to be kidding me!” I’m thinking. You need to know that as a vocalist I was quite comfortable singing before people, but speaking... not so much, and in adversarial situation iffy at best. Ken handed me the microphone and I took in the scene. People glaring down on me from three different walkways. I sent a “SOS prayer” for help. I talked about my faith journey, not growing up in a Christian family and studying world religions at UCSB and about science and my anthropology degree. I was very surprised that I became a Christian, in fact I was the last person I thought would become one. I talked about experiencing the Goodness of God and His reality in my life. Christ changed everything for me. Most of the crowd just glared at me as I spoke for ten or fifteen minutes. When I finished, I gladly handed the mic back to Ken and tried to disappear into the group. When we finished our concert and were breaking down our equipment, about a dozen young men came up to me and wanted to talk. I was standing with Jessie, the Campus Crusade for Christ leader at the university. He got us a room where we could talk. We had a long discussion, and all twelve men became Christians that day. Meanwhile, Ken had been looking for me as we were late in leaving for our next show. He rather grudgingly accepted my story but was clearly not happy with me. This wasn’t the first time, and it wouldn’t be the last. When I finally came home, I was a much more mature Christian than when I had left. This was one of the great experiences of my life! I left in obedience and came back a changed man ready to restart my career. God knew exactly what I needed and gave me this miracle of a journey to strengthen and encourage me.

**RETURN HOME AND RE-ENGAGING:** It was good to be home again, and I looked at my work differently. Starting at the bottom of the organizational ladder at Marlborough made me aware that personal growth is a decision that comes at a cost. I worked hard and diligently on my way up the corporate ladder. I took night and weekend classes at local colleges in architecture, the uniform building code, drafting and estimating. I joined building industry non-profits such as the “Residential Purchasing Council” where I served as Director, Vice-President, and President. I also joined the “National Association of Home Builders Ventura County Chapter” where I served on several task forces including the Landscape and Open Space Committee writing the policy guiding County-Wide Home Building activities while protecting farmland and public open space. I became a professional member of the “International Conference of Building Officials” and a “California Licensed General Contractor.” Through it all I became well known in the Southern California Building Community. Dad and I worked together for Marlborough Development Corporation for fifteen years. I had started training as an assistant purchasing agent and left as Vice President of

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Construction, all because of a nudge from God and obedience. Dad and I worked well together and had lunch together almost every day, and in the process we became best friends and really respected one another. Dad had his limitations; his leadership style was mainly authoritarian. He told people what to, do which worked for some. I led as a collaborator, leading by example and developing relationships. Marlborough's owners saw that our staff and field workers worked better under my direction, and I slowly assumed more responsibility.

The goal of Christian faith is transformational life. God is not merely interested in making you cleaner or better. God's plan is remaking you into something you cannot become on your own that blesses you and others. I found I had a gift for organizational management and strategic process development that was not part of my giftedness before Christ. Through it all I was a leader my team wanted to follow, and they knew I had their best interests at heart as well as the best interests for the company and our trade partners. I had a number of recruiters comment "What is it about you, John? I offer your guys a good job with better pay and they don't want to leave." These are things I didn't have before becoming a Christian. Through faith and hard work, I had become what I could not have done on my own, I was one of the top executives in the Southern California Building Industry, and I know God was the reason.

One day I got a call from my buddy Jim that his sister Debbie was going into the hospital for an emergency operation, and he asked me to pray for her. She had been diagnosed as having cancerous fibrous tissues in her breast which had grown into her muscle tissue beneath. They were hoping to get most of the cancerous tissue surgically then treating what remained followed by cosmetic surgeries. Debbie is in her early 20's, how can such a thing happen? I was praying as I drove to my office and after a while, I heard God say that I should "pray for Debbie in Spiritual language." I said, "Lord I do not know how to do that" and kept driving. A short time later I heard, "John... I want you to pray for Debbie in Spiritual language." I said, "Lord I've never done that, and I don't know how or what it is," and kept driving. A little while later I heard, "John, I want you to pray in Spiritual language." I started to protest "But Lord" and He cut me off. He said "John, I desire to heal Debbie, do you refuse to be the person through whom I heal her?" No kidding! That direct and clear. What could I say? I sat there driving 101 on the way to my office stunned. Not knowing what to do I prayed a silly disclaimer prayer because I didn't know what I was doing, and I was apprehensive and didn't want to mess things up. Finally, I just opened my mouth and started speaking out loud. I heard words I had never heard before, but as I voiced these strange words, I understood what they meant in my mind. Theologically, I was speaking in the Spirit, Who was translating for me. I had never heard of anything like that before. I could not wait to get to work and when I got the call from Jim, he told me that Debbie was fine, the operation went well, and she would need only cosmetic treatment. That night I called Dave and before I could tell him what happened he started telling me how he and his son Rick had attended a spiritual renewal service the night before and they both received a Spiritual language. I started laughing. God You are too funny! Dave and I talked of our experiences and laughed and prayed. I'm very grateful that God has always validated things I am unsure of or uncomfortable with through someone I know, trust and respect. God has been gracious to me in so many ways!

### CHAPTER SEVEN – Discipleship and Career Choices

*I expected God would just tell me what He wanted me to do. I prayed in earnest, “God, how shall I serve You?” God’s response, “How do you want to serve Me?” Following Jesus is not a once and done matter. The Spirit will lead you in and allow you to learn and then empower you to work things out. Submission to God is not merely obedience like a worker to a boss, is more of a collaborative partnership. God isn’t interested in us acting as automatons, He wants sons and daughters naturally going about doing His work while loving Him and others.*

I attended Calvary Community Church (CCC) in Thousand Oaks (later moved to Westlake Village) since I had returned from the Continentals. CCC was part of the Missionary Church denomination headquartered in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I suggested to Larry (the lead pastor) that I would like to start a young adult ministry as none yet existed at CCC. I was soon partnered with Steve, our new associate pastor. Steve would teach, and I would lead worship, and in the process Steve (the cradle to grave Missionary Church Christian) and I (the Jesus Freak barbarian Christian) became best of friends. In time we developed a solid leadership team and built a discipling community that grew to over one hundred regular attendees, and I was invited to come on staff at CCC. I was told this would mean going to seminary and quitting work at Marlborough to work full-time for CCC. I prayed for clarity. I had been ‘called’ (or invited I think is a better word) by the church, but I did not sense a ‘calling’ from God. I decided I’d stay in Corporate America and continue to work part-time in ministry. Also, another important development was going on in my life.

I met ‘*the lady*’ who would become my wife, best friend, life and ministry partner. One afternoon I was playing tennis at a local club my family frequented, when I saw my mom walking by and talking with two attractive young ladies. Marilyn who I had known since high school was giving my mom a bad time over something, while the other lady I didn’t know was being the peacemaker. I was impressed with the latter. Not long thereafter I was late getting to an outdoor church service. When I located my friends there was one seat available, next to the peacemaker lady I had seen at the club who was sitting with Marilyn and my friends. What are the odds? Several hundred people sitting out in the open and one seat empty next to the person I was most interested in meeting. I sat down, we talked, and I started to get to know Cindy. She was smart, kind, and an industrious working single mom. We dated casually and after two weeks I knew she was the woman I wanted to marry, but I did not want to scare her off. I was almost thirty and never married, she was thirty-two divorced with a young daughter. She was lovely inside and out; her character as well as her beauty captivated me. We were engaged within a month and married within six months. Second best decision I have ever made, first was following Jesus. Forty-two years of marriage at the time of writing and we are still very much in love. I cannot imagine life without her. I have many friends who have great marriages, but often their relationship looks like a wrestling match, whereas Cindy and I dance. We have a daughter and a son who are both married with three kids each. Daughter Darcy is a Registered Nurse, and son John is a YWAM Missionary. We are very proud of the people they’ve become and the lives they’ve built, and especially gratified they both love Jesus.

**AN OLD ADDAGE:** *“The necessities of life will get you behind the plow, but only serving something greater than yourself (like a wife and family you love) will keep you there.”* I knew I needed the motivation of

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working for something bigger than myself, and a partnership between God, Cindy and I emerged; and our life and family blossomed. I continued working hard developing my career, assumed leadership of several non-profit industry organizations, and made a name for myself in the home building community in Southern California. After fifteen years at Marlborough and ten great years of marriage, I had become one of the top talents in the Southern California building industry. Then, things at work began to change. Marlborough had been sold to a publicly traded corporation, and many of the ‘old guard’ employees were laid off, me included. I was fortunate that I had a significant amount of unused paid vacation due, and that along with severance and bonus money gave us six months income to find new work. I would need it as the Lincoln Savings and Loan along with the American Savings and Loan scandals placed the home development business into a recession, and a lot of people were out of work.

The best offer I had at the time was with The William Lyon Company (TWLC) – a Fortune 500 Company and top builder in California as well as top ten builder nationally. TWLC was a great homebuilder and privately held. I was hired as the senior construction operations officer in their Bay Area Region headquartered in San Jose where I reported to Dick, the President and Vice Chairman of the company. TWLC had thousands of lots and hundreds of acres of development property tied up, and I was the top construction operations guy for the San Francisco Bay Area and Central Valley. This was big, not to mention we had one month of severance remaining when we moved north. God was very gracious to us, took care of our needs and provided a tremendous opportunity. I was stoked!

One thing we asked God for when we moved north was to lead us to a church home and to bring Godly friends into our lives. We had settled into the City of Scotts Valley just outside the city limits of Santa Cruz, which was a relatively short drive ‘over the hill’ to my new office. I asked both Steve and Dave if they knew of a church we should consider attending, and Santa Cruz Bible Church was their recommendation. Cindy and I settled into the children’s ministry where we would meet Jeff and Christy. They became more than best friends but brother and sister to us. Together we spent many years leading children’s ministry, also doing spiritual community life in [theodyssey.org](http://theodyssey.org) [[Theodyssey](http://theodyssey.org)], as well as home fellowship ‘Missio-Dei’ (paying homage to the ‘Blues Brothers’). Jeff is a fine musician as well, so I had a new playing partner! God has a way of leading His followers into relationships that nurture and bless one another. Christy, Jeff, Cindy and I and our kids became an extended family with ‘Guitar Night’ as a regular family and friends celebration. God has been very gracious to us in giving us a local family that was closer than the biological families we left behind.

