

A classical temple with seven rainbow-colored pillars (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet) stands on a dark, rocky cliff. The temple has a triangular pediment and a base with the inscription 'build for now and for ever'. The sky is dark and stormy, with bright lightning bolts striking down. The foreground shows turbulent, white-capped waves crashing against the base of the cliff.

SEVEN PILLARS PROJECT

build for now and for ever

ZERO
TO
INFINITY

Ed Lyons

ZERO
TO
INFINITY



Seven Pillars Project
Zero to Infinity

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*Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them,
is like a wise man, who built his house upon a rock:
and the rain descended, and the floods came,
and the winds blew, and beat upon that house;
and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*
(Matthew 7:24-25)

*Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn out her seven pillars.*
(Proverbs 9:1)

*Through wisdom is a house built;
and by understanding it is established.
By knowledge shall the chambers be filled
with all precious and pleasant riches.*
(Proverbs 24:3-4)

*Come, My people,
enter into your chambers,
shut your doors about you:
hide yourself for a little moment,
until the indignation be overpast.*
(Isaiah 26:20)

The Cover Story

Imagine a truck unloads stacks of building materials on your property. The driver welcomes you to your new home then leaves. You wonder, What now?! This is like most academic lectures and church sermons that leave us with notes and lists of facts, but not enough to build a complete house of understanding and wisdom.

Using clear patterns, the *Seven Pillars Project* shows you *how* and *why* to build a life that will thrive forever. From beginning to end, you will understand. From foundation to roof, you will be secure.

II **Rainbow**

There is a seven-fold pattern that influences everything from our smallest daily happenings to the great phases of world history. It defines good and evil. Its principles are always in the right order to teach us the stages of endless growth.

II **Storm**

The flood of ignorance and deception in our political and religious institutions is deep and wide. Fear and convenience overwhelm love for truth. As evil grows, the consequences multiply. Greedy selfishness, corrupt human nature, and brazen hypocrisy pressurize a brewing storm that must soon engulf the globe in terrifying chaos and destruction.

II **Steps**

The Spirit of truth will help all who want to escape this flood and prepare for the soon coming tempest that is not a conspiracy theory nor abstract argument. Real power will be given to all climbers on the steps of wisdom. An academic degree or genius-level brain is optional. The sincere desire to be a better person is the essential qualification. Anyone can start with zero!

II **Rock**

Every house has footings, but the ground itself is also part of the foundation. A concrete pad on marbles rolls away. A steel base on sand washes away. To make a permanent house, start with the right location. The rock of Infinite Truth, high above the tsunamis of corruption and evil, is the only place of eternal stability. All wise people establish themselves there.

II **Pillars**

Each person puts their style on their home. However, everyone founded on the rock will be immediately supported by the seven

pillars. They are channels of living power. They will grow in the builder's house of character with every lesson learned and every trial met. The bedrock extends itself into the house through the pillars to provide unbreakable strength in the face of any suffering or death or even the great test of eternity itself.

|| Rooms

It can't be properly shown in the picture, but every house has rooms for different purposes. Similarly, every person has a variety of talents, skills, and gifts. At various times, the providences of life cause us to focus on differing roles and responsibilities so we can grow in effective service.

|| Light

The storm will not last forever. The darkness will be vanquished by the dawn of everlasting day. The Light that shines through His followers now will then fill and restore all things with a glory and fullness that we can now only barely imagine. The lessons of wisdom will be ingrained in us forever. Our current pain and suffering will disappear into the forgotten past. All will be peace and purity and light.

|| Overall

The overall purpose of this book is to help you learn well enough to teach. As you experience success, you will have great things to share with others to inspire them. In turn, you will grow.

But right now, you may feel your mind is like a cluttered office desk or tourist shop with random gifts—nice, but disconnected. You make lists, but the problems and chaos remain. Yet, there is hope! The rainbow that explains the outside world will at the same time build your mind into a powerful, organized system of understanding.

The biggest questions demand the biggest answers which demand the greatest evidence. The *Seven Pillars Project* uses simple patterns that teach you *how* to connect fact to fact. You know with confidence *what* is truth, *why* it is truth, and *where* it is in the ranking of importance.

Zero to eternity. This is the way. Guaranteed. See for yourself.

Friend, my hopeful prayer is that all good things come together for you. In the great cosmic scope of things—eternity past to eternity future—may you find your place and purpose with unending joy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Zero 11
*Removing our filters to take a fresh clean look
maximizes our discoveries and rewards.*

Interactions 21
*We are interactive beings influencing, and influenced
by, everyone and everything in a universe of interactions.*

Faith, Hope, Love 31
*We choose our spiritual interactions by what we believe,
desire, and value as we experience patterns. Love can
create and change patterns.*

Infinite Good Person 51
*Only an infinite good person can satisfy our hope for
happy-ever-after, so only that kind of God matters.*

Evil 69
What is endless is good. Evil ends good.

Judgment 77
*Victims cry for justice. Criminals plead for mercy. Evil
is solved only by judgment.*

Quest 87
We have a dream. Now we look for its fulfillment in reality.

Big Bible Story 103
One sacred text claims to teach all our essentials. Is it true?

*Everything looks different
after you take off the sunglasses.*



*The first principle is that you must not fool yourself
and you are the easiest person to fool.*

— Richard Feynman

Zero

*Removing our filters
to take a fresh clean look
maximizes our discoveries and rewards.*

What is zero?

Once upon a time a researcher went out to find the best spot to build his house. He took soil samples, drilled rocks, and made many notes about surrounding environments. He wore sunglasses all the time so he collected data only from places that were easy to get to. He put all of his data into a computer then ran it through an analyzer that filtered places according to his preferences. The guy built a very comfortable house on a warm, sunny beach, but the winter storms pummeled it into driftwood.

|| **Zero means everything**

A filter removes or modifies whatever passes through it. Sunglasses lower the amount of light reaching the eye, while noise canceling headphones remove sound altogether. A mesh strainer removes the water and keeps the spaghetti. We usually have good reasons to use filters.

However, when looking for the place upon which to build our permanent spiritual home, we don't want to filter out any factors. For example, if I am willing to consider only those places that have flowers, I would be ruling out rocky bluffs and protective forests. If I only look at places near shopping malls or factories, then I am probably not thinking about my long-term health.

Zero filters in the mind actually gives me the most options. I am open to everything because I can see everything. And when it comes time to evaluate pros and cons, I see all those, too.

|| **See for yourself**

You are the biggest beneficiary from removing your filters. Like removing an unnecessary mask from your mouth, you can breathe in fresh air. Taking the dark filters off your mind lets you see the most light. You are starting your research journey with zero load on your back.

This immediately gives you a confidence boost because you know you are being honest with yourself. You know you are thinking your own thoughts and getting in touch with your own life and mind. You know you are being sincere—the opposite of hypocritical. Zero resolves any inconsistencies you might hold.

Sometimes things get so messy and confusing that you just have to sweep everything aside and start fresh all over again.

That is a great opportunity to take time for self-reflection and

true critical thinking, which means thinking about our thinking. Was I fair, open, honest? Did I dig deep? Did I refuse to open any doors in my mind because I didn't want to reveal skeletons or give up secret treasures?

Starting at zero means we are willing to examine and re-examine anything we have learned in the past or will learn in the future. Maybe we will keep all of our beliefs or give them all up. Most likely, we will keep some and lose some, but at zero we don't yet know, and we are OK with that.

Zero ego, zero pride, zero hypocrisy is the gateway to wisdom and to a happy ever after.

¶ Common ground

At zero, we leave our collective baggage behind. We drop our weaponized agendas. Literate and illiterate, rich and poor, young and old, religious and nonreligious, we all become equal little children ready to learn and help each other. Because there are no mountains to climb, and no money to pay, and no degrees to earn, we all find common, friendly ground at zero.

¶ Released to be creative

The inventors of the incandescent light bulb started with the common assumption that the filament must burn. Then they restarted their efforts by reconsidering all the ways of burning, including without oxygen. The rest is history.

The 20th century psychologist, Erich Fromm, said, "Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties." Obviously, we do not let go of the certainty of reality. We let go of the false, emotional certainty of our assumptions about reality.

¶ Courage to discern

The courage to restart at zero is the same courage that keeps you from forcing pieces into the puzzle that don't belong. When you have a consistent, creative belief system put together like a complete puzzle, untrue pieces simply cannot fit. Recognizing misfits is the same thinking that restarts you at zero.

¶ Question

How much do you agree with the culture, religion, philosophy of your parents? Do you agree (or disagree) with them because a) you thought things through on your own, b) you rebel against whatever they say, c) you feel you should obey your elders?

What zero is not

You have two friends. Which one would you hire to build your survival bunker and which one would you pay to paint artwork?

The first said, "I'm going to start with zero knowledge and zero logic. I am going to follow 100% feeling and intuition. I'm a free spirit and will float in the breeze."

The second friend said, "I'm going to start with zero restraints from cultural traditions, popular beliefs, and the idea that my experiences based on convenience can be my infallible guide. I am going to keep my thinking toolkit filled 100% with the tools of reason, logic, careful analysis, and connecting new ideas."

⌘ **False humility**

A common mistake is the self-deception that you are not able to see for yourself. In the desire to remove all filters and distortions from your vision you instead look through someone else's eyes. You think by trusting an expert that you are showing humility. No, you are just degrading yourself.

True humility acknowledges the truth about yourself, nothing more and nothing less. This is because true humility sees one's self clearly, without filters. Both strengths and weaknesses are recognized, dealt with, put to use. False humility devalues self and takes a sort of pride in groveling.

⌘ **Trusting experts**

False humility prepares us to blindly trust experts. It is not that experts are bad. The problem is that you blinded yourself. You lowered yourself and put a human authority on a pedestal.

A true expert is a good teacher that empowers you and makes you more capable. An expert shows you how to use maps, so when the battery dies and the "technical authority" of the GPS stops working, you can still find your way.

Pseudo experts (mass produced by institutions) tell you, "Follow me. Do what I tell you." They don't teach you how to look at the data for yourself, because they can't. Rather, they tell you to trust their conclusions, because they cannot defend them step by step.

The journey we are starting is all about your life. You are not infallible, but you are your own expert in the sense that you make your decisions and live with the responsibility for them.

⌘ Trusting family and friends

Almost by definition, we trust friends for companionship and honest feedback. What we should not entrust to them is our moral responsibility. We often do this in moments of weakness and confusion. We ask for advice, but then we abdicate individuality. We think that we are right because of numbers, because our friends could never be "that bad." They become our mini-gods.

Nobody—not parents, not spouse, not friends—is our moral authority or a 100% safe guide. We are all students of life together. We are all individually responsible for our individual choices.

Therefore, we individually must figure out best and worse, right and wrong, helpful and hurtful. We trust our friends to be supportive, not dictatorial nor controlling.

Friends use reason, wisdom, and knowledge to encourage us to go the right way. They don't use peer pressure to push our life in their direction. They also point out our fear of venturing alone, our peer dependency that keeps us paralyzed in the group.

⌘ Trusting experience and culture

Many people trust their experience as if it were infallible. Instead, they are blind slaves to habit. Real *experience* comes from a variety of careful *experiments* made with the mind freed from prejudice. With lab-like carefulness, results are compared, lessons learned, and long term improvements made.

Now multiply all that mindless experience by the individuals in a culture over generations. Childhood experiences are strongly shaped by cultural tradition. The adult with years of "experience" then shapes the culture. Masses are stuck. Cycles are perpetuated.

Zero is not 0% wisdom.

Zero is not 0% independent thinking.

Zero is not 0% risk.

Zero is not 100% feeling and foolishness.

Zero is 100% reboot.

Zero is 100% fresh start and a new chance.

More Thoughts

¶ Quotes

*[*Note: The quotes section of every chapter is provided to provoke thought, not necessarily to support the point of that chapter. Think them through carefully, from every angle.*]*

Never too old, never too bad, never too late, never too sick to start from scratch once again. — Bikram Choudhury

Human beings are poor examiners, subject to superstition, bias, prejudice, and a PROFOUND tendency to see what they want to see rather than what is really there. — M. Scott Peck

Science is the search for truth, that is the effort to understand the world: it involves the rejection of bias, of dogma, of revelation, but not the rejection of morality. — Linus Pauling

We journalists are a bit like vultures, feasting on war, scandal and disaster. Turn on the news, and you see Syrian refugees, Volkswagen corruption, dysfunctional government. Yet that reflects a selection bias in how we report the news: We cover planes that crash, not planes that take off. — Nicholas Kristof

We can not solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them. — Albert Einstein

A sum can be put right: but only by going back until you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on. — C. S. Lewis

Do not indoctrinate your children. Teach them how to think for themselves, how to evaluate evidence, and how to disagree with you. — Richard Dawkins

Your beliefs become your thoughts.

Your thoughts become your words.

Your words become your actions.

Your actions become your habits.

Your habits become your values.

Your values become your destiny.

— Mahatma Gandhi

[Comment: This process is exactly why we want to re-evaluate our entire belief system.]

II Confronted with zero

"Nothing is certain!"

My dad bellowed in rage as he literally backed me into a corner. My sister said something to break the tension so I could escape.

Why was he yelling at me? Because I had moved away from his religion and his control.

When I was in the shadowy region of doubt, skepticism, and atheism, he had no problem with my position. He barely acknowledged it and moved on. However, when experiences and discoveries turned me in another direction, when I dared to propose that his God be replaced with an Infinite Good Person, when light was shined on his dark inconsistencies, then all the inflated righteousness of hell was unleashed on me as if I was the cause of all his problems.

His argument was that everything—every idea, every claim, every religion—was relative. Therefore, there was no way I could know that I was right and that he was wrong. Days later, I realized that his own argument cut both ways. According to his own self-defense, there was no way that he could know if he was right.

The popular claim that truth is relative, or non-existent, is an absolute truth claim, and therefore contradictory and meaningless.

Starting with zero means we say: MAYBE nothing is certain; MAYBE some things are certain and others are not; MAYBE everything will become certain. We make no claims. We set aside all agendas. We let go of our opinions.

Starting with zero releases all expectations. It is now free to discover, to explore, and to soar. The wide-eyed child within us is free to learn, happy to grow, and eager to become real.

Starting at zero sheds us of all useless weight and baggage. It cuts all ties to the anchors of personal prejudice. Starting at nothing is actually a place of certainty based on humility. It opens us to the possibility of infinity and everything in between.

And infinity is bigger than any corner a raging monster can back us into.

II Re-starting, and re-starting again, from zero

Flip flopping can be a sign of a weak, opportunistic politician. It can also be the sign of a flexible, growing mind. Someone who changes their worldview is someone who has reset their thinking, or at least large parts of it. They restarted with zero. They had the courage to learn new things and see the world more clearly.

As babies, we all start from zero and slowly take in the belief system of our parents. So when I was a child, I thought God was a really nice guy who lived on a glowing white throne above white clouds surrounded by white angels. My marshmallow worldview is what I call it now. Everything was nice and bright, but also blank and empty.