I would work for another eighteen years primarily as Vice President of Operations, all with large corporate home builders. In addition to TWLC, I worked with Kaufman & Broad, SummerHill Homes, and Western Pacific Housing/D R Horton, the largest homebuilder in America. When I finally left my work in Corporate America I was at the peak of my career, and then I entered Western Seminary and becoming a pastor with the Missionary Church and starting a web-based non-profit ministry a free to use discipleship platform used all over the world. I also served as director and elder of a Missionary Church plant, Elevation Santa Cruz. God obviously has a sense of humor, but I am getting ahead of myself.



TWLC closed its NORCAL offices due to ramifications of the Savings and Loan fiasco of the early 1990's and a recession that resulted hit the housing industry particularly hard. I was hired by SummerHill Homes a privately held home builder that was part of a larger diversified group of companies with tremendous resources. SummerHill had a poor reputation as a builder at the time, and I was advised by friends in the business community not to go there. I met with their leadership team and liked them, and they thought I could help them. I accepted their offer and oversaw the cultural and operational change of the company. An early strategic hire I made was Bruce. He had a nice resume and was well qualified, but what caught my eye was his degree from a Christian College and his backstory. Bruce had been a carpenter for over twenty years when he was injured when the scaffolding he worked from collapsed. The resulting fall shattered both his ankles. He spent a year in a wheelchair while workman's compensation and the carpenter's local retrained him for an estimating office job as his field working days were through. I had always liked hiring carpentry foremen as superintendents and construction managers, because they know how the whole house fits together accommodating the various trades that must cooperate in building the home. I knew it would be great to have his skill set on my leadership team, and I hired him as our purchasing manager. In my career, Bruce is the best hire I ever made. We became best of friends and partners in affecting cultural and operational change with several builders, and each company thrived because God was blessing our companies through us, who in turn rewarded us. God positively impacted our organizations and our trade contractors through our partnership. Bruce and I worked together overall for over ten years, and he is on the board of my Christian non-profit AuthenticDiscipleship.org as are my old buddies, Jim and Dave.

After thirty-three years working in corporate America, the grind and pressure to produce and deliver had become burdensome. I had a great job as Vice President Operations at the NORCAL divisional office of D R Horton, and Bruce was Director of Purchasing. Out of fifty-three divisional offices, ours was the most profitable. We had built a great team and we loved working together. Our success was noticed at the regional office. Our senior office leadership was invited to a retreat at the company chairman's ranch in Texas. Early one morning I was in the dining room working at my computer, when Don Horton (the chairman) noticed and commended me for getting up early and working when the CEO and CFO and other VPs of our leadership team were still sleeping from partying the night before. Our regional office in San Diego had already noticed that our operational team had gone from worst to first in their organization. When Bruce and I started, our office was building about one hundred homes a year badly – meaning over budget, late on schedule, and quality not up to expectations. Together we made a number of key hires and transformed operations at Horton to where we were building three hundred homes a year on budget and on schedule and with high quality. We were on pace to deliver close to 400 homes the following year. Quite an accomplishment by a team in a comparatively short time. However, it is not always good when the corporate offices come to notice the accomplishments of the leader of the operations department over the CEO of a divisional office. When it came time for my annual review, my team along with our consultants and trade contractors all agreed I would have a stellar review as they all knew what we had accomplished. I had a feeling that because everyone was so overwhelmingly positive that it might not go as well. But then, God was getting ready to point me in a new direction.

**REDIRECTION:** Started with God showing up rather spectacularly! One morning on the way to my office as I stopped at a red light preparing to make a left turn, I saw that a tree had fallen onto the roadway diagonally across the street. I sat there pondering how the tree could have been knocked over as it had been fine yesterday. There had not been a high wind the past night, so it wasn't blown over. There was no way a car could have knocked it over as it was above the street grade, it made no sense. Then God spoke to me... He said, **“IT LOOKED HEALTHY BUT IT'S HEART WAS ROTTEN.”** It wasn't audible but rather like a fifty-font message inserted directly into my consciousness. I have come to be able to discern God's voice by this time, and for me it is more His thought placed in my mind rather than an audible voice, but unmistakably not my own thought. I am very comfortable with my own thought life, and when an outside thought arises, I recognize it as such. So, after receiving this, I am sitting in my car with my eyes and my mouth wide open and every hair on my arms and neck standing up in full throttle alert! I can only imagine what I must have looked like and am glad no one else was around. I asked God, “What does this mean?” No answer. The light turned green, so I made my turn and drove around to a parking lot at the back side of the tree to check it out. When I got there, I found what had been a healthy twelve-inch diameter weeping willow tree had a football sized hole in its heartwood where the break occurred. Even in death, the tree looked healthy, but its ‘heart’ had obviously rotted out. It had simply fallen over because of its own unsupportable weight. I asked God, “What does this mean?” No response. I took a picture of the tree and went to my office (see picture below on page 30).

One of the rewards of being a senior executive was having a private parking place and private entrance to my office. Handy as I was in a hurry to get in and to pray. I let myself in, asked my admin to hold my calls, locked my door and lay on the floor and prayed. It did not happen right away, but God revealed that the tree was me, and the tree was the church. YIKES! Not what you want to hear from your Lord! Rather like a petulant child I asked, “What do You want me to do about this?” The answer again came in time, God revealed, “I want you to go to seminary.” I'm thinking, You've got to be kidding me. I'm in my mid-fifty's and at the height of my career and earning potential. Why now? And how will I get my wife behind this? Then I thought, well if it is from God, He will have to work it all out. I decided, OK, I'll do my part and see what happens. Two seminaries are nearby, and I applied to both, thinking I would not get accepted by either and I would be off the hook. Go figure, I'm accepted at both. I said OK God, You have got to get my wife behind this and provide financially so we can work this all out. It is important to stress that such changes are not just about one party when you are married and have a family, we decide together what we will do as a team.

Back to my review, the CEO tells me I had done a great job but he's “uncomfortable with my leadership style.” He thought that when a senior leader walked into a room everyone should be worried whether they would lose their jobs, and this is definitely not my style. As an operations officer I learned that if people can't bring you bad news, they'll hide it and by the time it came to light it could derail operations both in delays and financially. Knowing the problem early allowed me to resolve them without adversely impacting the plan. The CEO was a big man, six foot five inches and two hundred sixty pounds. He played professional football for ten years before using his undergraduate civil engineering degree to go into the building business. His approach to management was from fear and intimidation, where mine is from example and

encouragement. Anyway, I realized that my review was going in another direction, and we are now playing poker. I knew he had cards to play, and I quietly watched as he began to play them. Bottom line, he offers to pay me through year end and make me whole on my bonuses. Combined enough money to easily carry us through seminary including our costs of living. He said he would not fire me, instead he would “diminish my role over time” and essentially squeeze me out. He said, “Go home and talk it over with your wife, I know you’ll make the right decision.” I went home and told my wife all the details, and she said, “I can’t believe it, after all you have done for them, take the offer and go to seminary.” I’m thinking God, You are too funny! He had the plan already worked out and all I had to do is watch Him work out the details. Crazy!

### CHAPTER EIGHT – Seminary and Ministry

*Mid-Life course corrections are not always what you would think; and things are not always what they seem. Change is hard, but in some ways, change is better than you could ever believe as you observe God’s plan and giftings coalesce. But that doesn’t mean it’s going to be easy!*

Most people go to seminary looking for a career, but I already had a great career and one I was extremely happy with and good at. I was not going to seminary to seek a new job, but rather in obedience to God’s Call and looking for a fresh experience with God. I thought I knew God well, but for me seminary was like bathing in Holy Water. Although every class I started I heard the same thing from the Accuser, “What do you think you’re doing here John? You’re not smart enough, you’re not good enough, what do you think you’re doing here?” Seriously! I agreed, “There but for the Grace of God go I.” The other thing I kept saying about my class experience is, “Why haven’t I heard this before?” I was already a well-read disciple, I have read extensively about theology and discipleship and many great authors, but seminary was an entirely new level of discipleship. To say the least, I had a transformational experience in seminary! I’ve heard some folks say that seminary is where your faith goes to die, but I saw a whole new side of God and His radical Love for humanity, and for me in particular! I went in obedience, and I graduated with a new calling.

It wasn’t until my last year of study that God finally revealed to me what He wanted me to do with the education I received and all the materials I had generated and collected. The picture I saw was that of the Parable of the Three Talents in Matthew 25:14-30, and I didn’t want to do the equivalent of the third servant who buried his talents. In my case leaving a treasure of discipling materials buried in my computer would dishonor God’s calling and equipping. It is important to understand that there are spiritual gifts and talents I received by faith throughout my career that I didn’t have before. Such as a disciplined and imaginative approach to problem solving, excellent communication skills, a big-picture strategic organizational approach to process development, and a collaborative leadership style. Not to mention being able to receive and translate meeting/classroom notes into an organized message. I typically took extensive notes in all my classes and went home to write them up in an organized outline form while it was fresh in my mind. Several of my professors saw the notes I was producing and asked if I would be willing to share them with my classmates. Between class notes, research notes, and written assignments I had an impressive amount of study content developed. God suggested I organize and make them available online. Everything would be broken down into three categories: 1) Biblical Literacy – Developing the Mind of Christ, 2) Spiritual Formation – Developing the Heart of Christ, and 3) Leadership Development – Developing the

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**Mission of Christ.** The primary values would be the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). God made it clear to me that this web-based platform would be “missional not merchandizing.” It would be open and free to use, no sign up or logging in, nothing for sale, nothing requiring or even encouraging giving. Just a discrete contact page where I could be contacted, and voluntary donations could be made. That was how the idea of AuthenticDiscipleship.org (AD) began to take shape.