As I grew into youth, I made more and deeper observations. I could not reconcile them with my childhood conceptions. The growing darkness around me led me to the startling and firm conclusion that God was dead, as in non-existent. I started over with a dark sense of abandonment.

A few years later I had a very brief vision that opened my mind to possibilities about God I had not considered. I then set off on a quest to see if such a God actually lived both now and in our past world history. I started over again to see if God could be viewed in living color, to see if He was a real Person.

The point is that my outlook on life reversed course twice. The second time I was conscious of what was happening to me and I purposely started from scratch with my thinking. Starting from zero really does happen.

It was a long and messy slog, but eventually patterns emerged in the evidence (both for and against) and now I stand on a firm foundation. My goal is to show you those patterns from the very beginning so that your journey can be much easier.

II Beliefs and belief systems

A belief is a thought and a feeling. We think something is true, and deep down we feel it is accurate. When we are not sure what to believe, we hold the thought and feeling loosely. When we finally come to a conclusion we nail that belief into our system.

A belief system is an entire collection of beliefs about a situation or an aspect of life or the whole world. When talking about the whole world we call it our worldview or philosophy of life. That is what we are talking about in this book.

Our worldview is a model of everything we know about life. As we grow and experience more things, the model in our mind grows, adjusts, and gains detail. Hopefully, our worldview is both accurate enough and extensive enough at any given moment to handle whatever the actual world throws at us.

If my philosophy of life tells me that everyone is good, that is probably going to get me in trouble when the stranger in the black van offers me a ride. If my worldview values a good work ethic and generosity, then I will probably be a productive member of society.

All of my beliefs, right or wrong, rational or irrational, form my habits, which becomes my character and lifestyle. My belief system makes me who I am because my beliefs are me. They are the thoughts and feelings that inspire me to trust or distrust, hope or give up, love or not to love.

By starting at zero, I am not throwing everything out. I am just checking and double checking to see if my inner world matches my outer world. If they match, and I act accordingly, then I am fully living up to my maximum potential.

By starting at zero, by taking a fresh look at my beliefs about life, I have only failure to lose and success to gain.

II Discussion

- 1) In your own words, What is zero?
- 2) What problem(s) in life could benefit by a fresh look?
- 3) Are you humble if you fake ignorance or weakness? Are you humble if you remain stuck in ignorance or weakness?
- 4) At what point does a person learn enough to truly be an authority, as opposed to a pseudo-expert with a certificate?
- 5) Pick a topic in your mind or in your group. First argue for it as if you really believed it. Then argue against it. No falsehoods. No exaggerations. Be fully on both sides. What fresh perspectives did you gain? Did you gain respect for potential opponents?
- 6) Have you ever decided to entirely rewrite a paper or redo a project? Did someone else make you start over? What were the similarities and differences between choosing it yourself versus being forced to? What emotional reactions did you experience?
- 7) How much of your belief system is from your own thinking, experience, and research; and how much of it is from what your parents, teachers, and media tell you?



*All human interactions
are opportunities
either to learn or to teach.
— M. Scott Peck*

*For good ideas and true
innovation, you need human
interaction, conflict, argument,
debate. — Margaret Heffernan*

Interactions

*We are interactive beings
influencing, and influenced by,
everyone and everything
in a universe of interactions.*

All can see that interactions are universal

Look around you. Anywhere. Everywhere. People talk to each other. Kids play with toys. Birds fly in the air. Fish swim in the water. Wind blows the leaves. Rain falls to the ground. Not everything moves, but everything is affected by gravity and other interactive influences.

You see things because light reflects into your eyes. Photons interact with the objects which then interact with your eyes which then interact with your brain through electrical signals.

Notice that you are seated on a chair which is supported by the floor which rests on a foundation which rests on the ground. There is no visible motion, but there is continual interaction between all the parts. You are attracted to the earth and the earth to you.

Now let's go above the atmosphere, out of the solar system, and above all the galaxies. Look out on the vast universe and watch suns and stars and systems circle each other in silent harmony.

Now dive down to the microscopic realm of molecules, atoms, and quantum particles. Again we see continual swirling interactions of great variety and power.

The whole world is a system of interactions. In fact, we could say the whole universe *is* an interaction, made of sub-interactions.

II What are interactions?

Inter– between, among, reciprocal, together

Action– do, perform, move

Interaction is movement and/or influence between and among things that may then reciprocate back and forth. Object A affects object B and B affects A. Interaction requires at least two things and some kind of force or influence between them.

Interact is act and react. It is things bumping into things. It is objects pushing and pulling other objects. Interaction is positive, such as people shaking hands and talking to each other, or it is negative, like fighting, warring, destroying. It is ideas connecting and modifying and relating to each other. From the microscopic to the galactic, in the physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual realms, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that does not influence, or get influenced by, other things. Everything interacts. Everything depends on everything else. Nothing is a self-existing island unto itself.

From this simple observation (no theory, no dogma) we will unpack how the universe works, and then why it sometimes doesn't work for us. We will find a framework to understand eternity past, present, and future. Like a rainbow exploded from a raindrop, interactions will unfurl themselves into a fractal-like pattern that repeats at all sizes from the quantum to the universal, from the personal to the global, from the natural to the supernatural.

¶ **Mr. Hermit**

"Bah! Humbug!" sneered the hermit when he heard about interactions. "I don't need anyone else. I don't interact, ever!"

Slinging his bag over his shoulder and tucking his philosophy books under the other arm, Mr. Hermit trudged deeper into the desert. For months he lived alone in the wilderness.

He camped in his tent by the spring-fed pond. Every morning he dipped his cup in the water while the birds dipped their beaks. Every morning he cooked his breakfast on an open fire from the wood he cut down in the nearby forest. He left a piece of food for the neighborhood rabbit then he climbed a hill to read his books.

At night, Mr. Hermit lay on his sleeping roll and gazed up at the stars. He pondered their vast distances and what great power must be required to make them so bright.

When the moon became full, the hermit made his monthly trip into town to get more supplies. Then he returned to his pond to maintain his delusion that he never interacted.

~ ~ ~

Do you agree with Mr. Hermit? Can you find a single sentence in that story that has no interactions of people, things, or ideas? Can you find the implied interactions?

Interactions are physical or spiritual

The physical world is the world of measurements and scientific instruments. The spiritual plane is made of personal choices, identity, loyalties, belief systems. We can distinguish between the two levels by learning their causes.

¶ **Physical interactions are caused by force, power**

To grasp a penny, electromagnetic forces between my skin and the copper molecules enable me to feel. Chemical reactions empower my muscles to lift it. When I release it, the penny is attracted to the earth by gravity. When the coin hits the ground, kinetic energy is transformed into acoustical and thermal energy. Forces are like springs connecting all objects and power is the energy that stretches those springs to start chain reactions of energy transformation.

Like an enormous game of pinball, energy is transmitted and transformed from object to object from one side of the universe to the other. The game never stops. Sometimes a person's choice starts a series of unexpected interactions, but after that the laws of physics take over and transformation after transformation cascade outward to the farthest reaches of the universe. Even after the tossed stone has sunk to the bottom and its ripples are no longer visible, the original energy is still spreading through water, air, and rock.

¶ **Spiritual interactions are caused by choice**

Our bodies operate on physical power which make our brains function. The mind is centered in the brain. However, the mind is more than the brain. The soul/spirit is more than the body.

Someone described human beings as embodied souls and ensouled bodies. Unlike animals, we make choices based on more than biology and chemicals. As we will soon see, every choice involves faith, hope, and love. We choose what to believe, trust, expect, anticipate, love, desire, value, etc... This is the higher spiritual dimension that only intelligent beings are capable of experiencing.

My body can be forced to do something, but my inner spirit/soul/mind always chooses its response to that force. We may not be able to avoid what we see or hear, but we choose how to respond internally.

¶ Interactions can be positive or negative

We can blow up a building or we can build a building. An arsonist can burn down a forest or firefighters can manage a prescribed fire. Some actions can be good or evil depending on motive. We can selfishly manipulate or we can unselfishly give. We can create or destroy.

In a few chapters, we will look more closely at what we mean by "good" and "evil." For now, it is enough to use our common ideas of helpful vs. harmful, beneficial vs. damaging.

Positive interactions are good, helpful, beneficial, advantageous, favorable, etc... Negative interactions are evil, harmful, damaging, toxic, unfavorable, etc...

Sometimes we are able to choose between the two kinds of interactions. Sometimes we can only react to what has already been done. For example, we can choose to hold the rope for our rock climbing friend or we can choose to let go. On the other hand, if our partner lets go of our rope and we break our leg, then our only choice is whether or not we will cooperate with therapy.

¶ Spiritual is personal

When I use the word "spiritual", it usually does not mean something overtly religious. Neither does it have a mystical or esoteric meaning. I use it very practically, almost synonymously with "personal".

Everyone is spiritual. Everyone has some kind of preference or opinion about the value of this life and the next. Everyone has some comprehension of "God" or "gods." Everyone is capable of operating at a level above the animal because they have a concept of self, of privacy and personhood.

As we will see in the next chapter, we all make decisions inspired by faith, hope, and love—by what we believe, desire, and value. Those beliefs, desires, and values were in turn shaped by our choices. That cycle is spiritual, personal.

Therefore, we all interact both on a physical level and on a personal/spiritual level.

Interactions have style

"One day I overheard the teacher tell the inspector that I was 'addled' [confused] and it would not be worthwhile keeping me in school any longer. I was so hurt by this last straw that I burst out crying and went home and told my mother about it. Then I found out what a good thing a good mother is. She came out as my strong defender. Mother love was aroused, mother pride wounded to the quick. She brought me back to the school and angrily told the teacher that he didn't know what he was talking about, that I had more brains than he himself, and a lot more talk like that. In fact, she was the most enthusiastic champion a boy ever had, and I determined right then that I would be worthy of her and show her that her confidence was not misplaced."

After only a few months in school, the mother withdrew him and taught him at home. That little boy (who apparently had a degree of dyslexia) was Thomas Edison, the famous inventor of the electric light bulb in the late 1800's.

Looking back later in life, Edison wrote, "My mother was the making of me."

|| Different style

We don't exactly know the learning style of young Thomas Edison. The important point is that it did not fit into the comfort zone of the teacher. Edison appeared confused to the teacher and so the teacher gave up.

Notice that we are talking about learning style. Nobody, including his teacher, said that Edison was hurting others. His style was neither positive nor negative. It was just different.

Different can be misinterpreted as bad by those without the insight and flexibility to appreciate something beyond them. As users of electric lights everyday, we should be thankful that Edison's mother had a talent to develop his talent.

Edison chose to channel his strengths and weaknesses into engineering and chemistry to invent things that help people. He easily could have used his talents to hurt others. In either case, he would invent, he would learn in his own unique way, and he would persist in solving problems. Positive or negative, helpful or harmful, Edison's achievements would be marked by his style.

⌌ Character and personality

Sometimes these two words are used to describe the whole person. In this series, I use *character* to describe a person's moral choices and development, while *personality* describes the style in which those choices are expressed.

For example, a meticulous thief has an evil character expressed in a meticulous personality. Convert the thief to a community volunteer and he will still have a meticulous personality.

The character of a berry can be healthy or poisonous. Its flavor is its personality.

⌌ Your style of interacting

You might sometimes feel like young Thomas Edison. You don't fit in. Others don't understand you. You get criticized, not because you did something hurtful, but just something different. Your way of doing things is not the same.

That is one of the evils of life. Many people do not have the love or patience to see outside of their own narrow thinking. Yet, that does not mean you are bad. It is an opportunity for you to learn their style and to become more confident in yours.

Positive interactions have many flavors. Negative interactions also come in many flavors—often the same flavors as the positive!

This is where honest feedback from family or friends can be helpful. They often see your good and bad traits easier than you do. They also know your personal eccentricities and unique habits, also. Their mirror of you can be the trigger in transforming the evil into good, while keeping your uniqueness as the gift to the world that it was meant to be.

More Thoughts

¶ Quotes

Human beings are social creatures. We are social not just in the trivial sense that we like company, and not just in the obvious sense that we each depend on others. We are social in a more elemental way: simply to exist as a normal human being requires interaction with other people. — Atul Gawande

When we seek for connection, we restore the world to wholeness. Our seemingly separate lives become meaningful as we discover how truly necessary we are to each other. — Margaret J. Wheatley

Absolutely lonely people have few personal interactions of any kind. — Martha Beck

There is nothing, save the selfish heart of man, that lives unto itself. No bird that cleaves the air, no animal that moves upon the ground, but ministers to some other life. There is no leaf of the forest, or lowly blade of grass, but has its ministry. Every tree and shrub and leaf pours forth that element of life without which neither man nor animal could live; and man and animal, in turn, minister to the life of tree and shrub and leaf. The flowers breathe fragrance and unfold their beauty in blessing to the world. The sun sheds its light to gladden a thousand worlds. The ocean, itself the source of all our springs and fountains, receives the streams from every land, but takes to give. The mists ascending from its bosom fall in showers to water the earth, that it may bring forth and bud. — Ellen White

Cherish your human connections: your relationships with friends and family. — Barbara Bush

As connected as we are with technology, it's also removed us from having to have human connection, made it more convenient to not be intimate. — Sandra Bullock

So the opposite of addiction is not sobriety. It is human connection. — Johann Hari

Cherish your human connections: your relationships with friends and family. Even your super weirdo creep cousin. — Joseph Brodsky

Starbucks being an extension of peoples home and work. The sense of community, human connection. That appears to be as

relevant in Turkey, China, Japan and Spain as it is here in America. And Starbucks I think is creating something for people all over the world that has not existed before. — Howard Schultz, CEO

¶ Solitary confinement

"My name is Anthony Graves and I am death row exonoree number 138. I was wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death in Texas back in 1992, where my nightmare began. Like all death row inmates, I was kept in solitary confinement... I lived under the rules of a system that is literally driving men out of their minds....

"I will have to live with these vivid memories for the rest of my life. I would watch guys come to prison totally sane and in three years they don't live in the real world anymore. I know a guy who would sit in the middle of the floor, rip his sheet up, wrap it around himself and light it on fire....

"Solitary confinement does one thing, it breaks a man's will to live and he ends up deteriorating....

"I have been free for almost two years and I still cry at night, because no one out here can relate to what I have gone through. I battle with feelings of loneliness. I've tried therapy but it didn't work. The therapist was crying more than me. She couldn't believe that our system was putting men through this sort of inhumane treatment."

Non-interaction, whether externally or internally imposed, is inhumane. Humans are born to interact.

¶ Discussion

Can you find an exception? Can you find something or someone who never interacts?

What insights into the meaning of life do you gain from either type of interaction?

Can interactions first appear positive then prove to be negative, or vice versa?

What are your favorite ways of interacting with others?

Why do influence and responsibility go together? Can you have responsibility if you have no ability to respond?

List some positive or negative interactions not mentioned here.

Am I responsible for somebody else's influence?

Did the medieval pub, the western saloon, the small town diner and general store fulfill a similar role in society as Starbucks?

*Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement.
Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.*

— Helen Keller



Love has reasons which reason cannot understand.

— Blaise Pascal

Faith, Hope, Love

*We choose our spiritual interactions
by what we believe, desire, and value
as we experience patterns.
Love can create and change patterns.*

All choices are inspired by FHL

We do not get to choose our genetics or our upbringing, but we choose our responses to them. These choices build the core of our being and produce our actions and habits. To deeply know me you must know my choices and why I choose. You need to know my beliefs, desires, and values—my faith, hope, and love (FHL).

II Examples

Every act from talking to hugging to yelling to working has a motive. Our actions come from thoughts and feelings which are a mix of convictions, anticipations, and affections.

For example, I value my teeth and hope to keep them. I believe brushing helps me achieve my goal.

People marry because they love and trust each other and hope to spend a happy life together.

We tip in the restaurant because we value good service, hope to benefit the server, and believe they will appreciate it.

We trust and love the friends we choose and hope to maintain close relationships with them.

My parents instilled a strong work ethic in me, but I now hold to it because I believe it is the backbone of a successful society. I personally hope to provide for my family, and I receive benefits by following it.

II Introduction to faith, hope, and love

Faith is my response to a predictable pattern.

Someone can count from 1 to 99 without skipping. I can then choose to believe they will next say, 100, or I can choose to believe they will stop, or I can choose to believe they will skip 100 just to confuse me. In any case, I will have a degree of faith in something.

Hope is my response to a progressive pattern.

Hope is very much like faith, but with the addition of future anticipation. For example, every summer my parents send me to summer camp, so I believe I will go this summer. However, hope notices that every summer an improvement is made, so hope not only expects to go to camp, but that it will be even better this year.

Love is my response to a profitable pattern.

Profit does not necessarily mean money. It just means that I gain something from the experience. It could be kind words, a smile, words of positive affirmation, a gift, a free lunch, a job offer—

anything that makes me feel better, valued, important, etc...

Of course, I can rightly or wrongly interpret the kind words as being manipulative and hypocritical, which makes me feel worse. However, that is the negative side of a pattern which we will investigate in the next lesson.

¶ **Why is FHL so important?**

Many animals exhibit a limited degree of trust, hope, and love, but they cannot communicate it and appreciate it as humans do. We can base ours on deep emotional or moral rationale, or we can change loyalties on a whim. Animals are limited to reacting to their environment. With them, we have reactions and behavior, and we're more than behavior.

We are all noble beings. The more our power of choice is developed the more we have to think, do, serve, and create. Unlike the animals, we can and should live by the golden rule of treating others as we wish to be treated. Might does not make right. Rather than controlling and violating the rights of others, we gain freedom and power by giving away freedom and power.

Recognizing and respecting and encouraging the golden power within each of us leads to a better society. Positive faith, hope, and love directly inspire permanent goodness.

This power is quickly draining from the world, both individually and collectively. Our humanity is disappearing. We are deceiving ourselves with a negative, cheap form of faith, hope, and love. This can lead only to apathy and self-centeredness, then downward to greed, violence, and chaos.

History mapped that path in the communist revolutions and the French Revolution. When the whole world repeats those footsteps, then we are doomed to suffer the most terrifying conflict and chaos ever recorded. At this point, global tragedy is unavoidable.

FHL can be positive or negative

As the building burned behind her, the little girl cried from the second story window. The firefighter below kept urging her to jump into his arms, but she would not. The fireman was her abusive father. Finally, the fire chief traded the dad with another fireman, then the girl jumped to safety.

¶ Positive and negative

The little girl had a positive image of firefighters. It had been built up by media, school, and trips to the fire station. However, that faith in emergency personnel was overridden by the negative experiences with her own dad.

She did not consciously set out to believe firefighters were good and daddy was bad. No, she naturally came to believe those things based on positive and negative experiences.

The abusive pattern established by the dad built faith in the girl. She came to believe that he was a monster. Of course, being an abuser is bad, but to believe an abuser is abusive is good, because faith is aligning with reality. Belief is based on solid evidence.

To believe a lie is a negative. A delusion is clouding judgment. There is a blind spot in the vision that leaves the believer open to danger, loss, and harm. To believe the truth, however horrible it may be, is positive.

Our goal is not to delude ourselves with nice stories and wishful thinking disguised as hope. Our goal is to find the greatest truth, the spiritual truth underlying the truth in front of our eyes. Only then can we make a fully informed decision. That is positive.

¶ Double negatives

Belief in one thing often requires disbelief in other things. I believe it is daytime so I disbelieve it is night. I know for sure I can't jump over the moon, so I think it is irrational to believe I can jump over the moon.

A mother loves her daughter, therefore she hates the cancer making her sick. This is like the double negative in grammar. If you hate something bad, that means you love the good, which is good. If you love what is bad, that means you hate what is good, which is bad.

Doubt is the negative to faith. A skeptic is the opposite of a believer. However, is it always "bad" to be a skeptic? Isn't it good

to be skeptical of rain on a sunny day or of meeting a polar bear in the Amazon jungle? Neither scenario is impossible, but it is good to be skeptical of claims with low evidence, just as it is good to believe in claims with high evidence.

We cannot believe opposite claims. To believe the truth and doubt the lie are both good.

¶ **Permanent positive**

Probably every culture and religion would agree that faith, hope, and love turned selfish is a bad thing. When my belief denies your right to believe that is negative. When my desires steal from or thwart your desires that is negative. When my pattern of behavior shows I am using or abusing you, then that is negative. I am not loving you or benefiting you. I am draining you. That is bad.

What is good and positive ultimately benefits everybody. True good is permanently good, not temporary euphoria followed by deception and destruction. In fact, one way to destroy positive faith, hope, love is to make a pattern of ups and downs, good and evil, justice and injustice. This pushes people over the brink of cynicism where they deny that goodness can even exist.

It is a good thing to doubt those that are not trustworthy, but what happens when most or all of the people in someone's life are undependable? Positive faith in good people is snuffed out because the belief is established that good people don't exist.

Positive faith, hope, and love is based on, and leads to, permanent goodness which benefits everyone. That makes both this life and the next worth living.

Faith is inspired by predictable patterns

There was once a young Shepherd Boy who tended his sheep at the foot of a mountain near a dark forest. It was rather lonely for him all day, so he thought upon a plan by which he could get a little company and some excitement. He rushed down towards the village calling out “Wolf! Wolf!” and the villagers came out to help him. This pleased the boy so much that a few days afterwards he tried the same trick, and again the villagers came to his help. Many times the boy repeated his false alarm, but less and less people came to his aid. Later, a Wolf actually did come out from the forest, and began to worry the sheep, and the boy of course cried out, “Wolf! Wolf!” still louder than before. But this time the villagers, who had been fooled multiple times before, thought the boy was again deceiving them, and nobody stirred. So the Wolf made a good meal off the boy’s flock, and when the boy complained, the wise man of the village said: “A liar will not be believed, even when he speaks the truth.”

¶ **Predictability inspires faith**

The boy had created a pattern, and although not forced, the villagers learned and trusted the pattern. When their predictions of mischief proved true again and again, they came to have faith in the foolishness of the boy.

This is what intelligent minds naturally do. Patterns lead to predictions. Fulfilled predictions give rise to faith. Intelligent, healthy, positive faith depends on predictability.

¶ **Healthy faith**

Anyone at any time can invent a belief and convince themselves it is true. Right now I can decide that cows really can jump over the moon and that little green men live on its far side. It does not take much to imagine a belief. However, that is not healthy faith.

Healthy faith, whether it be religious or scientific or otherwise is based on evidence. Moreover, it is not just random evidence (which easily leads to conspiracy theories), but patterns of evidence that prove themselves over and over again. Experience, experiments, data lead to true faith, not to blind belief in authorities, coincidences, or fantasies.

Faith is not a feeling of ecstasy or a mystic encounter on a mountaintop. Faith observes the sun rising every day and no

longer questions the next morning. Faith turns on the faucet without doubting that water will flow because it has flowed a thousand times before. Faith comfortably takes hold of daddy's hand because he has been a rock of kindness for years.

Trust and trustworthiness go together, and it requires a well-established pattern to earn trustworthiness. Everyone knows that to trust an untrustworthy person is foolishness. Yet, many people are willingly fooled over and over again.

A pattern does not force faith, but it is there to inspire faith, if the receiver so chooses. A person may believe or disbelieve a predictable pattern. A person may invent a belief out of a random pattern. Patterns speak, but they cannot force.

¶ **Scientific faith**

It is popular to contrast science and faith, as if faith is not a part of science. Healthy faith has always been an essential ingredient in science, but dogmatic faith, traditional faith, popular faith will never be a part of healthy science.

Science observes events, then guesses and tests for the patterns causing those events. When the guesses and tests are sufficiently refined and successfully repeated, a theory or law is established.

The law is not something a scientist enforces. Rather, it is merely a concise description of a pattern of events. It describes past behavior and predicts future behavior. Through the laws of science, scientists are declaring their faith for the future.

Imagine launching a rocket to Mars without scientific faith. Thousands of laws in physics, material sciences, life sciences, engineering, and many other fields are all involved. Faith is needed in each one to bring the astronauts home safely.

There is nothing wrong with having faith in science because it is just having faith in the predictable operations of nature. In other words, science is a system of faith based on physical evidence.

It is paralleled by healthy spiritual faith which bases itself on both physical and spiritual evidence. Just as science is not determined by majority vote, cultural norms, authority's decrees, or ancestral tradition, so healthy spiritual faith is not based on them. Predictable pattern of actual, real truth are all that matters.

Hope is inspired by progressive patterns

There once was an athlete who trained for years so she could row by herself across the ocean. As her training increased in difficulty, her faith and hope increased. Then came the day when she paddled away from the eastern shore on her way to the ocean's western shore. With every mile her hope swelled. After many days she reached the opposite side. Her faith was confirmed, but her hope came to an end. Her achievement was no longer in the future, but in the past. She could now turn her hope to greater goals.

Hope is faith plus anticipation of a better future.

¶ **More!**

Faith travels the flat road with confidence day after day after day. Hope sees the road rising to the mountains where the forests are green and lakes are blue.

One spring day a guy griped to his neighbor, "For years I have watched this grass grow. I cut it every summer. I have faith this season will be no different."

The neighbor replied, "Every summer I improve my garden and get more flowers, fruits, and vegetables. I hope to get even more this year!"

Like the crisp, gentle dawn after a stormy night, hope can rise gradually or it can be dumped on us all at once after winning the lottery. Either way, hope gives us a future focus, an anticipation that today will be better than yesterday, and tomorrow will be better than today.

Hope is belief wrapped in the emotion of eager expectation. Hope is faith blooming into desire. Real hope is faith standing on real evidence and opening its hands skyward.

¶ **Progress**

Faith is satisfied with mere predictability, but hope needs progress, growth, improvement, endless horizons of rich landscapes to explore. Progressive patterns increase in reward and fulfillment. The larger the pattern the larger the hope.

For example, consider the saying, "Living for the weekend." Both student and worker alike trudge through their duties Monday through Friday just so they can earn some kind of reward on the weekend. That hope keeps them going through the week.

Now consider the martyr tied to the stake with flames kindled

all around him. His hope of a future immortality with a loving God is greater than life itself. No mere weekend party could inspire his sacrifice. The degrees of hope are vastly different.

Yet, both are hope. Both the worker and the martyr see progress in the future. Both are living for their better tomorrow.

¶ **Unlimited**

Now let's stretch this idea to the limit and beyond. Would the martyr be so willing if he knew the afterlife was still mixed with suffering and would come to an end? He might. He might choose to be like the weekly worker who knows the weekend is also the beginning of a new week and another cycle of drudgery.

Even small, limited hope is enough to motivate us to keep going, but imagine a perfect world without limits. Our hope would be unlimited! It would be pure and unpoisoned by the nagging thought it will one day end. The dawning of a day without sunset inspires ultimate hope.

Just as the athlete no longer needed hope once she reached her goal, so the believer no longer needs hope when dream becomes reality. However, that applies only to a specific goal. The human heart needs greater goals and greater hope after every success.

As we will soon see, hope and unlimited infinity go together.

Love is inspired by profitable patterns

"I love you," said the mother to the child, and the pretty young woman to the old billionaire, and the kids to their ice cream, and the addict to his needle.

There are so many different kinds and levels of love! Perhaps we can use the poet's insight as our starting point. "Love is an irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired." (Robert Frost)

¶ Benefits

Predictable. Progressive. Profitable. We complete the alliteration. However, profit does not equate merely to money.

When you give to me, I feel loved. I don't feel you love me unless I "profit", or gain, from you in some small or large way financially, physically, emotionally, personally. How can you express love to me without benefiting me with your time, attention, or resources? Where there is no giving, there is no love.

For example, two people get on a crowded train and sit next to each other. They look at their phones. They sleep. They stare out the window. However, they don't talk to each other. Where is even a hint of love?

In the seats behind those two people are two other people who talk and laugh and counsel together. Are they romantically attached? Perhaps, perhaps not. In some way or another, could you say they care for each other? Yes. That's love. They receive from each other. Their relationship benefits each other. They profit from their friendship.

¶ Degrees

You are walking down the street and see a ten dollar bill on the sidewalk ahead of you. A step ahead of you, a stranger also sees the bill and picks it up. Then she turns around and gives it to you. Her kind smile and generosity makes your day brighter.

Now consider your mother (imagine, if needed) who gave you birth, raised you, worked a job or two to provide necessities, and yet took time to read stories to you at bedtime and kissed your scrapes. She was there at your ballgames or recitals and cheered at your graduations. Day after day, year after year, she gave of herself to you.

From which woman did you receive more love: the woman on the street, or your mother? Would you feel less loved by your own

mom if the woman on the street had given you a check for \$10,000? Can love always be boiled down to financial gain? Yet, the loved always profit from those who love them.

¶ **Quality vs quantity**

It is not that quality is good and quantity is bad, or vice versa. Both are important. Yet, we can confuse one for the other, or more often, try to substitute one for the other.

With a kiss from his fiancée, the man went off to war. Many months later, he came home wounded and disabled. His fiancée had broken the engagement leaving the man depressed and homeless. He became a fixture in the small town and most people dropped coins in his hat as they walked by, but no one really talked to him. Quantity, finances, but almost no quality love.

Compare that to a different future for him. He still comes home wounded and disabled, but he marries his sweetheart and she helps take care of him. They don't have much income, but they have each other, activities with limitations, a small family.

The quality vs quantity issue arises because we are both physical and spiritual beings. There seems to be at least a minimum of one required so that the other can be experienced. That leads us to the next situation.

¶ **Level of investment**

Suppose that you are in the hospital. You need a very special procedure that will cost a million dollars. You can barely scrape together a hundred dollars.

In the first scenario, a random billionaire pays your bill through a charity website. You are healthy again and very grateful. In the second scenario, a millionaire relative sells everything he has to pay your bill. He then starts over by living out of his van.