I now had a good idea of what God wanted me to do, but I had no idea how to set up a non-profit or a website for that matter. I contacted my longtime ministry friend Steve, who put me in touch with Mike, the Western Regional Director of the Missionary Church (same denomination as Calvary Community Church I attended in Thousand Oaks, and Elevation SC in Santa Cruz). Mike organized a lunch meeting with Steve and I as well as Len (missional strategist who worked with Mike). After answering an hour and a half of questions over an excellent lunch (and eating just a few bites), they offered me the opportunity to come onboard under their non-profit as a new “Strategic Church Development” ministry. I would be free to develop AD, and they would assist me whenever I needed it. As we left Steve commented to me, “I didn’t expect them to make you an offer, I just hoped they would help guide you.” Authentic Discipleship was soon to be born, and now more than a decade later we have over two-thousand pages of seminary level content in over two-hundred articles available for free online, with a worldwide readership. Yup, crazy! Plus, the content is offered in a casual and not an overly academic manner. Thus, it is intentionally accessible to a wider range of readers. Check it out... [Authentic Discipleship](http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org)

Meanwhile, I became involved with “Elevation Santa Cruz,” a small local church on the recommendation of my friend Steve, who introduced me to pastor Chuckk. Chuckk asked me to help find a new home for Elevation as it had to move out of its location in Santa Cruz. He paired me with a great co-worker on this project named Gene. Chuckk gave us very specific instructions on where he wanted to be, on the “West Side” of Santa Cruz near the university, and Gene and I started there. We found there were not many options, even though we had great meetings with several lead pastors who loved the idea, but their Board of Directors weren’t interested in sharing space. We decided to radiate our search out county wide. Gene and I checked out sixty-six venues in the greater Santa Cruz area, but none really met our needs or budget. One day Bruce came over for lunch and afterward I asked him to join me in looking for a new church home. We decided to drive the backway through Felton to get to downtown Santa Cruz. We made the turn onto Highway 9 and God nudged me, “Turn in here” and I did. Bruce asked, “What are you doing?” I told him the Spirit told me to check this out. We went into a restaurant-nightclub named Don Quixote’s and sought out the owner. We met Sue and told her we were searching for a new venue for our little church, and we felt this could be a great location. She was understandably wary, but we talked for a while, and I answered her questions and gave her some info about us. She said she would think about it and to come back in two weeks. In two weeks, Gene and I went back to see Sue and she said she’d love to have us do church in her nightclub. The place was not used Sunday mornings, so there would be no conflicts. She was ready to make a deal! Only problem was Chuckk had not seen the place, and this was exactly what he told us *not to do*, so now we had to see if we could get Chuckk on board. Reluctantly, Chuckk went with us to check it out. After meeting Sue and a nice conversation and seeing out all the venue had to offer, he decided it was perfect

and we made a deal that blessed us both. Sue had an additional steady source of income, and Elevation had a great venue we could afford. This was our new home for over six years. Like so many other situations and opportunities, it is less that we need to blaze a new trail and more that we need to pay attention and catch up with what God is already doing. God is usually working through and speaking to His people; we're just not always paying attention. We didn't know then that Sue was a Christ Follower, or that she'd be open to a church meeting in her restaurant-night club, but God surely knew!

### CHAPTER NINE – Concluding Thoughts

*God wastes nothing, and no matter what you think of yourself, He is not done with you until He calls you Home to be with Him.*

This article has been percolating in the back of my mind for some time. I did not really know how to approach it let alone get it out in some sort of intelligible manner. While it is autobiographical, the intent was more of observing how God's has been working in and through me my whole life. I trust readers can see that I am just another person trying to make sense of life and eternity, my encounter and life with God is not anything I expected. I think people often struggle coming to terms with the reality of a Personal God who is relationally disposed towards humanity, let alone One who has gone to such extreme lengths as coming to earth as a human to uniquely relate and communicate to people what Heaven and God are all about. Then purposefully sacrificing Himself to free people of their burden of sin and death, and then taking up His life again that He may remain relationally connected to His people through the Holy Spirit that indwells all born again believers leading us into an assured future. Crazy right? I believe and understand all this on several levels, but it's God putting it in motion in an historical timeline allowing the Spirit to lead. I also understand that God has not only loved me, but He has also called me into intimacy in a relationship that has really blown my mind. Late in life He has asked me to partner with what He is doing relationally in others through my own discipleship ministry.

I think it is obvious that God has had His Hand on me. I KNOW THIS! Looking back, I certainly see this! Reading this (presuming you accept what I have written) hopefully you see it too. But it begs the question, “Why Me Lord?” I mean I am grateful and all, but why has God shown up and demonstrated Himself repeatedly throughout my life? I have come to believe that everyone has moments when God nudges them, and as you start paying attention and acting on those nudges, you become more aware and see more such moments. Alternatively, if you stop listening and don't act upon those nudges, you see and hear less. One of my favorite musicians, Kris Kristofferson, wrote a great song with the title “Why Me?”.<sup>2</sup> “Why me” is not a complaint, it is a question by someone who has been overwhelmed by God's Grace, specially aimed purposefully and personally. This is the God we know and serve.

Following along with this “why me” thought, I have been reading an excellent book by Bob Goff titled Love Does.<sup>3</sup> In it, Bob describes his personal journey of discovery and invitation into “An incredible life in an Ordinary World.” It is a great book! It is his own look back through the rear-view mirror of his life and how

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<sup>2</sup> [Why Me Lord Story - Told and Sung By kris kristofferson - YouTube](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Amazon.com: Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World: 8601404450860: Goff, Bob: Books](#)



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God changed everything. Bob asks himself the same question Kris and I have been asking... “Why Me?” He made this statement in particular that caught my eye with regard to being chosen for ministry: “Am I the *right guy*? I don’t know, but I’m the guy being asked, and the last thing I want to do is miss an opportunity or make God mad, so I just keep saying yes. Maybe God is doing some inexplicable things in your life. Each of us gets to decide every time whether to lean in or step back – to say yes, or ignore it, or tell God why He has the wrong person.”

God often uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. The Bible is full of such stories as is the history of the Christian church. Most of these people probably had no idea how their actions were part of God’s plan. They were listening to God’s leading, and somehow had the courage to follow, not knowing where it would take them. The story of Abraham hearing and obeying God is one of the most compelling events in the Old Testament, but I’m certain he was clueless. He had faith and obeyed. One thing I’m fairly certain of, “Why me” will be a very common question we ask when we meet Jesus in heaven.

Looking back, I find a number of practices actually helped me understand who I am and what I’m doing. First, have a strong foundation of structured discipleship. Thanks to Dave, Robert, and Steve I’ve had great discipling. Second, regularly reflect upon what is going on in light of understanding your giftedness, opportunities and callings. Third, developing a plan with God (and your wife) and consistently working the plan. Most people fail because they do not dream, work, plan, evaluate, and course correct regularly.

Carefully choose some close friends and people you trust as advisors and mentors in your “Inner Circle.” People to develop and bounce ideas off and invite them to speak into your life. There was a management concept that was popular when I was younger, it asked the question “who do you want on your bus?” Meaning we’re all going somewhere, but who do you strategically invite to accompany you on the journey? Along these lines, Bob Goff writes about a misadventure he had in his youth in getting in the wrong bus with an unstable driver he had misgivings about but ignored God’s prompting. “I learned a lot about hitchhiking that day. I learned that even though I needed a ride to get somewhere, I had a lot of power over who I’d hitch a ride with. I know it sounds simple, but life is like that. You become like the people you hang around, and to a great degree, you end up going wherever they’re headed. When there is someone else behind the steering wheel, it needs to be someone you’d trust with your life, because you’ve given a great deal of control over your life to them. All this has to say that we have a lot more power to decide who we do life with than some people think. And if you make a bad pick like I did, you need to do what it takes to get out.”

### **POSTSCRIPT – “It’s Heart Was Rotten”**

*God uses different things to get the attention of different people and let them know He’s there and wants to engage them. For some people it may be sunrises or sunsets. My wife sees Him in rainbows. All God needs is a worldly event to ignite an other-worldly connection.*

I’ve always loved nature so it’s not surprising that He would use a tree to get my attention. Next page is a picture of the tree God used to get my attention. You can see where the tree split (at the base). God revealed to me “the tree is me, and the tree is the church.” I pray you would consider what God may be inviting you into, don’t ignore His Calling knowing that in Him anything and everything is possible.



Should it surprise us when God breaks into our mundane world to reveal the sublime? Thomas Aquinas observed in his seminal work *Summa Theologica*,<sup>4</sup> *"The slenderest knowledge that may be attained of the highest things is more desirable than the most certain knowledge attained of lesser things."* Thus, by definition, the highest thing in all the universe is God, to know Him and love Him, and to be known and loved by Him,

then in response to make Him known. This is the ministry Christ calls His followers into. God isn't interested in merely cleaning us up to make us presentable, as if He were interested displaying us on His celestial Mantle as trophies of what He can do with idiots like me, or you. God is interested in transformational relationships through which we become His sons and daughters, and partners in building His kingdom. This is the highest of callings, and the greatest of adventures; and it has a fundamental corollary... because the Spirit is within us as Born-Again Christ Followers, wherever we go and whatever we do God is there with us. A trusted friend once told me, "Christians aren't supposed to be thermometers merely reporting the temperature of the room, we're to be thermostats that change the temperature of the room."

## **PART 2 – THE THEOLOGY BEHIND THE STORY:**

### **CHAPTER TEN – HEARING AND OBEYING:**

**INTRODUCTION:** Bishop Robert Barron delivers a daily gospel message to thousands of people worldwide through his "Word on Fire" ministry. I found his August 25, 2022 posting on the passage of Matthew 24:43-51 to be an appropriate introduction to part two of this article.

"Friends, in today's Gospel, Jesus praises the faithful servant who served his master in a Theo-drama. We are called to serve our Master in the same way. A Theo-drama is written and directed by God. On the great stage that is the created universe and according to the prototype that is Christ, we are invited to "act," to find and play our role in God's theater. The problem is that the vast majority of us think that we are the directors, writers, and above all, stars of our own "ego-dramas," with other people functioning as either our supporting players or the villains in contrast to whom we shine all the brighter. Of course, our dramas are always uninteresting, even if we are playing the lead role. The key is to find the role that God has designed for us, even if it looks like a bit part. Sometimes, in a lengthy novel, a character who has seemed minor emerges as

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<sup>4</sup> [Summa Theologica - Wikipedia](#)

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the fulcrum around which the entire narrative turns. When we de-center our ego and live in an exciting and unpredictable relationship with God, we realize very clearly that our lives are not about us. And that’s a liberating discovery.”<sup>5</sup>

**We need to be reminded that while we each have a part to play in God’s unfolding Theo-drama, we’re not the center of attention, God is. Our job is to find our place in God’s story and be faithful witnesses and stewards, pointing the world toward God. Though I’m telling my story in this article, what I hope to communicate and shine a light on is how God is everywhere in it.**

**God has revealed Himself in the Bible and through it God shows the lengths He will go through to meet with and save those He Calls and loves. God’s Self-revelation in Scripture includes all three Persons of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Spirit; especially demonstrated in the Theophany at Jesus’ baptism by John recorded in Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; and John 1:29-34. The Self-revelation God presented in the Bible is theologically known as “Normative Revelation” – meaning the only authoritative standard of revelation for all of humanity and the objective standard of faith and practice for Christians. There are also forms of “Non-Normative Revelation” through which God or His messengers communicate directly to people through dreams and visions. These non-normative revelations are secondary revelations which must be subordinated to and validated by the normative revelation of the Bible. “Dreams, visions and hearings” from God are forms of non-normative revelation. God will never ask His people to do something that is contrary to His will and purpose as revealed in the Bible. Christ followers who know God as revealed in Scripture will be able to discern His good and perfect will accordingly.**

**Zondervan’s NIV Archaeological Study Bible reveals this about dreams:**

“In the ancient Near East great significance was given to dreams, and dream interpretations were sought from experts trained in the techniques and methods of the day. Both the Egyptians and Babylonians compiled ‘dream books’ which contained sample dreams with a key to unlock interpretation. These books preserved the data concerning past dreams and interpretations, providing the security of ‘scientific’ method and documentation. However, Joseph consulted God (Genesis 40) [stating ‘do not all interpretations belong to God?’].”

“Dreams were one of the many ways people of the ancient world believed that humans received divine messages. It is important to observe that the Bible contains no guidebook for interpreting dreams. These are no magical code we can follow. When God communicates by a dream, only God can give the interpretation Genesis 40:8)”

**Zondervan’s International Bible Dictionary has much to say about the *Realm of Dreams* as revealed in Scripture:**

“In early patriarchal times, God often appeared in Theophany<sup>6</sup> to godly men, but from the time of Jacob onward his revelations were more often in dreams. (Contrast the experience of Abraham in Gen 18 with that of Jacob in 28:10-17.) Often in ancient times God spoke in dreams to persons outside the chosen family, e.g., to Abimelech of Gerar (Gen 20:3), to Laban (31:24), to the butler and baker of Pharaoh (40:8-19), to Pharaoh himself (41:36), then much later to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:1-45; 4:5-33). In these dreams the meaning was clear enough to need no interpretation, as in those of Abimelech and Laban, or else God caused one of his

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<sup>5</sup> [wof@wordonfire.org](mailto:wof@wordonfire.org) , Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, PO Box 170, Des Plaines, IL 60016, United States

<sup>6</sup> Theophany is a supernatural manifestation visual or audible from God usually through His angelic messengers.

servants to interpret the meaning, as in the latter cases. One principle of interpretation seems quite evident: When the symbol is in the natural realm, the interpretation is in the human realm, e.g., when Joseph dreamed of the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing to him, his brothers immediately knew the meaning as referring to his father, mother, and brothers (Gen 37:9-11). When the symbol is in the human realm, as in Daniel 7:8, “Eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully,” the interpretation is in the spiritual realm. Dreams [as non-normative revelation] may [be mis-interpreted and could] lead people astray, but God’s Word [as normative revelation is authoritative and] tells how to deal with these situations (Deut 13:1-3; cf. 1 John 4:1-6). Jeremiah 23:25-32 and other passages speak of lying prophets, which are perhaps akin to spiritists, and other deceivers of today. Notice the contrast between Mary, to whom God spoke directly through Gabriel (Luke 1:26-35); and Joseph, to whom the angel appeared in a dream (Matt 1:20-24; 2:12-13, 19).”

### **Zondervan’s International Bible Dictionary has this to say about the *Realm of Visions* as revealed in Scripture:**

“It is impossible to draw a sharp line of demarcation between dreams and visions. The Hebrew and Greek words all have to do with “seeing” [and/or “hearing”]. Visions in the Bible were for the most part given to individuals and were not apprehended by their companions. Through visions God revealed truth. They came under various circumstances, 1) in men’s waking hours (Dan 10:7; Acts 9:7), 2) by day (Acts 10:3) or 3) by night (Gen 46:2). In the Old Testament both “writing” and “nonwriting” prophets were recipients of visions (Isa 1:1; Obad 1; Nah 1:1; and 2 Sam 7:17; 1 Kings 22:17-19; 2 Chron 9:29). With perhaps one exception (Num 24:4), they were given to men in the service of God, and those of a revelatory nature were always recognized as coming from God. In the New Testament Luke especially manifests great interest in visions (Luke 1:22; Acts 9:10; 10:3, 10 ff.; 18:9). Biblical visions concerned both immediate situations (Gen 15:1-2; Acts 12:7) and more distant ones connected with the development of the kingdom of God, as may be seen in the writings of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Micah, Daniel, and John. In the Old Testament false prophets feigned visions and were denounced by Jeremiah (14:14; 23:16) and Ezekiel (13:7).”

**We can safely conclude God is able to employ whatever means He deems necessary to reveal Himself to people to advance His redemptive purposes. The Spirit even spoke through a donkey to reveal God’s purpose in Numbers 22:22-33, which is a great lesson in humility for God’s prophets through the ages. In places where Christianity has not penetrated cultural groups, or the Bible is not yet known or available, there are stories of people who have dreams and visions of Jesus calling out to them. One of my favorite books is Eternity in their Hearts, by Christian anthropologist Don Richardson.<sup>7</sup> One of the premises Don presents captured my imagination... “the God who is there and wants to be known, who prepared the Gospel for the world, wouldn’t it make sense that He also prepare the world for the Gospel?” Don discovered that dreams, visions and even tribal traditions often coalesce to prepare people for Christ, and he provides ample corroboration for how this means of communication has played out in aboriginal culture groups.**

**While such hearings from God can and do happen, they are not necessarily for everybody. There are some who know, love and serve God who have never experienced Him in this manner. God in His own wisdom communicates with people in such ways as are necessary and helpful both for their edification and the edification of the Church. Having said this, there are ways Christ followers can make themselves more**

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<sup>7</sup> [Eternity in Their Hearts: Richardson, Don: 9780764215582: Amazon.com: Books](https://www.amazon.com/Eternity-Their-Hearts-Don-Richardson/dp/0780764215)



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sensitive and receptive to God through Spiritual formation activities, especially contemplative, meditative, and centering forms of prayer, Scripture meditation, and discipleship studies. I know some believers who seem to hear God regularly, others think He only speaks through Scripture, still others hear Him through dreams and visions. God being God, He can communicate with us anyway He wants, and He can speak to people differently in fulfilling His Will in them and through them. In other words, God’s non-normative revelations are not necessarily a “one size fits all” communication program.

In addition to Bible study and prayer, I find myself just talking to God as to a friend. Mainly silent conversational prayer, and sometimes He responds. These responses are not audible or some mystical extasy, for me they are more of a “nudge,” a slight redirect in one direction or another. I find that as I respond to His nudges, I tend to see more of them. Personally, I think God is speaking all the time, and usually it’s through these five sources: 1) Scripture, 2) prayer, 3) other Christ followers, 4) nature, and 5) everyday circumstances. The beauty and complexity of nature has always captivated me. The order, symmetry, symbiotic interdependencies, and cooperation within organic communities all speak to me as reflections of the nature and character of God. There is nothing random about the natural order; it is an integrated system and a dynamic whole. The more I learn of God in Scripture and observe the natural order as a reflection of His love and purpose, the greater and more wonderous God becomes.

With regard to *knowing* a person, Bob Goff<sup>8</sup> writes about the difference between “*collecting information*” about someone, and “*experientially knowing*” a person which is equally true of our knowing God. It’s not merely knowing about Him, it’s more about connecting with His heart. This is what prayer does, it moves us into God. Bob tells it this way, “Collecting information about someone is not the same as knowing a person. Jesus said that unless you *know* Him like a child, you’ll never really know Him at all. Kids don’t care about facts, that’s what the religious people at the time [of Jesus] were promoting. Kids are just [interested in being] with each other; they do stuff together. That’s what Jesus had in mind.”

Bob Goff shows a side of God most of us don’t see. Fair warning, Bob is a character and somewhat of a wild man. I’m a thinker and a planner, and Bob is more of a thrill seeker and a man of action. I’ll usually wait, evaluate, break things down and strategize before I act. Bob just seems to act and figure things out on the fly. Maybe because we’re so different is why I enjoy his writing. On this important subject of “hearing from God,” Bob writes the following:

“Human beings are limited in their [means of] communication and God isn’t limited at all. He can communicate to us in any way He wants to, anytime He wants to. Through [Christ] followers, other people, an uncomfortable sense, a feeling of joy, goose bumps, a newfound talent, or an appreciation we acquire over time. It doesn’t need to be a big mystical thing. I see the beauty that’s everywhere, that God made for me and you. I especially see evidence of God in other people’s lives. I wonder if the people listening for [special signs like mysterious] voices or looking for cloud shapes miss the whisper of God’s creation, somehow thinking it’s a lesser form of communication; but [through them] I can almost read His lips inaudibly saying to me, “*I love you this much.*” The more I’ve listened to God, the more I’ve realized I don’t always catch what God is up to in real time. I usually understand what God is doing by seeing it *in the rearview mirror*. Only then can I connect the dots, and even then, it’s a pretty dodgy sketch. The Bible says right now I know “in part” and one day, after were gone, we’ll know “in full.” That makes sense to me because it means our understanding will

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<sup>8</sup> Love Does, Bob Goff, Thomas Nelson publisher, page 202



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always have gaps and gaps are good because they leave room for God to fill in the spaces. Until all those gaps are filled in, I need to operate on my own best guess. I need to listen to that internal [Spiritual] tuning fork. I take the fixed points of His character and my particular hard wiring and extrapolate from there. There are plenty of fixed points too, so we don't need to get worried.”<sup>9</sup>

That is probably one of the best overall analyses of ‘hearing from God’ I’ve heard so far. For me, the more the Bible has been digested by my mind and absorbed into my consciousness, the more I seem to know God and the more I understand what He wants from me; and as a result, the more I look for Him. Another factor shapes our sensitivity to God involves the fabric of our individual lives, and the countless series of experiences and choices we make on a regular basis. Through them our tastes, preferences, and how we see and engage others all emerge from a series of choices we make in real time; and all of it goes into our sensitivity of hearing from and communicating with God. Here’s a quick example of what I’m talking about. Among other things, I’m a worship leader and music shapes my mind and heart in so many positive ways. One of my favorite songs is “Good, Good Father” ([Chris Tomlin — "Good Good Father" \(Intimate & Unplugged\) - YouTube](#)). Those of us who had good earthly fathers have a lot less trouble conceptualizing God as a Good Father. Those who didn’t have a good parenting example may be more challenged in seeing God or any authority figure as Good. But regardless, once you’ve experienced God’s Goodness and understand that it’s expressed to you personally, everything changes as it shapes your life. Additionally, individual choices over time shape our life experience until patterns of preference and expectation develop. One thing the Bible clearly teaches through its various stories and the history it employs, is God gives humanity a great amount of freedom to choose, and with freedom the responsibility to act, and then to live with and learn from the choices we’ve made. God can also break into our mundane and flawed existence and change everything. I know alcoholics and addicts who encountered God and ultimately became successful businessmen and pastors. Another aspect of personal development the Bible demonstrates is that choices shape our character, and the people we choose to befriend and do life with also shapes our character development. Thus, life is formed through individual choices, and we are shaped by those choices and their consequences one at a time over time.