The gain to you in dollars is the same. The resulting physical health is the same. Yet, you feel more loved by one than the other. Which? Why?

Love can create or negate patterns

It started as a simple disagreement, but the two close friends could not, would not, reconcile it. Their stubbornness grew into animosity and finally into separation. They were princes now become kings in their own countries. They were ready to send armies to war to prove their supremacy.

As the time approached for battle, one king paused to contemplate the consequences. He sent a message of apology and willingness to unwind all the years of hatred. The enemy king accepted the message and warmed to the idea.

Mutual annihilation was avoided, not because it was determined by fate, but because one person determined to love first.

¶ Love is greater

Love is similar to faith and hope because the love you feel is proportional to the pattern another person makes in your life. Greater predictability leads to greater faith. Greater profit leads to greater feelings of love.

However, love is different from faith and hope, because love can start a pattern. Remember, healthy faith and hope cannot be made out of thin air. A pattern must first be observed, only then can trust arise. There is a relationship similar to cause and effect. However, love is not dependent on that order.

You can love someone for any reason or no reason at all. You can decide, without any input from them, to start a profitable pattern to them. It does not matter if they are your friend or your enemy.

Faith, hope, and love all consume patterns, but love can also create. Faith and hope work in one direction, while love works in two. It receives, and it gives.

¶ Love can negate negative patterns

The hikers were stumbling around logs and through bushes as they searched for the way home. Then they found the beginning of a road with its yellow dashes. The non-pattern gave way to a familiar, helpful pattern. Similarly, love can negate a non-pattern and fill the empty time or space with comfort and courage.

More than that, love can negate a negative pattern and replace it with something positive. The arguing family can be calmed, issues resolved, and the home filled with warmth and care. Wars can be replaced by cooperation and communication through the

give and take of love.

When we encounter long established and deeply entrenched negative patterns we are tempted to force and dominate our way to a solution. It is good to hate evil and to want to end it now, but when I impose my solution and my self-centeredness on you, then I am not solving the problem. I am actually continuing it. I have fallen victim to the innate self-deception of selfishness.

Especially difficult is resisting the urge to respond in kind when we are attacked. Negative patterns inspire negative reactions. However, love continues to pour water on flames and offer flowers for punches. Like faith and hope, love can ride the breezes, but it can also persevere heroically against the angry winds.

Love is the source of all good patterns

Where do the predictable patterns come from that we trust so much? Where do the progressive patterns come from that encourage us with hope? And where do the profitable patterns come from that make us feel loved?

There can only be one answer—the giving side of love.

With all three patterns, I receive and grow. I become more than what I was. I become more confident, more optimistic, more loving. Out of that abundance, I give to you.

The act of giving is also an act of faith, hope, and love. Therefore, I have still more, and now you have more. Multiplication happened somewhere in the process. By merely being a channel of sharing and generosity, we all benefit.

We are not the source in the sense of being ultimate creators or inventors. Yet, we are a source for each other as we channel faith, hope, and love to each other.

Oh what the world might become if we were continual channels and never blocked the cycles of love!

That vision brings us to a deep question which cannot be answered without tools from the next chapter: Who created the very first pattern of love?

Hope + infinity = paradise instinct

In the late 1600's John Bunyan was imprisoned for holding religious meetings outside of the state church. In the depths of that dungeon, Bunyan began writing a story with universal appeal.

The Pilgrim's Progress unfolds as a dream in which Christian flees the doomed City of Destruction, burdened by guilt, and travels toward the Celestial City. Along a road fraught with swamps, giants, dark valleys, and deceitful guides, he gains allies, endures trials, and nears his journey's radiant end.

The pilgrim is drawn, even driven, forward by the urge of the soul to escape the confines of this current life and forever breathe the radiant atmosphere of eternity, of happy-ever-after.

Paradise instinct is our survival instinct on the spiritual level.

¶ What is it?

We will do whatever it takes to keep living and avoid death. The survival instinct keeps us going through the long dry deserts of life. It kicks in when the house is burning in the middle of the night, rushing us to wake the kids, and escape to the front lawn. The survival instinct wants our body to live. The paradise instinct wants our soul to live.

The child within all of us wants our life story to continue with happy-ever-after. The energy and wonder of our youth desires to continually explore friendships and landscapes. The overworked adult we have become just wants rest and relaxation on a sunny beach. This is all part of our paradise instinct.

We desire a place surrounded by people sharing positive faith, hope, and love. We want all injustice and crime to end. We want pains soothed and all suffering healed. We want the human family to be restored in body, mind, and soul. We want to live forever in peace and harmony.

Paradise instinct craves both quality and quantity of life. It is a specific kind of hope that reaches up to the spiritual dimension and that looks for life beyond the grave. It certainly looks way past the weekend.

¶ We want happy ever after

When you think about it, faith, hope, and love are creative powers that belong in a perfect and endless universe. There is no good reason that they should ever be broken or come to an end.

Good patterns inspire effortless, joyous trust and hope. They are created in us. We don't pay for them or torture ourselves to get them. So why stop?

Only selfish choice and self-deception take us off the course of positive patterns. We are flooded all the time with predictable, progressive, profitable patterns. Only a fool tries to ignore them.

Our paradise instinct is our deep-souled connection to a long ago perfect universe and to its restoration in the future.

Nobody really wants to die. Nobody really wants to live in a perpetual, confusing battle between good and evil, pain and pleasure. We want closure. We want good to win, evil to be eliminated, harmony to reign without a sour note.

Our paradise instinct yearns for Hope to fulfill all its promises so we can actually see and experience them. We want happy-ever-after of the highest kind.

More Thoughts

¶ Quotes

To have faith is to trust yourself to the water. When you swim you don't grab hold of the water, because if you do you will sink and drown. Instead you relax, and float. — Alan Watts

None of us knows what might happen even the next minute, yet still we go forward. Because we trust. Because we have Faith. — P. Coelho

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase. — Martin Luther King, Jr.

The capacity for hope is the most significant fact of life. It provides human beings with a sense of destination and the energy to get started. — Norman Cousins

Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness. — Desmond Tutu

We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope. — Martin Luther King, Jr.

Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage. — Lao Tzu

Hunger, love, pain, fear are some of those inner forces which rule the individual's instinct for self preservation. — Albert Einstein

Even paradise could become a prison if one had enough time to take notice of the walls. — Morgan Rhodes

I have only one dream. It is the oldest... It is paradise. I would like to give paradise to everyone. — Frei Otto

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. — C.S. Lewis

¶ Positive and negative categories of FHL

The common words faith, hope, and love are really more than words. They are categories. Each synonym presents a slightly different facet of the same basic idea. They may also present a different level of meaning as the positive sinks to zero then turns negative.

The lists below are short lists compared to what is used in modern speaking and writing. It would be boring to repeat the same word(s) over and over, so we try to capture facets, levels, and

even blendings of the three categories.

⌘ **Faith synonyms**

Trust; believe; conviction; hold to principles; persuaded by evidence; religious belief; scientific belief; trust in someone or something; loyalty or allegiance to a cause or person; freedom from doubt; confidence that some event will happen; to “really know”; assurance of your position in a relationship; belief that something is true; chosen perspective on information; conviction in the rightness of a principle

⌘ **Faith antonyms**

Culture imposed mindset; traditional thinking; conventional wisdom; doubt; skepticism; distrust; dubious; gullible; naive; credulous; wary; disbelieve; suspicious; judgmental; mistrust; blind faith; dogma; unwarranted assumption; unquestioning belief; fanatical devotion

⌘ **Hope synonyms**

Expectation; optimism; desire; wish; anticipation; cling to a promise; favorable prospects; possibility of future success; general feeling that some desire will be fulfilled; object on which expectations are centered; belief/feeling/intuition that future will get better; outlook that things will become more favorable

⌘ **Hope antonyms**

Despair; pessimistic; despondent; disheartened; resigned; Discouraged; disappointed; dismayed

⌘ **Love synonyms**

Give unselfishly; respect; reverence; fear (archaic); show affection; cherish; desire; appreciate; adore; to hold dear; to greatly enjoy; to value someone or something; to treasure; to appreciate; enamored with; get pleasure from; to bestow grace (undeserved benefits); to do what is eternally good for others

⌘ **Love antonyms**

Hate; fear; prejudice; bigotry; intense dislike; antipathy; aversion; abhor; condemn; hostile; enmity; scorn; detest; despise; loathe; ignore; forsake; abandon

⌘ **The law of faith, hope, and love**

The thief did not want to take the time to work and develop a pattern of trustworthiness with an employer. Instead, he stole what wasn't his.

The drunk knew there were better ways to deal with her issues for the sake of her family, but she had to satisfy the craving now.

Rather than work with the pattern of the daily sun and the seasonal rain, the farmer tugged on his crop to get it to grow faster. He lost it.

Even rebellion and stupidity are prompted by faith, hope, and love, albeit negative.

The thief, drunk, and foolish farmer all tried to break the law of faith, hope, and love, but they only broke themselves. They acted out of the belief and hope that they could do things better their own way to get their treasured objects. They degraded themselves in the effort.

The law of positive faith, hope, love is the law of life. It is the only way the world will work successfully. Even when we try to shortcut it, we prove it true. When we persist in banging our head against the wall, the wall doesn't move, but we bleed.

⌘ **Destroying ourselves**

The exercise of positive faith, hope, and love is the exercise of our higher, spiritual nature. It builds us up and everyone around us. When we indulge selfishness, it always lowers us and works its way out in negative interactions with others. To work against the law of life is to surely destroy ourselves, sooner or later.

I often think that I can get away with some secret vice, but that makes me operate from my body, not my soul; from my animal brain, not my frontal cortex; from my carnal nature, not my higher nature. That then affects how I interact with others, which influences them to react negatively. Over time, the whole web of societal interaction is straining and breaking under the load. Trust breaks down. Courage disappears. Love runs cold.

This is what we see in our world today. Many want to steal, lie, cheat, give up, and generally avoid the hard work "just a little bit." However, it all adds up. Human nature itself has degenerated over the last century almost to the point of no return. Children born today are almost clueless of what positive patterns looks like.

As spiritual patience and integrity dissipate, physical force and

political authority try to maintain order, but this makes people even less human. The cycle is vicious and can only end in disaster.

It takes neither prophet nor psychic to foretell our future. Simple, thoughtful observation shows us that the world is on the verge of unimaginable catastrophe. Our only option is like the one on a doomed airplane. We must find the oxygen mask, put it on, and breathe.

II Discussion

Can you think of other examples of faith, hope, and love?

Can you think of an example that does not involve FHL?

What is the difference between self-care and self-centeredness?

Why is self-centeredness frowned upon?

How many false alarms would it take for you to not believe the boy?

What are key differences between healthy and unhealthy faith?

Can you imagine living in an unending, perfect world?

Why do endings put a damper on hope?

Can you think of an instance where a person feels loved by another but at the same time receives nothing?

What are various ways we profit/gain from being loved?

Do you have a preferred way that really makes you feel loved?

Is love greater than faith and hope?

From where does love receive so that it can give?

How would you describe your paradise instinct?

What kind of eternity you would like?

Is this process and conclusion exaggerated?

*If God were small enough to be understood,
He would not be big enough to be worshiped.*
— E. Underhill



*If God is big enough to be worshiped,
but not good,
then He is not worthy of worship.*

Infinite Good Person

*Only an infinite good person
can satisfy our hope for happy-ever-after,
so only that kind of God matters.*

The 6 God options

Our paradise instinct seeks happy-ever-after. Our human nature of faith, hope, and love seeks personal connection. If eternity is reclining on an empty beach sipping our favorite drinks, then we will soon complain about our solitary confinement.

But who do we complain to? Who is in charge of Paradise?

There are only six options when we look for god(s) or God(s).

Deity is finite or infinite. Combine that with pure good, pure evil, or mixed motives. That gives us six options. How do each of these options fulfill or fail our paradise instinct?

	EVIL	MIXED	GOOD
FINITE	hated	undependable	weak
INFINITE	feared	untrustworthy	Hope!

⌘ Finite: Evil

Hitler. Nero. Stalin. Mao. The devil. Any number of despotic dictators. Demented arch-villains in the movies. All of these are examples of finite beings dedicated to evil. Who would even want an eternity under them?! Finite evil gods often preach Utopia, but are neither willing nor capable of making a true Paradise.

⌘ Finite: Mixed

We could put every human on the planet in this category. We can also put our fictional super heroes like Batman, Superman, and the Avengers in this category. But just because the American people defeated Hitler, or the Avengers saved the planet from an invasion from outer space, does not mean any or all of these people are anywhere close to providing us with an eternally good universe. In fiction, things are getting better (until the next movie!) but in reality things are getting worse. Putting all the finite beings in the world together will not give us infinity, and good intentions mixed with evil thoughts and actions does not bring perfection. Heroes and politicians mean well, but they are not dependable.

⌘ Finite: Good

So where is this perfectly pure person or persons? And how is this finite person so good when they have not lived for an eternity

to find out what is really good? We cannot afford limited good. We need endless good. But in the end, it does not matter. Even if such a person(s) could be found, we still have the problem of finiteness when we really need infinity. Put all the gurus, philosophers, and holy men together (if it can be done consistently, which it can't) and we still have only a tower of wisdom that fails to rise out of the atmosphere much less reach across the universe.

¶ Infinite evil

If an infinitely powerful and totally evil person existed, then we would all be dead and/or continually tortured by now. The fact that there is true, unselfish goodness left in this world proves that an infinitely evil person does not exist. All hope would be destroyed, so this is the most terrifying of all the options.

¶ Infinite mixed

Here is the subtle compromise on which most religions have settled. They use a blend of logic and selfish emotion to form their beliefs. Logic shows that we need an infinite Deity for an infinite eternity. Also, our lack of imagination, our contradictory environment, and our selfish desires lead us to make God in our own image. We want a God like us—mixed.

Popular religion wants a God that is mostly good, but overlooks their favorite forms of evil. Nobody wants to be thought of as being a boring goody-goody. The thinking is: a teeny, tiny, little bit of evil is normal, forgivable, covered by grace, etc....

Popular religions are just human nature on a large scale. We want to be the favored chosen ones, even if it means excluding others who are equally or more worthy. We want to be good, but not purely good. We want to keep our cool vices and mask them with false personas. Thus, we prefer deities who are a little naughty. We want a God who will excuse my transgression, but bring down justice on the “other guys” who threaten the comfortable convenience of our society.

A compromising church wants a compromising God. That will produce a compromised eternity. Which looks like what we have now! So why are we longing for Paradise? Because deep down we know a compromiser is untrustworthy and unpredictable.

¶ Infinite good

The last option sounds the best, but what exactly is infinite good? The next lessons will examine the details.

Good works forever

Not all that glitters is gold. Evil can look good in the beginning.

II “Good” turned evil

Hat makers in the 1800's discovered that mercury made more workable leather. Over time "mad hatters" were those who suffered from the side effects. Good hats caused evil illness.