### **CHAPTER ELEVEN – THEOLOGY OF CALL AND CHOSEN:** Genesis 15:1-6; 17:1-16; 18:1-33; 28:1-16; 1 Sam 3:1-11; Isaiah 6:1-10

Why does God “Call” some and not others? Personally, I believe “Call” is better understood as “Invite”. Jesus in His earthly ministry called some to “Follow Me,” an invitation to personal discipleship, to which Jesus is still inviting people to follow Him. Some Jesus followers just seem more receptive or more sensitive to God’s invitations, and perhaps just more open and curious with the supernatural. One thing I think is true, the more open and honest you are with God, the more He invites you into greater intimacy, and the more you realize you don’t quite measure up to His expectations. I think Romans 3:23 states this well, “For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.” I think when we’re honest with ourselves, we realize we’re not perfect and we need help, and that may well place us in a more open and responsive state. I remember as a young man before I met Jesus, I would look into the mirror and not particularly like the person I saw. I perceived my character, meaning “who I am when no one else is looking” to be deficient. I wasn’t a terrible person, but I knew something was wrong with my heart and it was affecting my

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<sup>9</sup> Love Does, Bob Goff, pages 140 & 141

relationships. I wanted more from life, and I expected better from myself. I understood the choices I had made brought me to where I was, but I didn't know how to break free of my failures, fears, and inadequacies. As a consequence, I was stuck. Looking back, these realizations provided fertile soil for Spiritual life. I didn't know it then, but the Apostle Paul wrote of this situation in Romans 7:14-24 (New Living Bible Translation):

“The [character-standard of the Jewish] law is good, then. The trouble is not with the law but with me, because I am sold into slavery with sin as my master. I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it [consistently]. Instead, I [often] do the very thing I dislike. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the [standard of the] law is good. But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these things. I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right [consistently]. I want to, but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. But if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin [meaning wrong being not merely wrong doing] within me is doing it. It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?”

In these verses Paul had pretty effectively summed up the problem I was feeling about myself. Though not a Christian or even religious, I must have had an internal “character-compass” letting me know about my inadequacies, but not providing a way to correct them. It's a lousy place to find yourself, knowing you have a problem and having no solution. Paul found a solution to his problem as written in the continuation of the above passage in Romans 7:25-8:3:

“Thank God! The answer is [the Gospel or ‘Good News’] in Jesus Christ our Lord. So, you see how it is: In my mind I really seek and strive to obey God's law [to do what I know to be good and right]; but because of my [broken and deficient] sinful nature [I don't because] I am a slave to sin. *So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed me through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death.* The law of Moses could not save us, because of our sinful nature. But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.”

“There is no condemnation” rang loudly for me. It would take me years to understand it, but I finally came to the same conclusion Paul did. Knowing my character was lacking, I accepted that God's provision of Grace through Jesus would solve my character deficiency. The Sin Paul is talking about isn't merely “wrongdoing” meaning actions alone, it's “wrong being” meaning having a broken and deficient internal nature something I alone could never fix. The gracious Being God is, He doesn't leave us in our broken deficient state expecting us to be perfect. Nor does He force us to engage Him or to be used for His Purpose, instead He invites us first to accept Him, and then to participate with Him in advancing His redemptive Gospel plan.

There is a fundamental reality of this “God who is here and wants to be found” that is demonstrated throughout Scripture. He continues to invite and engage people with an offer of supernatural life. This should be no surprise since it's how He acted from the beginning of redemptive history as chronicled in the

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**Bible.** Our responsibility is about how we respond to God’s invitations, and how much or how little we are willing to allow Him to transform us.

It should come as no surprise that God still engages people to comfort them and transform them. A friend of mine recently posted this note in remembrance of her mother-in-law Virginia, who died Christmas Eve at the age of 92.

“I miss her already. She was a good mother and person. My favorite memory of her was when I stayed in her house during a blizzard, just the two of us. The wind was howling outside, and we were sitting inside, cozy in pajamas, drinking hot tea and watching Gone with the Wind. She had a silly side that I enjoyed bringing out. She told me a story once of how when she was young and widowed with four children all under the age of 15, and she was struggling emotionally and financially. She was lying in bed one night and the Lord appeared to her in a dream to tell her that He would take care of her, and she could be at peace. It helped her throughout the difficult years to come. I was honored that she trusted me to tell the story to, and that apparently, she told no one else.”

These are stories we should be telling. Like me, maybe folks are afraid how others would react when they hear stories of God and the supernatural. In this post, Virginia claimed to have a supernatural encounter that strengthened her and enabled her to deal with difficult present issues and unknown significant challenges ahead. Something about the encounter gave her confidence God could be trusted, and for her this changed everything. My friend who knew her had no doubt this in fact had happened. That God would provide the strength and means for one of His children to succeed in life and overcome the obstacles ahead should come as no surprise to Christ followers.

The Bible reveals much about the “perseverance of the saints.” Perseverance is about standing firm in faith believing God will do what He promised, and He will provide what you need to do what He’s asked of you. Perseverance is not learned in a Bible study; it is learned in the crucible of life.

Zondervan’s New Encyclopedia of Bible Words says:

“The Greek word *hypomeno* means “to patiently endure.” In the Bible it usually has an active sense. Perseverance is overcoming difficulties; it is facing pressures and trials that call for a steadfast commitment to doing right and maintaining a godly life. The New Testament encourages us to value trials and difficulties, for taken in the right way, they can enable us to develop perseverance (Ro 5:3-4; Jas 1:3-4). When we are under intense pressure, it is all too easy to become discouraged. At such times we need to remember the words of Hebrews, “Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised” (Heb 10:35-36).

Knowing how gracious God is as revealed in Scripture, it was no surprise to Virginia that He would step into her everyday life and encourage this young woman in her times of need. Isn’t this exactly what Jesus would have done? And of course, she had a choice to accept or doubt the message of comfort God offered. In relating her story to my friend, it’s clear Virginia chose to accept God’s gift of comfort and strength. Many folks in our modern church era often find it hard to believe God still does this sort of personal engagement. But why should it be surprising God still intercedes in moments of crisis? I’ve heard of non-Christians in desperate times having dreams and visions; some bringing comfort, and others telling them about Jesus. The Bible reveals the Holy Spirit as the “Great Counselor and Comforter” (John 14:16), who Jesus left in charge to lead His people into “all Truth” (John 16:13). Perhaps our hard-headed and/or hard-hearted

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modern approach to faith, numbs us about many aspects of faith, especially that of the supernatural that early Christians accepted and understood. In John 14:12 Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”

The Bible reveals a rich history of God’s Supernatural Presence breaking into the mundane world of humanity, and the Bible contains countless examples of God’s messengers connecting with humanity. 1 Samuel 3:1-11 provides another early glimpse into this mystic reality. Samuel as a young boy heard his name called out. Thinking it was Eli the priest who he was in service to, he answered three times before Eli realized it was God calling him. The text states, “The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the ‘Word of the Lord’ was rare, and there were not many visions.” Into this void, Samuel is the exception. Notice that Eli does not doubt Samuel’s experience, or God’s ability to engage his young apprentice, and he encourages Samuel to respond appropriately the next time he’s called. The Bible reveals there were times when God’s messengers regularly visited earth and revealed Truth to God’s people through Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, the Apostles John, Peter and Paul, as well as many other saints throughout redemptive history; all of whom had personal interaction with God as a supernatural reality. Redemptive history is the whole story of God taking humanity from the separation of Fallen humanity to the reunification of perfected humanity with God in a new heaven and earth. Scripture has long demonstrated humanity’s awareness of and desire to engage the supernatural. If we accept God can do what He wants, and the supernatural is not superstition; why wouldn’t we conclude such personal experiences of the Supernatural continue today? It may be surprising to many, that two significant and very public supernatural events have occurred in the past 150 years alone. Both were highly publicized and received considerable investigation and notoriety.

The first of these spiritual events occurred in 1858 when Bernadette Soubirous saw visions of the Virgin Mary, who identified herself as “The Immaculate Conception” ( [Saint Bernadette of Lourdes | Biography, Life Story, Miracles, Patron Saint Of, Facts, Body, & Feast Day | Britannica](#) ). As a poor young 14-year-old, Bernadette found herself in the center of a debate between the secular government of France, and the community of faith at large. It was not something she wanted or was prepared for, yet she held fast to the validity of her experience. The Roman Catholic Church investigated her claims and concluded this poor uneducated peasant girl had no idea about the theology of the Virgin Mary as the “Immaculate Conception.” Bernadette was later venerated as a saint. Years later in 1945 the movie The Song of Bernadette was released chronicling Bernadette’s story, and the movie received critical acclaim. In 1960 Andy Williams recorded “The Song of Bernadette” also with great critical acclaim. Both the movie and the song attest to the desire many have to engage the supernatural meaningfully.

The other spiritual event occurred in 1917 in Fatima, Portugal ( [Our Lady of Fátima | Britannica](#) ), where a series of visions were reported, investigated, and validated by the Roman Catholic Church ( <https://gritdaily.com/the-historical-realities-behind-fatima/> ). While World War One was still raging, these visions were considered prophetic about evil events that would soon be birthed by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Including religious repression and persecution, and the development of widespread abortion considered an extreme atrocity at the time ( [100 Years after The Apparitions of Fatima, this “Error of Russia” Continues to Wound the Heart of Mary and Threaten World Peace \(priestsforlife.org\)](#) ). Into this era of

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religious silence, in the middle of a World War crisis, God broke through with a message of consolation and hope. Doesn't that sound like something Jesus would do?

**Some Guidelines on Discerning God's Voice:** Generally speaking, hearing God involves discernment. Based upon knowing Him through Scripture and having a personal relationship, we can generally know God's purposes are for blessing and not for harm, for encouragement not discouragement, for enlightenment not confusion. Here are some of the ways God's voice affects His people versus our own inner voice or our adversary's voice:

<u>God's Voice</u>	<u>Human Ego, Shame, Adversary</u>
Stills me	Rushes me
Leads me	Pushes me
Reassures me	Frightens me
Enlightens me	Confuses me
Encourages me	Discourages me
Comforts me	Worries me
Calms me	Obsesses me
Convicts me	Condemns me

**CHAPTER 12 – CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:** I believe God still does break through into the mundane world to reveal Himself to receptive people. Everything I've studied about the Old and New Testaments of the Bible teach that God is same “then, now and forever.” Some theologians believe that God does things differently in different dispensations. While I agree that God's different covenants with humanity have changed how God's redemptive justice plays out through redemptive history, neither God nor man has changed. God is still God and He'll advance His redemptive plan as it suits Him without changing His nature or character. This may be especially true where the Bible is not known or available to people. It is beyond the scope of this article to do justice to how people can make themselves more receptive to God's messages, but in the [www.authenticdiscipleship.org](http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org) website, there are additional resources to review especially in the Spiritual Formation section, where we explore Christian spiritual practices. For our purposes in this article, we've discussed briefly the main two vehicles for spiritual alignment and transformation with God, which are prayer and Scripture.