A British prison offered computer classes to help rehabilitate the prisoners. One convict used the time and knowledge to hack the prison's network and escaped.

Some mothers put sweet drinks in their baby's bottle to keep them quiet, but years later they have cavities and misbehavior.

In the early 1900's glow-in-the-dark radium watch dials were useful to the military. Young women were hired to paint them. Gradually, they fell ill, lost their teeth, had bones rot in their face, and had other harmful side effects.

II “Evil” turned good

It works the other way, too. There are many stories of people with car trouble, or who were laid off, or stuck in traffic at just the right time to keep them from the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York on 9/11. Likewise, there are many stories of people who were kept from buying or using their tickets to get on board the Titanic's first and only voyage.

Only time will tell of the true cost/benefit ratio of government programs, manufacturing processes, and cultural traditions. Immediate gratification vs. building for durability happens on both the personal and societal levels. Appearances can be deceiving.

II Definition

We cannot understand evil without first defining good, because evil is generally thought of as the opposite of good.

As an adjective, "good" means something that has desirable qualities, promotes success, health, or happiness, or is otherwise beneficial. As a noun, it is something with favorable character.

Two things are immediately apparent. Good is strongly subjective and strongly positive. In other words, who determines success, happiness, and favorable character?

Obviously, the user of the word intends an exact meaning, but as we saw in our stories, meaning and appearance can change. In this book, we need a definition of ultimate good.

⌘ **The real test**

The full proof of goodness is revealed over time. Short term is not enough, but how long is long term?

We can fully know the answer only by going to the end of eternity and looking back on history.

But eternity is an infinite, endless timeline! How can we know the end of an endless story?! And so we are brought face to face with our inability to comprehend infinity. Yet, we can still define what is truly good.

Good is what works for eternity or what makes eternity work. If a behavior feels good now, but in the long run hurts me or you, then it is bad. It may appear good for a million years, which gets many people to adopt it. Then, its insidious, cancerous side effect breaks through and we realize that what we thought was long term good was only a very subtle deception to hook more people.

Good survives the longest long term. Evil fails.

Whether the universe breaks down after a million years or a trillion years, it is never good. It is evil.

⌘ **Good, practically speaking**

A good universe, untainted by evil, is a harmonious system of physical and spiritual interactions that grows endlessly. Like a well-oiled machine, atoms to galaxies spin in delightful melody. Life flows through the years uninterrupted by pain or death. New wonders appear. New experiences blossom. Scientific knowledge accumulates, but weapons and fighting are unknown.

Every person is valued, trusted, and trustworthy. Hope swells larger with each new day as friendships steadily deepen. No one lacks. No one hungers or gets sick. Continual contentment blends with eager anticipation of ever new discoveries.

Good grows while evil is forgotten. Goodness is good in and of itself. Evil is pointless, contributes nothing, counterproductive.

⌘ **How do we know what things are good?**

We need an infinite good person to explain everything to us.

They must be infinite so that they know the end of the endless story. They must be good so that they will tell us the truth. They must be a person because they are teaching people.

Infinity is inevitable

II What is infinity?

Infinity is not just very big, it is immeasurably big. Fly a rocket around a large galaxy and it will take a very long time. Fly a rocket around an infinite galaxy and you will never return.

On your calculator, press $1/1$. You get 1. Now $1/.1=10$. Now $1/.01=100$. Keep dividing by smaller and smaller decimals, such as .0000001. You get bigger and bigger answers. Now divide by the smallest of small numbers, zero. The calculator says, Undefined. You just discovered infinity for yourself.

II Three infinities:

Did the universe have a beginning?

No: Then it is infinitely old and evolved.

Yes: Did it begin itself?

Yes: Then it is infinitely powerful and miraculous.

No: Then Infinity began it with miraculous creative power.

II Did the universe have a beginning?

This means, Was there absolutely nothing before everything? If there is a multiverse, then that is everything. Antimatter canceling matter to zero does not count. Those are two things, not nothings. The beginning is when nothing turned into something.

II No beginning: Then it is infinite.

Most scientists used to believe the universe had no beginning. It had an endless past. Whether they are right or wrong does not matter. If the universe has no beginning then it has infinity built into it. That means it has an infinite amount of time to complete evolution and achieve perfection, but look around....

Regardless if the consensus has changed or whether or not you can prove it. If there was no beginning, there is infinity.

II Yes there was a beginning: So did it begin itself?

In this scenario there was absolutely nothing. No time. No space. No forces. No ideas or laws. Nobody around to see that nothing existed. There was not even light or dark. Just nothing. Now we ask the question, Did the universe begin itself?

II Yes it began itself: Then it is infinite.

In this scenario, the universe just pops itself into existence. Whether it began big or little, simple or complex does not matter. It was an unexplainable miracle! Existence exists itself into

existence from non-existence! Or did non-existence burp existence into being?! In either case, it was miraculous, infinite, beyond comprehension power making itself.

¶ **No it did not create itself: Then Infinity began it.**

If the universe was not around forever or did not make itself, then there is only one other option. Someone outside and before the universe, with infinite power to create something that had not previously existed, had to make the cosmos.

¶ **Inevitable conclusion**

The fact that we are here, the fact that the universe exists, means there is infinity. It is inside or outside the universe, but either way, there is infinity.

Again, regardless of how we got here, what keeps us here? Not we ourselves. The universe is kept in existence by infinite power. To spin the cosmos for a moment or for an eternity, requires infinity. From quarks to galaxies, from plants to animals to humans, we do not possess the property of self-existence.

¶ **Mind bending miracles**

Science is the cataloging and analyzing of physical data. It is not power nor control over that data. We have filled a big bucket so far, but the universe is a big ocean of 90% unknown energy with no boundaries. With infinity always ready and able to surprise us, we would be wise to conclude that miracles are always possible, because we are a miracle living in a miracle. That means the universe will never be subject to our explanations or expectations. Infinity is inevitable, will we be humble enough to accept it?

The 4 miracles of existence

A lab technician met a caveman deep in the mountains. She pulled out her flashlight and awed the caveman into worship. Over time, she taught him about light and electricity. He made his own flashlight. He stopped worshipping her.

Then our technician met a shining being who told her every secret thought, healed all of her infirmities, then granted her immortality. She learned some, but not every miracle, so she never stopped worshipping the shining being. Her awe was endless.

Our awe is endless as we consider four miraculous leaps of existence: nothing to law to something to life to mind.

¶ 1) Nothing to law

Before things exist, there need to be laws governing that existence or it will grind to a halt or explode. There need to be established patterns of helpful vs harmful, allowed vs disallowed behaviors. There needs to be a conceptual framework that defines the existence of one thing and how it is similar to or different from other things. The first miraculous leap is nothing to law. Where do laws come from? (How can there be law without mind? See #4)

¶ 2) Law to things

With a framework of consistent laws in place, now things can be brought into existence and operated in harmony with each other. Creation can now work forever without destroying itself. The second miraculous leap is law to something, which requires infinite power.

Also, what makes things obey law? The stoplight is a traffic law, but the stoplight does not stop my car. Neither does the green light make it go. My choice of pedals makes the car work. What makes the electrons and planets orbit? What makes the rock do rock things, or the water do water things?

¶ 3) Things to life

Time, space, matter, and energy is good, but there is still not that undefined quality that we all experience and value, and of which science is incapable of defining—life. We know death is the cessation of life even though the physical parts continue to exist in gradually disintegrating form.

Plants and animals have another level of existence beyond that of dirt, even though they are made of dirt. The third miraculous

leap is something to life. What sparked stuff into life?

A dead man lies on the hospital table. The doctors shock his heart back to life with their electric paddles. They "re-lifed" the man, but what sparked his life in the very beginning?

That question is a vast over-simplification. The human body is a life made of trillions of living cells. Each of them is a living complex as complicated as a modern city. Where does all that life come from? Our only answer is, other life.

But where did life itself first come from? Chemistry labs are nowhere close to answering that question and it looks like they never will.

¶ 4) Life to soul

Every person is a miracle. We have consciousness, intelligence, spiritual choice, appreciation of beauty, formation of morality, language, and meaningful investigation into meaning itself. Animals have never asked questions, but starting at age two we are filled with them!

We are mind, spirit, soul. A body born of molecules in the shape of a human acquires personhood, individuality, value beyond comprehension. How is that?! Where does they come from?! Why do we ask questions, make discoveries, and share experiences that no other species is even aware of?! The fourth miraculous leap is life to soul. We are upright walking wonders!

¶ Infinity is miracle

The mind comfortable with the reality of unexplainable infinity has no problems with miracles. They are simply creative outbursts of limitless power and wisdom. Humility is awed and grateful.

The ego that wants to explain everything in terms of human science is threatened by the unknowable. It cannot be contained, predicted, controlled.

Yet, we are all miracles, and some of us complain about miracles. Much of that complaining can be traced to false religion. This is why it is so important and encouraging to realize that infinity is best wielded by a Good Person.

Only a Person can satisfy paradise instinct

The large brass gong echoed its deep vibrations far and wide. The people came into the great hall with its marble floor and richly cushioned chairs. It was time for worship.

A massive AI robot robed in white ascended the golden throne. It raised its hands in blessing over the crowd. The people prostrated themselves as they chanted praises.

¶ AI is limited

In this age of almighty tech, many worship at the altar of AI without realizing it is something created as the sum of human knowledge. Even after programming it to generate new combinations of knowledge, it will still be just a creation. Even though it may in some ways get bigger than us, it is still a mere example of god option #2, finite mixed. It will always be a mix of good and evil, right and wrong, stupidity and wisdom inheriting from its human coders and data.

¶ Only an infinite good person

All of us are spiritual people, positive and/or negative, but spiritual nonetheless. We are souls filled with faith, hope, and love. No machine, robot, artificial intelligence, or Mind-In-The-Sky can understand or communicate with us on a truly personal level. No impersonal essence or set of scientific laws can satisfy our needs or fill the longings of our hearts.

We need a mother's lap in which we can curl up in comfort and a father's shoulders upon which we can sit in safety. We need a warm person who loves us because they are as real as us and chooses to appreciate our uniqueness. Clever, coded fakes will always ultimately fail us.

Only a heart feels another heart. Only a living soul shares the warmth of love and struggles of life. Only spiritual people make and share spiritual patterns of experience. Only an infinite good person can personally believe in me and love me for all eternity while at the same time also giving you and everyone else exactly what they need. Only an infinite good person will have an actual personal relationship with me for eternity.

¶ Only a being of FHL like us can inspire us

If we were robots, then a robot deity would be good enough.

Infinite goodness can design, create, and operate a flawless, but

cold, universe forever. Only an infinite good person has both the ability and the desire to share with us everlasting paradise.

Imagine conversing with this infinite good person. He tells you why he made the universe, it's purpose, and your special place in it. He made you to fill a particular and valuable role. He explains it and it fits you perfectly. With other equally satisfied people, you are ready to explore and help shape eternity.

And you have Someone to return to and tell all about your discoveries and achievements. You have Someone with whom to share all your questions and joys.

¶ **The "paradox" of infinite person**

When we put "infinite" and "person" together, infinity tends to take over. We typically imagine a being of limitless power and endless riches. This is a natural extension of typical arrogant billionaires—beyond compassion and feeling. They have no connection or care for the common person.

However, a real infinite person is infinite in faith, hope, and love, in sympathy and care-giving. This beyond big Person has a beyond big heart. They are person through and through.

Infinite Good Person is the source and sustenance of all personhood. You feel you, because Person is in you enabling you to feel individuality and privacy. Therefore, to really understand our inmost soul and our utmost potential, we do not study our finite selves. We discover endless hope and delight by going deep into the heart, mind, and soul of the Person who is our eternal source.

Any God worth proving cannot be proved

A very big being stands in front of you and booms down to you, "I am infinite." How do you prove or disprove him? And what exactly are you trying to prove? Infinite size? Infinite power? Infinite knowledge, presence, what? If He claims to be eternal, can you go to the end of endless time, look back, then say, Yes or No?

Would your test(s) vary according to the characteristic you are measuring? Is it possible to disprove infinity in one part while at the same time being unable to prove infinity in another part? What if He claims infinity in a dimension we cannot access? What do you do if the being is infinite in an infinite number of ways?

¶ **Worthy of proof**

The only kind of God that can fulfill our desire for eternal paradise is an infinite good God. That is the only God worthy of trying to prove. We know the end results of the other five kinds of gods, so we won't bother with them.

It's not hard to tell that the being in front of us is a person, or at least looks and acts like a person. However, he claims to be infinite and purely good. These are just the claims we want to hear, but how do we prove, or disprove, them?

We could challenge the Big Guy to an arm wrestling contest, but his undefeated status just proves he is bigger than everyone else. We still don't know if he is infinite.

We could verify his impeccable resume and his spotless personal references going back centuries, but does that prove he will be good to us tomorrow? We really want this God to be who he says he is, but how can we know? What test do we make that will actually prove or disprove him?

¶ **Arguing the unprovable**

Coming face to face with an infinite being really doesn't prove or disprove anything. Yet we argue as if it would. If God struck you with lightning or boomed at you from the sky, then what? Your doubt would only grow bigger because you would then demand a bigger display. Seeing is not believing and we want to believe.

We could be in heaven in front of God's throne for a million years and see some incredible things, but that would only prove things up to our level of understanding and experience to that point. Tomorrow is still another day. Infinity is still beyond us.

So why do we bother with these silly arguments or make our irrational demands? In this case, seeing is not believing. Even in eternity, we still cannot prove tomorrow. We are, and will always be, incapable of measuring the immeasurable.

Because we cannot measure and because we cannot control the future, we can neither prove nor disprove.

¶ **Daddy's arms**

A child does not try to prove her daddy to anyone. And yet, she proves him every time she snuggles securely in his arms. She proves him every day as he provides for her and protects her. She trusts him. She anchors her hope in him. She loves him. And she is loved by him. All day. Every day. That is all the proof she needs or wants. She is happy ever after.

Now, a cold-hearted, steely-minded mathematician would argue that is not proof at all. He would try to cover the white board in data and formulas and logic statements.

If somehow he could prove God's existence for all the world to see, what kind of existence would he prove? A cold, hard, steely one. An abstract God exists, but does He care and should we?

The pure logician scorns the little girl's experience as anecdotal and unscientific. Yet, he is cold, uninspired, and uninspiring. She is happy. He is bitter.

Formulas make rockets fly, but patterns of experience are the fuel of life.

More Thoughts

¶ Quotes

If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning: just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. Dark would be without meaning. — C. S. Lewis

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else. — C. S. Lewis

A philosopher once asked a Christian, 'Where is God'? The Christian answered, 'Let me first ask you, Where is He not?' — A. Arrowsmith

We hear of the conversion of water into wine at the marriage in Cana as of a miracle. But this conversion is, through the goodness of God, made every day before our eyes. Behold the rain which descends from heaven upon our vineyards, and which incorporates itself with the grapes, to be changed into wine; a constant proof that God loves us, and loves to see us happy. — Ben Franklin

Still, even the most admirable of atheists is nothing more than a moral parasite, living his life based on borrowed ethics. This is why, when pressed, the atheist will often attempt to hide his lack of conviction in his own beliefs behind some poorly formulated utilitarianism, or argue that he acts out of altruistic self-interest. But this is only post-facto rationalization, not reason or rational behavior. — T. Beale

¶ Belief in God is reasonable, natural, and hopeful

In this chapter we have examined the three essential qualities of God: infinite, good, and person. This needed to be done because the word, God, is often used like a big box that people fill with their own ingredients. Just because the label says, God, does not mean you get infinite good person inside the box.

This observation is important to note, because in the popular debates about whether or not God exists, I have never heard God clearly defined. What *kind* of God exists? That is my question.

God or gods exist, but is he, she, it, they worth my time?

As we have already seen, there are six options for belief in gods

or God. Everybody believes in some kind of god. At the very least, a person will believe in the gods of “experts” and “authorities.” Arrogant people will believe in themselves as their own god. So to believe in an infinite good person kind of God is just as natural and reasonable.

Belief in an infinite good person is reasonable

We have already looked at the three ingredients and each one meets a human need. Each one has plenty of evidence of its existence. Putting them all together is the best solution for our paradise instinct.

Belief in an infinite good person is natural

The high desert air of eastern Oregon is incredibly clear. You can see thousands of times more stars in the sky than you can see from the city. Their silent orbits draw the heart up and away from the constant stress of artificial life. The pristine beauty of the heavens speaks peace to the soul. In all that wonder, surely there is Someone who cares.

Back on earth, in the foxhole of war or in the devastation of fire, earthquake, or hurricane, the heart also tends to look up for Help. When things beyond our control impact us, we look for One in control. We hope for One who will heal. Religion is not required.

Belief in an infinite good person is hopeful

One thing is certain, we all die. Then what? Many people have had near death experiences, but no one has been truly dead for days then come back and verify to us what lies beyond the grave. From the human point of view, there is death, then there is black.

We need an answer, but we want a good answer. We want hope that there is something better. We want hope that there is a paradise with open doors. Who else can give us hope but an infinite good person?

⌋ Father!

"He's not my father anymore!"

I said it, I felt it, my heart snapped, all in the same instant. Why? Let me give you a little background.

My dad had always been a control freak and demanded total submission from wife and children. He had grown increasingly harsh and violent. Our family was raised in abject fear. He literally demanded that as long as we lived in his house we were to do what he told us to do and to think what he told us to think.

After years of being kicked out of the house and cut off from contact with the family, I was able to reconnect with my brothers and sisters. They told me how envious they were of me! It was that bad.

Yet, I was not prepared for the relentless insanity, or possibly demonic rage, for a solid hour on the phone. He would yell at me, then check if I was still listening, then he would fly off another cycle. I spoke for no more than two or three minutes.

Finally, it was time for me to leave to drive back to school.

A few minutes down the road, I snapped. I turned to my fiancée (who had listened to the call) and said, felt, and thought it all at the same time, "He is not my father anymore." I neither planned nor premeditated it. I reacted. I didn't so much choose it as I realized it and admitted it.

Then in the next moment, I felt a Presence from above that musically and softly whispered in my head, "I will be your Father." Light and peace filled my soul. I relaxed. The tension of years drained away and I knew everything would be all right. I no longer felt fear and intimidation, only pity. I was no longer cowering below. I was looking down on dad, with pity.

Ever since that time, I have never wondered what dad (who is now passed away) would think. I have never asked myself, How would my dad do this? That day, he ceased to be my reference point. For better and for worse, I was a bit like a newborn baby needing to learn about life all over again. Family, love, child rearing, social relationships, I started all over again to learn from my new Father how to be a man.

II Discussion

We need and want an Infinite Good Person, but is there evidence for one?

Did I miss any evidence for the first five options?

Is there evidence for an Infinity? Good? Person?

What is truly good?

Does the existence of infinity scare, concern, or please you?

Explain the two kinds of proof used in this lesson.

How and where do we find the unprovable God?

Which is better: public approval of our "proof" or consistent personal experience that gives us peace and confidence?



*I saw a man secretly toss pebbles of evil into the sea.
He indulged "tiny" selfishness, then justified himself.*

*I saw him turn his back on the waves he created.
The end was a tide that drowned an innocent babe.
Then he complained, cursed God, but did not change.*

— Watcher

Evil

What is endless is good.

Evil ends good.

What is evil?

Once upon a time there were millions and millions of astronauts that lived with each other on a giant spaceship. They were tethered to each other and to the life support system with three conduits labeled: faith, hope, and love. They were safe, well-nourished, and in constant good health. They always felt content, happy, and grateful to be with each other.

One day an astronaut realized that he had the power to cut his connections. He didn't want to. He felt no need to do so. It made no logical sense, and his natural urges admired the unity of every one's connections. Yet, he entertained the painful thought of being different, being "better". Against his better judgment and all the musical warnings playing in his head, he chose to cut the lines.

Evil was born.

Subtle misbehaviors began to spread by curiosity and deception. The keepers of the life support system began making incorrect adjustments which also affected the plants and animals on board.

The crew had never seen fluctuations in the system before and were totally mystified by the ominous failures. For the first time they felt discomfort and forebodings of crises to come.

No reason. No justification. Peace was deteriorating. What was the real problem? How could it be fixed?

⌘ **Not a balancing force**

Some philosophies teach good and evil complement each other. We need the one to appreciate the other. That means evil serves a permanent purpose. That means evil is endless, which makes evil good. Of course, that's a twisted contradiction.

What they could say is that pleasure and pain complement each other temporarily so that we might learn the difference between what is true happiness and what is actual evil. Then, in the end, we could wholeheartedly reject evil, which would end it.

⌘ **Anti-good**

Good stands on its own so well that it can last forever and provide endless joy and fulfillment to all people of positive faith, hope, and love. It is so obviously and innately the way things should be that we don't teach it. It rises up in the human heart entirely on its own.

Though we may have only a vague idea of goodness, light, and

life, we condemn evil as anti-good. It is a wrench in the works, a failure in the system, an immoral choice, a destructive force that must itself be destroyed.

Suffering is an objective statement based on self-reported experiences or observation of other organisms. Even animals know when another animal is in pain.

However, only we humans declare that pain and death ought not to be. We have never seen a perfect system, but we are sure suffering is not a part of it. It is not good.

¶ **Choice**

First, evil is a choice against good. It does not make sense that anyone would choose against their own good and the universal good, but generational decay is strong. Ignorance is widespread. Intentional evildoers are deceptive. The basis of choice is freedom. Thus, while we are baffled by the first sin, we are familiar with how later choices lead to still more evil choices.

¶ **Consequences**

Secondly, choices always have consequences. This ripple effect washes over guilty and innocent alike. Misbehaviors are injected into the physical environment along with the selfishness that poisoned the spiritual atmosphere. All of this ripples everywhere unless opposed by a good choice.

¶ **Residual influence**

Remove all evil today and everyone will still have doubts about the system and its Creator. Furthermore, to remove evil, all evildoers must be removed. To do that, the human ties of faith, hope, and love must be willingly severed. That's difficult.

Even aggressors often have an innocent side. Sympathy and blind love bind hearts together that are moving in opposite directions. Even an infinite good person will suffer a massive headache if the discipline or final execution of an evildoer is mishandled. Delicate, painstaking social surgery is necessary to untangle unhealthy relationships to avoid universal rebellion.

Evil influence can outlive an evildoer. The mother must be convinced not only to release her dead criminal son's body, but to condemn his memory. The criminal's friends must be persuaded to give up their right to revenge. Residual influence is the worst.

Source and limits of evil

Light is light. It always has been and always will be. It is not a brightening of the darkness. It is itself, pure, glorious, good.

An infinite good person cannot and will not do bad. No time is needed to develop goodness or to evolve life from death. Everything is perfect from the very beginning. There is never lack of power or wisdom, so there is no possibility of evil. Yet, there is evil. Where did it come from?

¶ **The only possibility**

Evil could not arise from the physical universe itself, because it is under the direct and constant control of Good. It was created good. It is continued good.

The only entity in the world not under the direct control of God is the free will of intelligent beings. Choice can do what a rock or a monkey cannot do—break faith.

Evil was not caused by a lack of power. It arose by distrusting Infinite Power. It exists by resisting and rejecting Good.

Evil has natural consequences in the physical world that steadily avalanche through time, but the engine driving it is the spiritual decision to turn positive faith, hope, and love into its negative.

In the spiritual bank account of life, evil people never deposit. They only withdraw to spend on themselves. Then they resort to all manner of physical and moral violence to deal with their overdrawn accounts.

Spiritual disconnection expresses itself in destructive behavior, which in turn causes physical turbulence. All those whirlpools of suffering become hurricanes of death. And so, here we are.

¶ **Endless evil is no longer evil**

Here is the mistake many religions make, including popular Christianity. If your worldview needs endless suffering then you have just made evil good.

If your idea of good requires something like an eternally burning hell, solitary confinement in everlasting darkness, or endless suffering to keep the saints good, then your ideal is degraded by the deceptive influence of evil. True goodness is so good it stands on its own and grows better and better. Destructive evil cannot help creative good. Therefore, good does not evil, but evil needs good.

If the endless fires of evil are so good, then why didn't the infinite good person make it a feature of the perfect universe from the beginning? Why didn't He light the match before evil began? If hell keeps the saints from sinning in the future, then hell would have prevented them from sinning in the past.

Of course, that logic is absurd. It assumes good is not good enough without evil around to help it. What that line of reasoning is really saying is that good needs evil like a cherry on top of the ice cream to really be good.

¶ **Evil cannot disprove good**

Evil proves good. If there is evil, then there first is good. It is possible to have good without evil, but it is impossible to have evil without good. Because evil is a destructive force, there must already be something good to be destroyed.

For example, evil can blow up a planet. The planet is already there, which is a good thing. If there was no planet in existence, then there could be no evil destruction because there is nothing to destroy. No good, therefore no evil.

Total destruction, the complete triumph of evil, results in utter nothingness. All that is good is first destroyed, then evil simply vanishes. There is nothing left to destroy. There is nothing left for evil to prey upon. Therefore, it simply ceases to exist.

For all the advantages and power evil supposedly possesses (especially in the movies), it is actually weak. Creating something good, something lasting and beneficial, requires planning, organizing, effort. Blowing things up, criticizing good people, doubting obvious truth, these require very little. In fact, it is merely the rejection of true power.

To tell the truth, one must carefully remember the facts in order. To tell a lie, one only needs a lazy imagination. To maintain friendships, we must invest our heart, time, and attention. To break a friendship, we merely need to stop talking.

Both of these examples presuppose a good ideal. It is good to tell the truth and have friends. Only after establishing what is good can we conclude it is evil to do the opposite.

There must be good to have evil. If there is evil, there is good. Seek the good!

More Thoughts

¶ Quotes

If there is a "problem of evil" there is also a "problem of good." Wherever we look we see not only confusion but beauty. In snowflake, leaf or insect, we discover structured patterns of a delicacy and balance that nothing manufactured by human skill can equal. We are not to sentimentalize these things, but we cannot ignore them. — Kallistos Ware

There has to be evil so that good can prove its purity above it. — Buddha

Inside of me there are two dogs. One is mean and evil and the other is good and they fight each other all the time. When asked which one wins I answer, the one I feed the most. — Sitting Bull

A lie doesn't become truth, wrong doesn't become right and evil doesn't become good, just because it's accepted by a majority. — Rick Warren

You assist an administration most effectively by obeying its orders and decrees. An evil administration never deserves such allegiance. Allegiance to it means partaking of the evil. A good man will therefore resist an evil system or administration with his whole soul. — Mahatma Gandhi

He (Jesus) knew that the old eye-for-eye philosophy would leave everyone blind. He did not seek to overcome evil with evil. He overcame evil with good. Although crucified by hate, he responded with aggressive love. — Martin Luther King, Jr.

In one degree or another we all struggle with selfishness. Since it is so common, why worry about selfishness anyway? Because selfishness is really self-destruction in slow motion. — N. Maxwell

¶ Moral vs natural evil

Evil is commonly categorized into two types. Moral evil refers to harm caused by human choices such as fighting, cruelty, murder, prejudice, common self-centeredness, etc.... Natural evil refers to suffering caused by non-human forces such as earthquakes, hurricanes, disease, animals killing each other, etc....

These can be useful classifications, but one must realize the usual assumption that goes with it. The two categories are assumed to have different, unrelated causes. While human choice is logically blamed for moral evil, it is assumed that God started

natural evil. That in turn assumes God is not infinitely good.

But an infinite good person starts with an infinite good universe. Then evolution and growth by life takes place. There is no need for evolution by death and suffering. An infinite good person does not need time to learn what works or not.

Therefore, natural evil must have come from the same place as moral evil—selfish human choice. Just as one choice multiplied and avalanched its way down through time spiritually, so it did physically. For example, an animal may have been tortured and that changed its epigenetics which change future generations which affected other species.

Natural evil is a very sad side effect of moral evil.

¶ Discussion

Are good and evil complementary or opposite? Why?

Describe the types of evil in your own words.

Should "evil" be reserved for only the most serious crimes or should it be applied to everything less than good? In other words, can there be tiny evils?

Is everlasting suffering good?

There is a famous quote that says, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." But how can that be if we are not responsible for someone else's choices?

Augustine said, "The greatest evil is physical pain." Do you agree?

*Justice is love
correcting that which revolts against love.*
— Martin Luther King, Jr.



Judgment

Victims cry for justice.

Criminals plead for mercy.

Evil is solved only by judgment.

Options to deal with evil

The very act of creating the universe was itself a promise and a pledge from the Infinite Good Person to all created beings. Creation has no destruction. Life has no death. Therefore, the beginning of life is an inherent promise of endless, deathless life.

Likewise, as soon as evil arose, Good pledged its end and the restoration of perfect harmony. The promise was made to people of faith, hope, and love by a Person of faith, hope, and love. Therefore, the interruption of evil must brought to its end by faith, hope, and love, not by falsehood, fear, and force.

⌘ **Do nothing**

Good could do nothing. Evil would continue to grow as evildoers continued to do evil. The once in a lifetime exception would become a regular occurrence. Evil would become a part of the pattern of goodness. This would cause all good people to question and doubt. As the pattern of evil grew stronger, making the pattern of goodness weaker, then the faith of the people in Good would also weaken. Some would rebel out of frustration or discouragement. Evil would grow more. Ultimately, evil would destroy all good things in an uncontrollable feeding frenzy. Good himself would be killed because Good ceased being Good by compromising with evil. Good and evil would both cease to exist. Nothing would survive.

⌘ **Instant kill**

Good could instantly kill evil. As soon as the first good person (typically called, saints) chose evil, then Good could have wiped out the evil action before the ripple effect started. However, Good would have needed to also terminate the evil chooser, because more evil choices would follow. But how would the other saints in the universe understand? Suddenly, person X is gone. The saints must then trust Good that X sinned, something they had not seen before. They wonder, What kind of thought? What kind of action? Now they would begin to fear that Good was using force instead of faith, hope, and love. Now their faith is shaken and someone else would also pull back in fear, which would swiftly lead to evil. Because Good over reacts, we have a cycle of ever-growing evil.