1. **PRAYER** – Is often thought of the practice of moving God into some desired action. It includes this, but this isn't the main purpose of prayer. Prayer is the means by which our hearts are connected with and conformed to God's own heart. The Old Testament directive of Leviticus 19:18 is reprised in the New Testament by Jesus as recorded in Matthew 19:19. We know it as “The Greatest Commandment” – To love God with all our soul, mind and body... in other words with our complete being. Prayer is the primary path through which our heart (meaning our emotive and relational inner self) connects with God. Prayer is deliberately pressing into the heart of God, through which we feel God's feelings about ourselves, others, and the world.  
Many people mistake prayer as an attempt to incite God to do what we want Him to do. God is not a magic “Genie in a bottle” that we learn to rub just right so He answers our wishes. Prayer's primary purpose is relational connection. When we're relationally connected with God we sense His love for us, His hopes, and even His dreams about what our future can be as God's love flows in and through us.



When His love has done its work in me, then His love continues to affect the world and people around us.

2. **SCRIPTURE** – Study and meditation on Scripture are the doorway through which Christian discipleship emerges. Prayer, reading and meditating upon Scripture are the Spiritual practices that develop how our mind and heart connect with God’s mind and heart. Through Scripture our mind is conformed to God’s Mind, and we learn to think God’s thoughts. The combination of prayer and meditation is how we learn to express the values of faith, hope and love to others. But the value that is truly transformative is love. **GOD IS LOVE (1 John 4:8, 4:16)** – Note what Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

“And now I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

**Paul’s dissertation on Love is formed in faith, sustained by hope. It is the intent of the Spirit to develop such love in all Christ followers. This is the nature of transformational Christian life. It is not just empty sentiment; it is not merely doing good things. It is the transformational life that is the realistic end goal for all believers.**

3. **FAITH IN ACTION:** As my pastor friend Harold liked to say, “you can’t steer a parked car.” If you’re in motion, you can be moved and redirected by the Spirit. If you’re parked, you’re going nowhere. All of Scripture is directed for people in motion, especially those open to and seeking heavenly redirection. The passage of 1 Corinthians Chapter 13 above does not talk merely about empty sentiment; it speaks of the goal of transformational life God desires for all Christ followers. It is a reality that is being formed within us through the Spiritual disciplines.

**Along these lines Floyd McClung Jr. writes:**

“God wants us to love ourselves [and others] not selfishly, but with His Love. He wants us to think His thoughts about ourselves [and others] – thoughts of kindness, esteem, respect, and trust.”<sup>10</sup>

**Floyd goes on to discuss the importance of enduring in faith,** “Ninety percent of success is finishing (2 Timothy 2:12). Endurance has two aspects: On the one hand, it means a commitment on our part not to give up, a determination to finish. On the other hand, it has to do with God’s enablement. God gives us

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<sup>10</sup> The Father Heart of God, Floyd McClung Jr, Harvest House Publishers, page 51-53

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the Grace to accomplish what He calls us to do. His commands are also His promise of victory. When we come to the end of what is possible for us, then we can see God do the impossible. Faith has not really begun until we believe God for the impossible.”

### **Priest and Mystic Henry Nouwen wrote the following about prayer and meditation:**

“The Jesus Prayer, or any other prayer form, is meant to be a help to gently empty our minds from all that is not God and offer all the room to him and him alone. But that is not all. Our prayer becomes a prayer of the heart when we have localized in the center of our inner being the empty space in which our God-filled mind can descend and vanish, and where the distinctions between thinking and feeling, knowing and experience, ideas and emotions are transcended, and where God can become our host. ‘The Kingdom of God is within you’ (Luke 17:21), Jesus said. The prayer of the heart takes these words seriously. When we empty our minds from all thoughts and our hearts from all experiences, we can prepare in the center of our innermost being the home for the God who wants to dwell in us. Then we can say with St. Paul, ‘I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me’ (Galatians 2:20). Then we can affirm Luther’s words, *‘Grace is the experience of being delivered from experiences.’ And then we can realize that it is not we who pray, but the Spirit of God who prays in us.*”

### **4. Paul Defines the Spirit Led Life in Galatians 5:16-25**

“So, I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

### **Zondervan’s New International Version Commentary offers this interpretation of the above Galatians 5:16-25 passage:<sup>11</sup>**

**Verse 16:** What is the solution to such biting, devouring, and destroying that is all too common among Christian assemblies? The answer, Paul says, is to “live by the Spirit.” Then, and only then, will one cease to gratify the desires of the flesh. It is the Spirit alone who can keep the believer truly free. The contrast between *sarx* (“flesh”; NIV “sinful nature”; GK G4922), on the one hand, and *pneuma* (“spirit”; GK G4460), on the other, is one of the characteristic themes in NT, and particularly of Pauline, theology. It is as important, for instance, as the contrast between the observance of the law and the hearing of faith that has thus far dominated the letter. Although *sarx* can mean the whole person as conditioned by a bodily existence and by natural desires, in Christian vocabulary (especially in Paul), it came to mean a human being as fallen, whose desires even at best originate from sin and are stained by it. Thus, *sarx* came to mean all the evil that one is capable of apart from the intervention of God’s grace in one’s life, i.e., it is

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<sup>11</sup> Zondervan – Pradis Interactive Bible Study Library – Scholar’s Edition, ISBN 0-310-23054-3

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synonymous with "the natural man," "the old nature," or "the sinful nature." Sarx also contains thoughts of human limitation, both intellectually and morally (Ro 7:18). Thus, that which is flesh is incapable of knowing God apart from special revelation and the redemption that removes the barrier of sin (cf. 1Corinthians 2:14).

The other term is pneuma, usually translated "spirit." Its earliest meaning is "wind," "air," "breath," or "life." Later it came to refer to the incorporeal part of a person, which (like breath) leaves at death. These meanings do occur in the NT. But the main emphasis is always on "spirit" as the Spirit of God or related to the Spirit of God. Indeed, it is because God breathes his spirit or breath into a person that that person has breath (cf. Ge 2:7). The incorporeal part of a human being has God-consciousness. In distinctly religious terminology, *the Spirit of God takes up residence in Christians to enable them to understand spiritual things (1Co 2:14), receive Christ as Savior and Lord, call God "Father" (Ro 8:15; Gal 4:6), and develop a Christian personality.* The Spirit is thus the presence of God in a person, through whom fellowship with God is made possible and power given for winning the warfare against sin in the soul.

The Spirit is not natural to a human being in one's fallen state. But this does not mean that by the gift of the Spirit a redeemed person escapes the need to struggle against sin. The Spirit simply makes victory possible--and that only to the degree that the believer "lives by the Spirit" or "walks" in him.

**Verse 17:** A characteristic of the contrast between sarx and pneuma is that the two principles are in deep and irreconcilable conflict. In the sense in which Paul uses the words, the sinful nature does no good and does not desire good, whereas the spirit does no evil and, indeed, opposes anything that does not please God (see Ro 7 for a fuller discussion of this same principle).

The last clause of this verse probably means that the sinful nature keeps a person from doing the good he or she desires (see Ro 7:15-16). Some have maintained that there is no conflict within the Christian because the old nature governed by the "flesh" has supposedly been eradicated. But this is not true. Naturally, the sinful nature is to become increasingly subdued as the Christian learns by grace to walk in the Spirit, but it is never eliminated in this life. So, the Christian is never released from the necessity of consciously choosing to go in God's way and to depend on his grace.

**Verse 18:** The final verse of this section is best taken as a summary in which Paul reminds the Galatians that, though he is now talking of the need to live a godly life, he is not thereby reverting to legalism. Life by the Spirit is neither legalism nor license--nor a middle way between them. It is a life of faith and love that allows a person to be led by the Spirit.

### **The works of the sinful nature (5:19-21)**

That pneuma and sarx (see comment on v.16) are in conflict is now illustrated by contrasting lists of the works of the sinful nature and of the fruit of the Spirit. At the same time, the lists are more than a mere proof of what he has written earlier. For by raising these particulars of conduct, he also provides a checklist for measuring the conduct of those who consider themselves spiritual. If one's conduct is characterized by the traits in the first list, then he or she is either not a believer or else a believer who is not being led by God's Spirit.

**Verse 19:** When Paul says that the "acts of the sinful nature" are obvious, he does not mean that they are all committed publicly where they may be seen. Some are, some are not. Instead, he means that it is obvious to all that such acts originate with the sinful nature, not with the nature given believers by God. Here the full scope of the word *sarx* ("flesh") becomes evident, for the list not only contains the so-called "fleshly" sins, but it also contains sins that emanate from every part of human nature.

Four divisions of sin are obvious in his list: (1) three violations of sexual morality; (2) two sins from the religious realm; (3) eight sins pertaining to conduct in regard to other human beings--i.e., social sins; and (4) two typically pagan sins.

(1) The first three words cover sexual sins. They are obviously intended to be somewhat comprehensive and inclusive. "Sexual immorality" or "fornication" (*porneia*; GK G4518) is the broadest term, denoting any immoral sexual intercourse or relationship. In starting with this vice, Paul begins with what was acknowledged to be the most open and shameless vice of the Greek and Roman world. "Impurity" (GK G174) refers to a person who was either morally or ceremonially unclean. Paul uses it almost exclusively of moral impurity. "Debauchery" (GK G816; cf. also 2Co 12:21) is an open and shameless contempt of what is proper. In this regard it is a fitting term for what is probably intended to be a climax of several evils.