⌘ **Redefine**

Good could redefine evil. Whatever unloving, self-centered,

destructive choice the first evil doer made, Good could then immediately declare that to be good. Justice would not need to step in because there is no more evil. However, there are still the rippling side effects and the repetition of that first sin. Good would have to approve those also. Yet, whether you call those choices and consequences moral or immoral, it doesn't really matter. People still get hurt. Suffering grows. Once again, a cycle begins of endless destruction that can only be stopped by the destruction of everything and everyone.

¶ **Reset universe**

Good could reset the universe. This is a very sneaky solution. As soon as the first evil choice is made, Good backs up the whole universe in time and adjusts things ever so slightly so that evil is not chosen. Everyone moves forward again feeling good in their blissful ignorance. However, this is a subtle form of control which negates the freedom of choice. Another version of this is to literally reboot the entire universe with new people and new memories. Again, this is not truly free freedom. Also, infinite Goodness fails at maintaining a universe solely by faith, hope, and love. The good news is that we don't need to wrestle with the dilemmas introduced by these scenarios, because it clearly has not happened. We are very much aware of past and present evil.

¶ **Judgment**

Each of the previous proposed solutions is based on the use of force. A very common mistake is that the problem and solution of evil is a matter of power. Evil is a destructive power, but its origin and ending is a matter of faith, hope, and love. Evil arises from people. People are beings of faith, hope, and love. Therefore, all truly permanent solutions arise from faith, hope, and love.

What we long for is closure—the desire for a clear, satisfactory resolution, even if it is sad. For example, we euthanize our favorite pet if it gets rabies. We cry, but we know the pain ends.

The enforcement of judgment against evil and evildoers is sad, but we know their pain and ours ends. This assumes enforcement is preceded by a full and fair process based on an accurate standard of good and evil which condemns only the guilty and acquits only the innocent. And if the guilty make clear they cannot be happy living with the innocent, then people can put evil behind them once and for all.

What is judgment?

The judge used his judgment to apply the law to the evidence. He then arrived at a judgment that found the defendant guilty. Finally, the police enforced the judgment by taking the criminal to prison to serve his sentence.

¶ **Standard**

Every fair and just judgment is based on an impartial application of the standard that defines good from evil, legal from illegal. If the rules change in the middle of the game, then people rightly get upset. If the rules are applied unequally to one side or the other, then people rightly get upset.

The standard of judgment in a given situation is the laws or rules or principles that govern in that domain. They define right from wrong. They filter acceptable from unacceptable. They are the boundary between helpful and hurtful.

We must not confuse the standard with our understanding of the standard. The "laws" of physics represent our current, growing understanding of how the universe works. They are not decrees that the sun, moon, and earth must obey. Just ask Einstein who put Newton in his place. Just ask Einstein 2.0 who will replace Albert.

If we insist that our understanding is the standard itself, then we leave no room to trust Infinite Good Person when He decides to do something new, even miraculous. He is not arbitrarily changing the law to do something evil, but unfolding the system of laws to reveal something better.

If our minds will not allow something new, then hope dies because it thrives only on greater newness.

¶ **Investigation**

Before a concluding judgment is made, we expect a fair and thorough process of investigation. Without that process we suspect prejudice—pre-judgment. We expect all the evidence to be brought forth and given its proper weight without exaggeration.

If the detective fails to examine the fingerprints on the gun, we rightly suspect conspiracy. If the driver's guilt is based on drinking alcohol a week before the accident, then we also doubt justice.

Before a final judgment is decreed and enforced, we expect intelligent discernment (good judgment) be used. Especially when considering the end of evil and evildoers, we need a process that is

sharper than a surgeon's scalpel to separate between the good and the evil. We need all the evil washed away, but we don't want to lose any innocent babies in the dirty bath water.

¶ Enforcement

The highest standard in the world and the best process in the universe are useless if there is not accurate enforcement. If the determination is 20 years without parole, then that actually needs to happen. Without it, the justice system is just idle threats.

If enforcement of the penalties is disproportionate or uneven, then suspicion of favoritism and conspiracies emerges. If two people with similar backgrounds and committing identical crimes are given identical sentences, but one is enforced and the other is not, then judgment fails again.

When judgment is perceived as failing, then residual influence rears its ugly head and society is put at risk once again by the vengeful justice seeker and/or the angry populace.

¶ In conclusion

All three stages of the judgment process are required to achieve full justice. If the laws are not good, or if the investigative process is incomplete, or if the punishment is not enforced, the cycle of evil does not stop. It will shift or it will spread.

To properly rid the universe of evil, the standard of right and wrong must be based on the knowledge of eternal consequences without any short-term favoritism. The process must discern between good and evil inside the heart as well as public behavior. Then, proportionate penalties must be enforced equally.

Only 100% at every stage of judgment results in justice. Anything less than 100% justice is no justice at all. To fail at any step is to open the door to the skepticism of residual influence, which gives rise to evil and rebellion all over again.

Quarantine

A group of the king's subjects had become infected with a particularly dangerous virus called, *transgressum manica*. This caused their attitudes to sour in bitterness and blame. Then they would lash out violently at all those around them.

The townspeople had many scars and bruises to testify to the harmful side effects of the disease. They went to the king's court to plead with him to do something.

The king was between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, he had promised peace and prosperity to his people. On the other, he genuinely cared for all of them, including the infected ones. He wanted time to try to heal them, but each new day brought reports of more violence and infections.

The king needed time and space and a cure. He paid extra to his top medical doctors while he implemented a strange new plan. He fenced in a large area and supplied it with special food and housing adapted to the violent conditions. He called the area, Quarantine.

Many people, both inside and outside the quarantine, raised questions about the strategy. It seemed unfair. It appeared separatist. It was excluding some of the most needy from society. It felt like a final judgment of doom on the sick.

The king assured the people that one way or another, the quarantine was temporary. He needed time to find and apply a cure. He needed space to protect the innocent and space to deal properly with the sick. Under the proper conditions, anyone could cross from one side to the other.

Although with reservations, the people watched the king's plans unfold. They saw that it was indeed possible to heal infected people. The cure worked so well that healed people on their way out of the quarantine would suffer violence without retaliation. They were welcomed back to society with open arms.

Why weren't all the sick people cured? Because the cured involved choice. While the overall approach was the same, different people required slightly different medications and therapies. This required self-discipline and daily consults with their personal doctor. Many refused immediately or over time.

Finally, there came a time when the only people left in the quarantine were those who refused the treatment. There were no

more patients for the doctors to help. At that point, the quarantine had done all it could do. It was time to close it.

At first thought, the townspeople thought that was a severe judgment, but as they discussed the matter they changed their minds. Their doctors had done all they could do. Healed people had been freely accepted back into society. All that remained were hardened criminals determined to spread their violence. More time would only make matters worse, not better.

The king had been waiting anxiously when representatives from the people arrived. They had reached reluctant, but unanimous, agreement to proceed with the closure of the quarantine.

While the criminals slept, an odorless gas stopped their hearts. After proper burials, the quarantine area was razed and a most beautiful forest was planted on top. The virus died with the criminals and never reappeared.

Society lived happily ever after because they learned an inch becomes a mile and recovering from the disease of evil is a very painful process. Too painful to repeat.

More Thoughts

¶ Quotes

Justice consists not in being neutral between right and wrong, but finding out the right and upholding it, wherever found, against the wrong. — Theodore Roosevelt

True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice. — Martin Luther King, Jr.

Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are. — Benjamin Franklin

Justice cannot be for one side alone, but must be for both. — Eleanor Roosevelt

Until the great mass of the people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each others welfare, social justice can never be attained. — Helen Keller

At his best, man is the noblest of all animals; separated from law and justice he is the worst. — Aristotle

Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment. — Will Rogers

An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind. — Mahatma Gandhi

Justice is the constant and perpetual wish to render to every man his due. — Domitus Ulpianus

Justice without force is powerless; force without justice is tyrannical. — Blaise Pascal

The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice. — Theodore Parker

Where there is no justice, there is no peace. — Martin Luther

Justice should remove the bandage from her eyes long enough to distinguish between the vicious and the unfortunate. — Robert Frost

The vindication we ask is less vengeance than validation: to forgive those who sin against us is first to have acknowledged their sin. — Kim Coleman Healy

Even if not immediately, love will bring us justice, peace, and vindication, and when we open our eyes to the truth that love is wider than the river of grief, we can move toward the mirror and recognize ourselves again. — Amber and Seth Haines

¶ Judgment and closure

At the end of the Interaction chapter, we looked at the story of Anthony Graves, the man wrongfully convicted of murder and sentenced to death. Do you think his family felt the pain of injustice when he was locked up? And what about the family of the victim? They must have felt a sense of relief thinking that the murderer was finally removed permanently.

Now consider the victim's family when Anthony's innocence was established *after* his execution. How bad would they feel knowing that the wrong person paid the price? How secure would they feel knowing that the real murderer still stalked the streets?

Satisfaction, vindication, security are all illusory when judgment is improperly done. Real closure depends on correct judgment.

¶ Discussion

Do you use the same moral standard of judgment with your family, friends, coworkers, strangers, others of different race, religion, culture, etc...?

Are you willing to be ultimately judged similar to how you judge others?

What does it feel like to be investigated and publicly declared innocent after being falsely accused?

Suppose a dirt poor, single mother with kids, steals \$1000 from you. What kind of judgment would you want the court to impose?

Suppose a rich corporation takes \$1000 from you by not honoring their contract. What kind of judgment would you want?



*Science asks, How?
Religion wonders, Why?
Victims cry, How long?
Truth answers all.*

Quest

We have a dream.

*Now we look
for its fulfillment in reality.*

The Religion of Science

Once upon a time there was a windowless room bigger than a world. It contained all the things the millions of inhabitants needed. Generations lived and died in the room having no idea that it was anything but a world.

Then along came something called Science™ promoted by science-ists. With all their instruments they began to describe the distant walls and astronomically high ceiling. They then declared that there was nothing outside the walls. They said that what was inside existed and operated entirely on its own.

Many people believed the scientists, or at least lived in fear of their theories and laws. Science™ shaped their ideas of God, afterlife, and human worth. Scientists might be a little wrong, the people said, but they can't be *very* wrong.

Then a wrinkled old man stood, leaned hard on his cane, and asked, How deep have you drilled into the wall to determine its thickness? What experiment have you done to know if your instruments can even detect outside? What if we are already outside right now?

¶ What is science?

Modern science is called natural science. It is based on the revolutionary concept of the middle ages that actual experiments in nature should determine our understanding of nature, rather than sitting around and philosophizing explanations in our head.

Science demonstrates *how* things work, but it cannot tell us *why* they work or exist. Science can neither prove nor disprove if there is a spiritual dimension to life. Scientists are people who are motivated by positive or negative faith, hope, and love just like any other person. However, their instruments can detect photons, but not spiritual truth. Microscopes can reveal the working of bacteria, but cannot dissect the soul.

Science is the observation, experimentation, and modification of the physical world. It can boil gravity down to a formula, but cannot tell us why gravity exists or why not a different formula.

If there is a spiritual realm (of course, I believe there is), then launching a rocket across the galaxy may still be far short of the goal. Or, maybe, the spiritual realm is already here on the launch pad and permeating the whole world.

It is just as important to know what science is, as well as to know what it is not. It certainly is not an infallible source of truth about the physical world, much less the spiritual world.

¶ **Why is science often opposed to religion?**

Scientists can be opposed to religion, but science cannot be. The atomic particles and fundamental forces of nature give no hint either for or against faith, hope, and love. The believer in God, the believer in the green spaghetti monster, and the believer in nothing can all agree and verify that the speed of sound at sea level is about 700mph.

Much of the problem is caused by people wanting to use their selected evidence from the data banks of science to prove their worldview and disprove the other guy's. There really is no "creation science" or "evolution science."

This is because there is no experiment that can be done to demonstrate our origins. We have no time machine to travel back and watch. We have no way to duplicate a creation event or a worldwide flood or an alien population experiment or a million year erosion event. All views have lots of supporting evidence, lots of counter evidence, and raise tough questions. Humpty Dumpty just cannot be put back together again.

Science is not the problem. It is the misunderstanding of science's natural power and supernatural limitations that is the source of the problem.

Microscopes, nor telescopes, nor quantum computers can detect God or what kind of character He has. This is a matter of soul and spirit, which is the motivation that drives religion, positive and negative.

The Science of Religions

A scientist goes to the lab and experiments with making roses without thorns. He constantly asks, *How?* The same scientist then goes to church and asks, *Why* do roses have thorns?

II Purpose

Science tells us how many calories we need to live. Religion needs to tell us why we live. The purpose of religion is not make up answers to life's questions. Its purpose is to communicate God's answers to those questions.

Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? Where did good and evil come from? Will evil ever end? Why is God invisible to us?

Like science, religion is the organized study of the universe and the dissemination of that knowledge. Science researches the physical, while religion investigates the spiritual.

The major difference between the two is that science is more "bottom up," while religion is "top down." Science catalogs the detailed phenomena in the world, then formulates laws and models to express the patterns it discovers. Religion receives revelations from God that declare the reasons for things. If we could discern the spiritual reasons for things from physical research, then science would be the channel to God. Instead, God must reveal answers to personal questions in a personal way.

II Goal

We are looking for true religion, organized or not, institutional or not. In other words, we are looking for a way to communicate securely with the Infinite Good Person of the universe. We do not want to merely talk *about* God. We want to talk *with* God.

And we want sufficient evidence that it is God. Many religions say, Trust us, pay us, and we'll communicate for you. But we want to eliminate the middle man. We want God directly, dependably.

Prophets and priests, gurus and teachers may help us start, but the goal is not reached until we can individually hear God's voice for ourselves and have the evidence it truly is Him.

II Criteria

Like anything else in life, is what we are being told consistent, complete, creative, and confirmed (CCCC)?

The first witness said the getaway car was blue. The other

witness said it was red. Their stories were not CONSISTENT.

If it does not tell us all the important truth, then it is almost like lying. We need the COMPLETE truth from beginning to end.

If truth does not inspire life in us, then it is unimportant. Spiritual truth has CREATIVE power.

Fiction, myths, and fairy tales might tell consistent, complete stories, but they cannot be CONFIRMED by facts in real life.

¶ List of major religions

Our first task is to find out if the religion at least claims to teach an infinite good person, otherwise it is not worth our time. (Their definitions may differ from ours, but it is better to cast the net too wide so we don't miss anything.) Second, if they teach an IGP, then their God must be able to present a worldview—an explanation of life—that is CCCC. These are basic and reasonable expectations of anyone claiming to be an infinite good person.