**Verse 20:** (2) Paul goes on to list two sins of religion: "idolatry" (GK G1630), the worship of the creature rather than the Creator (Ro 1:21-25), and "witchcraft" (GK G5758), a secret tampering with and at times a worship of the powers of evil. These two terms are arranged in an ascending horror of evil and indicate that the works of the sinful nature include offenses against God as well as against us or our neighbors. (3) Neighbors are in view in the third section of Paul's list, since it includes much of what would today be called social offenses. Most of the words are self-explanatory. "Hatred" (GK G2397) means "enmities," such as those between classes, nations, and individuals. It is these enmities that have been broken down for those who are in Christ (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:14-16). "Discord" (GK G2251) is the natural outcome of hatred both in the world and in the church. Four out of six of Paul's uses of the word are connected with church life. "Jealousy" (GK G2419) and "fits of rage" (GK G2596) can denote both good and bad qualities. There is a godly jealousy or zeal (see comment on 4:17) as well as righteous anger. When either originates from selfish motives and hurt pride, however, it is evil and harms others. "Selfish ambition" (GK G2249) may be translated in many ways: contention, strife, selfishness, rivalry, intrigues. Its basic meaning is a selfish and self-aggrandizing approach to work. "Dissensions" (GK G1496) and "factions" (GK G146) denote a state of affairs in which people are divided and feuds flourish.

**Verse 21:** "Envy" (GK G5784) is so closely related to "jealousy" that it is hard to tell the difference between them, except for the fact that this attitude is always bad. This third set of words shows the sinful nature to be responsible for the breakdown in interpersonal relationships seen in all strata of society.

(4) The final grouping is concerned with sins of alcohol: "drunkenness" (GK G3494) and "orgies" (GK G3269). They denote pleasures that have degenerated into debauchery. There are more items that could be mentioned, for when Paul adds "and the like," he indicates that the list is not exhaustive.

Paul adds a solemn warning, saying that those who habitually practice such things will never inherit God's kingdom. This does not mean that if Christians fall into an isolated lapse into sin through getting drunk or some such thing, they thereby lose their salvation. Rather, Paul is referring to a habitual continuation in sins of the sinful nature, and his point is that those who continually practice such sins give evidence of having never received God's Spirit. When he says that he warned the Galatians of this previously (presumably when he was among them), he reveals that his preaching was never what one might call mere evangelism but that it always contained a strong dose of the standard of morality expected from Christians.

The reference to the "kingdom [GK G993] of God" introduces an entirely new and large subject, one that is an important and complex idea in the New Testament (see comment on Mk 1:15). Here, however, Paul is doubtless thinking of God's kingdom only in an eschatological sense. The phrase "will not inherit" carries the thought back to Paul's words about Abraham in Ch. 3. His point is that those who keep on living in the sinful nature give evidence that they are not Abraham's seed and therefore will not inherit salvation.

### **The fruit of the Spirit (5:22-26)**

Paul continues his contrast between the natural productions of the sinful nature and Spirit that he had begun in v.19. Here, however, he speaks of the "fruit" (GK G2843) of the Spirit (using both a new term and the singular form) in contrast to the "acts" (v.19; GK G2240) or works of which the sinful nature is capable. The term "acts" already has definite overtones in this letter. It refers to what a human being can do, which, in the case of the works of the law (2:16; 3:2, 5, 10), has already been shown to be inadequate. The fruit of the Spirit, on the other hand, suggests that which is a natural product of the Spirit, made possible by the living relationship between the Christian and God through Christ (cf. 2:20; Jn 15:1-17). The singular form stresses that these qualities are a unity, like a bunch of grapes instead of separate pieces of fruit, and also that they should all be found in all Christians. In this they differ from the "gifts" of the Spirit, which are given one by one to different people as the church has need (1Co 12).

The nine virtues that are the Spirit's fruit hardly need classification, though they seem to fall into three categories of three each. The first three comprise general Christian habits of mind; their primary direction is Godward. The second set primarily concerns Christians in their relationship to others and are social virtues. The last three concern Christians as they are to be in themselves.

**Verse 22:** It is appropriate that "love" (agape; GK G26) should head the list of the Spirit's fruit, for "God is love" (1Jn 4:8), and the greatest of Christian qualities is love (1Co 13:13). In biblical texts it is the association of agape with God that gives the word its distinctive character. Divine love is unmerited (Ro 5:8), great (Eph 2:4), transforming (Ro 5:5), and unchangeable (Ro 8:35-39). It is this love that sent Christ to die for sinners and that perseveres with them in spite of their willfulness and desire to sin. Now because the Spirit of Christ is living within them, believers must show love both to other Christians and to the world. By this, people will know that Christians are indeed Christ's disciples (Jn 13:35).

"Joy" (GK G5915) is the virtue in the Christian life corresponding to happiness in the secular world. On the surface they seem related. But happiness depends on circumstances, whereas joy does not. In the NT a form of the word "joy" becomes a typical Christian greeting (Mt 28:9; Lk 1:28; Ac 15:23; 2Co 13:11; Jas 1:1). Joy is particularly full when what was lost spiritually is found (Lk 15:6-7, 9-10, 32).



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The second of the two most popular Christian greetings is "peace" (GK G1645; see comment on 1:3). Above all, peace is God's gift to us, achieved by him at the cross of Christ. It is peace with God (Ro 5:1) and expresses itself both in peace of mind (Php 4:6-7) and in a practical peace between all those who know God. This latter peace should be seen in the home (1Co 7:12-16), between Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:14-17), within the church (Eph 4:3; Col 3:15), and indeed in all relationships of believers with other people (Ro 12:18; Heb 12:14). Moreover, Christians are to strive for it (1Pe 3:11). The importance of this word is evident in that it occurs in every NT book and eighty times altogether.

"Patience" (GK G3429) is the quality of putting up with others, even when one is severely tried. The importance of patience is evidenced by its frequently being used to describe the character of God, as in the great text from Joel: "Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity" (Joel 2:13).

"Kindness" (GK G5983) is the divine kindness out of which God acts toward humankind. It is what the OT means when it declares that "God is good," as it so frequently does. Christians should show kindness by behaving toward others as God has behaved toward them.

"Goodness" (GK G20) is hard to define. Though it is related to "kindness," it differs from it in being a more active term. The primary idea seems to be generosity that springs from kindness.

The last three virtues are concerned with Christians primarily as they are to be in themselves. They are to be characterized by "faithfulness" (GK G4411), a word that also means "faith," but undoubtedly here means that which makes a person one on whom others can rely--i.e., trustworthiness or reliability. This word describes a faithful servant (Lk 16:10-12), including servants of the Gospel and of Christ (1Ti 1:12; 2Ti 2:2). It describes the character of those who will die for their confession of Christ (Rev 2:10; 3:14). It goes without saying that it is also descriptive of the character of Christ, the faithful witness (Rev 1:5), and of God the Father, who always acts faithfully toward his people (1Co 1:9; 10:13; 1Th 5:24; 2Th 3:3).

**Verse 23:** "Gentleness" (GK G4559) describes those who are so much in control of themselves that they are always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time--e.g., Moses, who is praised for being the gentlest or meekest man on earth (Nu 12:3). This is the spirit in which discipline must be applied and faults corrected (Gal 6:1). It is also the virtue for meeting opposition (2Ti 2:25) and for giving a Christian witness (1Pe 3:15-16).

"Self-control" (GK G1602) is the quality that gives victory over sinful desires and is therefore closely related to chastity both in mind and conduct. This quality enables a person to live and walk in this world without getting one's garments spotted by the world.

These are the qualities of the life that has been claimed by Jesus Christ and is led by the Spirit. "Against such things there is no law" (v.23b). The last clause is most likely an understatement used for rhetorical effect. The law, as Paul has said, was given to restrain evil; but these qualities do not need to be restrained. Hence, no law opposes them. There may also be a sense in which Paul is suggesting that the law cannot be against those who live in this manner because by being so led, they are in principle fulfilling all that the law requires.

**THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT** The aspects of the fruit of the Spirit advocated by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 occur not only here but also elsewhere in the Scriptures. Most of the attributes are those by which God himself lives.

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### Definition of the Attributes of God that are to be Attributed for Christians:

- 1) **Love:** sacrificial, unmerited deeds to help a needy person Ex 34:6; Jn 3:16; Ro 5:8; 1Jn 4:8, 16 Jn 13:34-35; Ro 12:9-10; 1Pe 1:22; 1Jn 4:7, 11-12, 21
- 2) **Joy:** an inner happiness not dependent on outward circumstances Ps 104:31; Isa 62:5; Lk 15:7, 10 Dt 12:7, 12, 18; Ps 64:10; Isa 25:9; Php 4:4; 1Pe 1:8
- 3) **Peace:** harmony in all relationships Isa 9:6-7; Eze 34:25; Jn 14:27; Heb 13:20 Isa 26:3; Ro 5:1; 12:18; Ro 14:17; Eph 2:14-17
- 4) **Patience:** putting up with others, even when one is severely tried Ro 9:22; 1Ti 1:16; 1Pe 3:20; 2Pe 3:9; 15 Eph 4:2; Col 1:11; Heb 6:12; Jas 5:7-8, 10
- 5) **Kindness:** doing thoughtful deeds for others Ro 2:4; 11:22; Eph 2:7; Tit 3:4 1Co 13:4; Eph 4:32; Col 3:12
- 6) **Goodness:** showing generosity to others Ne 9:25, 35; Ps 31:19; Mk 10:18 Ro 15:14; Eph 5:9; 2Th 1:11
- 7) **Faithfulness:** trustworthiness and reliability Ps 33:4; 1Co 1:9; 10:13; Heb 10:23; 1Jn 1:9 Lk 16:10-12; 2Th 1:4; 2Ti 4:7; Tit 2:10
- 8) **Gentleness:** meekness and humility Zec 9:9; Mt 11:29 Isa 66:2; Mt 5:5; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12 self-control G1602 victory over sinful desires Pr 16:32; Tit 1:8; 2:12; 1Pe 5:8-9; 2Pe 1:6

**Verse 24:** It should be evident by this time that the warfare between the sinful nature and the Spirit is both intense and unrelenting. The qualities of each are fundamentally opposite, and those who feel caught in this warfare cannot do the good they would like to do. How, then, is victory to be achieved? What must believers do to triumph? In the final verses of this chapter Paul gives two answers.

First, he reminds his readers that when they came to Christ, they repented fully of the works of the sinful nature and indeed turned their backs on them forever. This act they must sustain. In speaking of this radical repentance, Paul uses the vivid image of crucifixion, though in a different way from such passages as Ro 6:6 and Gal 2:20. In those instances, the verb is in the passive voice ("was crucified," "have been crucified"), and the reference is to what has been done for believers as a result of Christ's death. But in this passage the verb is in the active voice ("have crucified") and points rather to what believers have themselves done and must continue to do. The proper term to describe this act is repentance. Thus, believers have already repented of their former way of life to the degree of actually having executed the old nature. This does not mean that the battle is thereby over, however. As in an actual crucifixion, life lingers even though the criminal has been nailed to the cross. Nevertheless, believers must regard the decisive act as having been done. They are not to seek to remove from the cross what has once been nailed there.

**Verse 25:** The second answer is Paul's reminder that since believers have been made alive by the Spirit, they must also walk by the Spirit. The Spirit leads: they must follow. Indeed, they are to get in line with him or keep in step with him.

**Attached below is the May 12, 2012, Western Seminary San Jose Alumni Newsletter Interview at the time I was beginning to put Authentic Discipleship together as an online ministry. *To be an explorer, you have to ask a lot of questions. Then you need to diligently seek out answers. As you get close you need to know on a lot of doors. Anything worth finding requires a discovery process, and when the door finally opens you joyfully enter. Jesus invites us to be Spiritual Explorers, and when you find the Truth... everything changes. Do yourself a favor... go exploring.***



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INSIDE SPIRITUAL ARBORIST 1-2 / DR. LOUIE'S OWN 3 / SUMMIT DISCOUNT 3 / GOD'S VESSEL 4

# The Western FRONT

where the gospel meets the world



## The Making of a Spiritual Arborist

*Encounter With Fallen Tree Becomes Defining Moment*

*By John Broersma, Western Alumnus of 2011, MA Specialized Ministry*

In the winter of 2002, while enjoying prayer and praise during my morning commute from my home in Scotts Valley to my office in Pleasanton, I encountered an obstacle that would change everything.

At the intersection of Owens and Johnson, about a block from my office, a large weeping willow tree had fallen into the intersection. While pondering how it could have fallen or have been knocked over, God was nudging me. As I pondered the tree, God impressed on me, “It looked healthy, but its heart was rotten.”

The hair on my neck and arms and probably everywhere else immediately rose. The words were not audible; they were more like 30 font bold text inserted directly into my mind. I knew it wasn't my thought, and since I had been praying and asking for guidance I knew God had somehow answered.

But what in the world does this mean? I had no idea. God said what He wanted, and left it at that. So



I drove around the block to take a closer look at the tree. It was about a foot or more in diameter at the base, and where there should have been healthy heart wood, there was a foot-ball sized hole.

Only about an inch or so of healthy material around the perimeter had held the tree upright and giving the resemblance of health. The tree did look healthy, but its heart was indeed rotten. “Lord, what does this mean?”

By this time I was late for work so I drove down the street to my office. I let myself in, told my admin I was not to be disturbed, and locked my door to pray.

*(continued p. 2)*

### IMPORTANT DATES

#### JUNE 6

Free Discover Coaching event on June 13 from 6:30-8:30pm. RSVP by June 6 at <http://westerncoaching.com> or contact Lisa Mueller ([lmuel@westernseminary.edu](mailto:lmuel@westernseminary.edu))

#### JUNE 24

Commencement at Saratoga Federated Church at 4:30 pm. Volunteers needed! Contact Carrie Priest ([carriepriest@westernseminary.edu](mailto:carriepriest@westernseminary.edu))

#### JULY 1

Developing & Delivering Life Changing Messages class (PCW 515S) - FOR WOMEN ONLY. Registration begins July 1. Class begins Oct. 5.

#### JULY 11

Art Therapy Introduction class (CNS 565FS) Audit deadline is July 11. Class begins July 18.

#### JULY 21

Sex Addiction class (CNS 564WS) Audit deadline is July 21. Class begins July 28.

#### AUGUST 9-10

Global Leadership Summit at area churches with discount for Western alumni (p. 3).

#### AUGUST 30

Introduction to Coaching class (MCS 510S). Audit deadline is August 30. Taught as a 2-day intensive September 6 & 7, 8:30am-4:30pm.

Don't forget to use your free “Alumni Audit Opportunity.” See p. 4. Check out Western's course schedules and syllabi at [www.westernseminary.edu](http://www.westernseminary.edu) for a course description, class dates and times.





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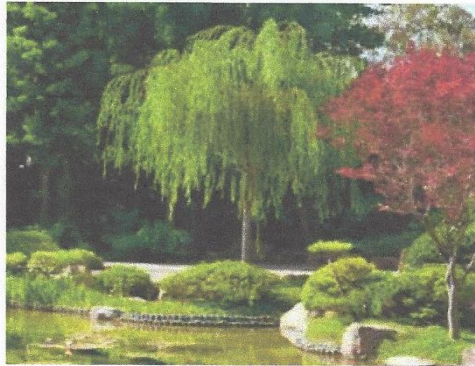
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There was no immediate answer, but as I prayed about the matter over the following weeks and months, God let me know that the tree was me... and also the church. Not unlike a petulant child I said, “Well, what do you want me to do about that?” His answer that came over time surprised me... He wanted me to quit work and go to seminary.



Yeah, right... walk away from a very healthy base salary and an even healthier bonus deal to go to seminary? Even though I knew the pressure and strain of work was killing me... soul first and body second, it seemed ridiculous.

So I bargained with God... “You know, I probably will not be accepted by a seminary and even if I was there is the financial side You’d have to work out, not to mention getting my wife behind the plan. I just can’t see that all happening.” To make a long story a little shorter, I was accepted by both seminaries I applied to, and God

arranged for my company to “invite me to leave” giving me the equivalent of two years of income to walk away quietly,

resulting in my wife telling me to take the money and go to seminary... all within two weeks of when I had to notify Western I was coming. God, You are too funny!

The experience of being a middle aged

man of means and influence entering an academic community where none of that really mattered was humbling, challenging, and immensely rewarding. Although I had been a lay leader in the church and was well read, it was in seminary that I saw a side of God I didn’t know, and I gained an understanding of His great love for humanity throughout redemptive history, of which my story is only a little piece.

So here I am, a Western Seminary graduate, ordination application in process, non-profit discipleship ministry in formation, website semi-functional in development...

who’d a thought?

Though I have no outside income on the horizon, and my wife and I are hoping we don’t outlive our savings, we are hopefully facing an uncertain future. Am I worried? Well, sometimes... but not so much. God has used Western to perform a work of grace in me at my advanced age, and has ignited a passion in me for Him and for discipleship as a means to ignite lay leaders in the church.

The Body (of Christ)’s health occurs from the inside out, and I am convinced that lay leaders are the key for health in the Church. My challenge now is: How do I get there to impact others? I really don’t know. The things I’ve tried so far have not reaped results. But somehow I’m not too worried. My challenge is to obey with the light God provides.

If every believer is an ambassador of the Gospel to a weary and confused world, what would happen if lay leaders throughout the church got caught up as I did in faith and conviction? How might they influence the spheres of life they operate in? You’ll never know what God can do until you believe Him and step out in obedience.

[REDACTED]



## Q&A with John Broersma

**How would you describe the discipleship training tool you’re developing?**

These are the three aspects my ministry is formed around: 1) Biblical Literacy – forming the mind of Christ, 2) Spiritual Formation – forming the heart of Christ, and 3) Leadership Development – forming the mission of Christ. There are many Bible study formats and discipling systems out there, but most focus on Biblical literacy.

I wanted to see an integrated approach that combined all three. What I am doing is segregating my extensive notes from my classes at Western, along with seminars and reflections, into one of the three discipleship categories.

[REDACTED] I look

forward to the opportunity to walk groups of leaders through this integrated discipling experience.

**How did you come up with this idea?**

After attending Western for some while, I was struck by how limited my church experience had been in training and developing lay leaders like me. Many church leaders I’ve spoken to lament that the playing field we call Christianity is “a mile wide, ten miles long, and an inch deep.”

I thought that since I had this fairly extensive digital file of materials topically organized, that just leaving it in my computer would be like burying the talent in the ground. As I prayed

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Alumni Pira Tritasavit, Dr. Louie and John Broersma wait for coffee to finish roasting.



## Dr. Louie's Own

### Recent Alumni Gatherings Foster Community

Alumni never know what they will discover about Western professors outside the classroom. They were taken by Dr. Jeff Louie's novel approach of using a customized popcorn maker to roast coffee beans. If you are wondering, Dr. Louie usually roasts his beans to a medium dark flavor.

This was one of the highlights at an Alumni Gathering that met in April at his home in Millbrae. Previous gatherings have included at least one faculty member and unique settings.

In January, alumni from three decades gathered at a restaurant in downtown San Jose to celebrate Dr. Gary Tuck's 24th year of teaching at Western. In February, many alumni, mostly Marital & Family Therapy degree grads, gathered at the home of Dr. Judith Needham-Penrose in Los Altos, CA.

Alumni discussed ways to serve and network in their local communities. They also responded well to the alumni mentoring program that is launching soon.

Anyone who would like to host a regional gathering at their church, home or local restaurant can contact Jeff Mammen in alumni relations at [jmammen@westernseminary.edu](mailto:jmammen@westernseminary.edu).

## Summit Discount for Alumni

Western alumni can register for the annual Global Leadership Summit on August 9-10, 2012 at a special discounted rate of \$79 (Reg. \$269). GLS is telecast live from Willow Creek Community Church and features world class speakers, music and drama to help equip Christian leaders around the world.

Here are the five Bay Area host sites. Come join us for lunch at Church on the Hill on August 9. Free to our alums.

- San Jose – Church on the Hill (Western hosting a lunch)
- Foster City – Central Peninsula Church
- San Francisco – Sunset Church
- Pleasanton – Valley Community Church
- Richmond – Hilltop Community Church

Contact Charmaine Williams for details at [cwilliams@westernseminary.edu](mailto:cwilliams@westernseminary.edu).



CONTINUED FROM PG. 2

about it, God seemed to be inviting me into this ministry, and a Missionary Church really got excited about the idea and invited me to work under their non-profit charter.

### How did Western equip you for developing this?

I can't tell you how many times during class sessions when a point was being developed that I said to myself, "How come I've never heard this in church?" Through the process, God was changing me from the inside out and I was learning to know and love God more completely and committedly.

I caught a passion for God and discipling as a result of my professors investing themselves in their students where the I.Q. of Biblical literacy combined nicely with the E.Q. of Spiritual

formation. The result was a very naturally occurring ministry outlook of leadership development. I see my ministry sort of as "Western Lite" for church lay leaders.

### What potential impact are you hoping this has?

As I have spoken with many church leaders and missionaries, it is apparent that God is up to something in drawing people into a more vital relationship with Him. I'm hoping that in some small way I can contribute to a greater understanding of the unity in the Church, and the high calling of discipleship. I'm hoping to have local churches get excited at such a prospect and hold local and regional discipleship training sessions for their lay leaders. Hey, you never know what God can do until you step out in faith.