Adherents	Religion	Deity
2,400,000,000	Christianity	infinite good person
1,900,000,000	Islam	infinite good person
1,200,000,000	Nonreligious	atheist/agnostic
1,200,000,000	Hinduism	finite sages
400,000,000	Chinese traditional	finite sages
506,000,000	Buddhism	infinite consciousness
300,000,000	indigenous	finite spirits
100,000,000	African traditional	finite beings/powers
26,000,000	Sikhism	infinite consciousness
19,000,000	Juche	North Korea ideology
15,000,000	Spiritism	finite beings
14,000,000	Judaism	infinite good person
5,000,000	Baha'i	infinite good person
4,200,000	Jainism	infinite power
4,000,000	Shinto	finite beings
4,000,000	Cao Dai	infinite good person
2,600,000	Zoroastrianism	evil counterpart
2,000,000	Tenrikyo	infinite good person
1,000,000	Neo-Paganism	finite beings
800,000	Unitarian-Universalism	unity of religions
600,000	Rastafarianism	personality cult
500,000	Scientology	infinite concept

Non-IGP Religions

⌘ **Scientology – 500,000**

"The concept of God is expressed as the Eighth Dynamic—the urge toward existence as infinity." The church "has no set dogma concerning God." [God is concept, not person.]

⌘ **Rastafarianism – 600,000**

"There are many sects of Rastafari that have developed over the years. Its adherents worship [Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia] in much the same way as Jesus in his Second Advent, or as God the Son." [Personality cult of finite person.]

⌘ **Unitarian-Universalism – 800,000**

"We do not have a defined doctrine of God. Members are free to develop individual concepts of God that are meaningful to them. They are also free to reject the term and concept altogether."

⌘ **Neo-Paganism – 1,000,000**

Simplistically: A fluid belief in a pantheon of "gods" that are merely facets of an underlying pantheism. [finite persons, infinite power, but not an infinite person]

⌘ **Shinto – 4,000,000**

A term that applies to the religion of public shrines devoted to the worship of a multitude of gods (kami)." [no infinite person]

⌘ **Jainism – 4,200,000**

Right belief, knowledge, and conduct is the threefold path to liberation—"omniscience without any activity." "Jain texts reject the idea of a creator or destroyer God and postulate an eternal universe." [infinite power/mind, not person]

⌘ **Spiritism – 15,000,000**

"Humans are essentially immortal spirits that temporarily inhabit physical bodies for several necessary incarnations to attain moral and intellectual improvement." [no infinite person.]

⌘ **Juche – 19,000,000**

"The official state ideology of North Korea.... It says that an individual is the master of his destiny, that the North Korean masses are to act as the masters of the revolution and construction, and that by becoming a self-reliant and strong nation one can achieve true socialism." How many of these "adherents" are enthusiastic? [personality cult of the North Korean leader]

‖ **Sikhism – 23,000,000**

"There is but one all-pervading spirit, and truth is its name! It exists in all creation; it does not fear; it does not hate; it is timeless and universal and self-existent, You will come to know it through seeking knowledge and learning!" [infinite force, consciousness]

‖ **African Traditional & Diasporic – 100,000,000**

Generally polytheistic and/or nationalistic. Some are monotheistic, usually deriving from blending with another religion. [no infinite good person of its own]

‖ **Primal-indigenous – 300,000,000**

Varied mixtures of pantheism, animism, fetishism, infinite mind, etc... [No infinite person.]

‖ **Buddhism – 500,000,000**

"Buddhism has taken a wide variety of forms. Some emphasize rituals and the worship of deities, while others completely reject rituals and gods in favor of pure meditation. Yet all forms of Buddhism share respect for the teachings of the Buddha and the goal of ending suffering and the cycle of rebirth." Nirvana is "passing through the gate of Emptiness (sunyata) – realizing that there is no soul or self in any living being, then passing through the gate of signlessness (animitta) – realizing that nirvana cannot be perceived, and finally passing through the gate of wishlessness (apranihita) – realizing that nirvana is the state of not even wishing for nirvana." [infinite force or consciousness.]

‖ **Chinese traditional religion – 400,000,000**

Confucianism, Taoism, Chinese Buddhism, etc... Ranging from pantheism to social ethics to spiritual philosophy. [no infinite person]

‖ **Hinduism – 900,000,000**

"A diverse system of thought with beliefs spanning monotheism, polytheism, panentheism, pantheism, pandeism, monism, and atheism among others; and its concept of God is complex and depends upon each individual and the tradition and philosophy followed. It is sometimes referred to as henotheistic (i.e., involving devotion to a single god while accepting the existence of others), but any such term is an over generalization." [no infinite person.]

‖ **Nonreligious/Agnostic/Atheist – 1,100,000,000**

Self-explanatory.

IGP Religions

II Zoroastrian – 2,600,000

It does not seem possible to know which version of teachings is the real Zoroastrianism. Sometime around 500BCE, Zarathushtra Spitama (translated, Zoroaster) in Iran began teaching about Ahura Mazda.

Ahura Mazda is self-created, omniscient, omnipresent, good, and invisible. He is the source of all truth and light. One day he (by himself and/or through his followers is unclear) will defeat the forces of evil and restore the world to its original perfection.

Clearly, an infinite good person is implied.

However, the evil spirit, Ahriman, is described as uncreated and almost as powerful as Mazda. In another version, evil works through Angra Mainyu, who is one Ahura Mazda's sons. Both versions call into question infinite goodness because evil is along side, or proceeds from, good. That's not good.

A lack of spiritual consistency within inconsistent changes in teaching makes this hard to follow. Which version, if any, is true? And, where is the observable evidence to back it up?

It is also not clear that in the future when good vanquishes evil whether Ahriman is eliminated entirely or just reduced in power. Therefore, the possibility remains that evil may remain in some form. Which means that any and all versions of Zoroastrianism teach an *almost* infinite goodness.

II Judaism – 14,000,000

We now go back in time about 1,000 years before Zoroaster to Moses and the beginning of the Jewish nation and Judaism. This will begin a sequence of development and replacement by the remaining five religions.

Judaism looks to Moses and the Torah (first five books of the Bible) as their source. In his first book, Genesis, Moses looked to the Creator as his source. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had always been in the world, unchanged, but now writing of teachings was beginning.

The core of the Jewish religion was the God-made engraving of the ten commandments on two tablets of stone and the sacrificial services in the sanctuary. From those two fountains flowed laws of government, health rules, and a religious calendar of feasts.

Originally, Israel was to be a theocracy under the direct guidance of Yahweh—the I AM, the Infinite Good Person who ruled over all the false gods of the earth.

Though never fully trusted or obeyed by all the people, the Old Testament scriptures presented God as all-powerful, all-good, and a Person who at times talked face to face with humans.

The mission of Israel was simple: love God and each other with all their heart, then reap the spiritual and temporal blessings. Their abundant lives would make them a light among the nations to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah.

However, after centuries of disobedience, punctuated by a few bright spots, the ancient Jews returned from captivity to make culture of ceremonial rules and bigoted exclusivism. They worshiped their religion about God more than God Himself. In the end, they crucified their Messiah—according to the Christians.

To this day, Judaism in practice is described more as a system of ethics than a religion that builds faith, even though official teaching remains based on an infinite good person. Moreover, those ethics formed much of the foundation of western civilization and the Christian church, which was born in Israel.

¶ Christianity – 2,400,000,000

The core agreement among the thousands of Christian denominations is that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was the incarnation of the Infinite Good Person. He was crucified on a Roman cross to pay the price for the sins of the world. He resurrected and ascended to heaven to continue to minister for us.

That core has remained unchanged for 2,000 years. It has been alternately covered in corruption then reformed in various degrees multiple times. It has frequently excited opposition and other religions have sought to replace it altogether.

Because of this religion's highly splintered nature, we need to delay its analysis until after the next lesson. For now, we need to continue with the historical flow of religions seeking to replace it.

Replacement IGP Religions

II Islam – 1,900,000,000

The single divine personage of Allah replaces the three in one Christian God of Father, Son, and Spirit. Allah's will should always be obeyed because it is always good. Allah is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator who will reward the righteous and punish the wicked in a future, final Judgment Day, just like Zoroastrianism.

Islam teaches that Jewish prophets, like Abraham and Moses, were true messengers from God, but their writings were corrupted by later generations. Muhammad, Allah's final prophet, corrects all previous prophets and only his writings remain true.

This "replacement theology" immediately runs into a couple of inconsistencies. First, the Old and New Testaments are well known to have been copied down through the ages with trivial errors. They do not show any corruptions in teaching.

That first problem leads to the second. We know what Moses and Jesus taught. They leave no room for the claim that they were messengers from God, but false. Either they were true prophets of God or they weren't prophets at all. Islam's claim to revere them as guides from Allah while also accusing them of falsehood is hypocritical and inconsistent. Why pay lip service at all?

Christianity was already well established in the seventh century when Islam grew into acceptance. Together they rid the Middle East of polytheism. It appears that Islam used the cultural-religious progress made by Christianity.

Also, like Zoroastrianism, all we have are the teachings of the founder and interpretations of his spiritual descendants to go on. What actual, public evidence testifies to their truth? How do we know God/Allah spoke authoritatively through them?

Finally, evil's origin is explained as Allah giving permission to tempt humans simply on request by an unhappy angel. This puts the evil in this world squarely on the shoulders of the Good One. That is nothing but a spiritual contradiction.

II Tenrikyo – 2,000,000

Over a millennium later, in the 1830's in Japan, Miki Nakayama claimed to receive revelations from the infinite good Parent of the universe. The basic message is to live the Joyous Life in gratitude for God's love.

Like Islam before it, Tenrikyo claims to be the higher, corrected truth that was only partially understood and/or corrupted by earlier religions. At one point, the Parent tells Nakayama, "I have never taught [the truth of my Heart] to you." No wonder everyone got it wrong!

Again, we see another self-proclaimed messenger without external evidence make a monotheistic claim in a Christianized world. Yet, Christianity and Islam (and everybody else) are wrong. Why didn't the good Parent teach the truth from the beginning? The origin and termination of evil are never addressed.

Tenrikyo teaches an infinite good person in generalities only. It fails the tests of consistency, completeness, and confirmation.

⌘ **Baha'i Faith – 5,000,000**

At about the same time as Tenrikyo, the Baha'i Faith came into existence in Iran. It claimed the founders of Islam, Christianity, and the other major world religions were manifestations of God. They were imperfect and limited to their time and culture, but taught universal principles of love. The Baha'i Faith now brings all those religions into a perfect, worldwide harmony.

Once again, an infinite good person is diluted into a mess of contradictory religions that cannot be harmonized. Once again, we have a replacement theology that looks good only on the surface.

⌘ **Caodai – 4,000,000**

This is yet another put-them-all-together-and-fix-them religion that started in Vietnam in 1926. Its version of the infinite good person is so flexible that it is left to each individual's worldview to name and describe the Supreme Being.

Like the other replacement religions before it, Caodaism attempts to reconcile impossible differences, fails to explain the origin and destiny of evil, and provides no external evidence to confirm its supposed divine source.

⌘ **Summary**

It's human to want peace by uniting on a watered down version of "our ways." However, in the process we must degrade faith, hope and love to platitudes, rather than full experiences based on consistent patterns of truth and experience. Likewise, the infinite good person our paradise instinct needs will exist in words only.

Christianity

The Christian God is eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. He is infinite. He loves all the beings He has made, even the rebels, and is willing to sacrifice Himself for their eternal well-being. He is good. The one Godhead (also called, Trinity) reveals Himself in three Persons: Father, Son, Spirit. Therefore, the Christian religion teaches an infinite good person.

Like the other religions, the devil is in the details. Is the teaching merely surface, or does it go deep enough to help us in our quest?

¶ Christ

Over 5 billion people in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and other religions hold Jesus of Nazareth in high esteem. He is considered a wise teacher, a good prophet, or a divine savior. What is it about this guy that he is so often recommended?

As previously mentioned, the core agreement among the thousands of Christian denominations is that Jesus Christ was the Infinite Good Person in human form. He was crucified on a Roman cross to pay the price for the sins of the world. He resurrected and ascended to heaven to continue to minister for us.

That story has universal appeal and is not equaled elsewhere.

Christianity is the only religion that teaches that God came down to humanity to offer us free grace and salvation. All others teach that we must work our way up to eternal bliss through good deeds, self-discipline, and/or gaining special knowledge.

The unique story of Christ is worth researching, but which branch of Christianity has the true story, because they differ in views of God, method of salvation, authority of sources, composition of Scripture, and major doctrines.

¶ Denominations

Christianity consists of three major divisions along with a miscellaneous group containing denominations that some question if they are even Christian. They may have their own prophets, rewritten Bibles, and/or other private sources of truth. Like other religions, they fail to produce external evidence to confirm their supposed authority.

Turning to the first major denomination, we have Roman Catholicism. It invests ultimate authority of government and doctrine in the pope supported by councils, cardinals, bishops, and

priests. Through official consecration, the clergy can trace their spiritual authority all the way back to the Apostle Peter, who is considered the first bishop of Rome.

The church believes truth comes from God through Scripture and Tradition. Tradition is the teachings handed down from church fathers. The pope, with the bishops, interpret both sources to make official doctrine.

Splitting from the Catholic church about 1000 years ago is the Eastern Orthodox church. It also traces a line of bishops back to the apostles, but does not recognize the pope's authority. Like Catholicism, Orthodoxy interprets doctrine through Tradition. Other differences include wording in the creed, what type of bread should be used in the Eucharist, the role of images in church, and arguably minor theological beliefs.

In the 1500's, the third major branch of Christianity found its origin in the Protestant Reformation. Probably the two most divisive beliefs centered on the method of salvation (by faith in Christ alone rather than by sacraments of the church) and the primacy of Scripture over tradition. For the most part, authority was invested in democratically elected administrators.

In the last 500 years, the most division has been within the Protestant branch. Democratization of government and doctrine led to highly decentralized organization which then gave way to splintering. There is now a wide spectrum of beliefs.

¶ **Finding the real Jesus**

What all Christians agree on is that God revealed Himself perfectly through Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of man. Through historical, ecclesiastical, and/or spiritual means, all three branches seek to trace their authority and teachings back to Him.

Because our main goal is to connect and communicate with the Infinite Good Person, more than solving centuries of church power struggles, we will follow the Christian example of getting back to the basics about Jesus. There is a compelling power to start with the Gospels (four biographies of Christ) then branch out into the rest of Scripture.

We have not yet proved, but we are taking the time to prove, the Bible story of God redeeming humans. We are looking for internal consistency, conceptual completeness, historical confirmation, and creative spiritual power in the soul.

More thoughts

¶ Quotes

(Caution! These quotes purposely represent a wide, conflicting variety of people. They are not meant to be reconciled!)

The right to search for truth implies also a duty. — Albert Einstein

Without free speech no search for Truth is possible; without free speech no discovery of Truth is useful. — Charles Bradlaugh

If God be God and man a creature made in image of the divine intelligence, his noblest function is the search for truth. — Morris West

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 1948) in most solemn form, the dignity of a person is acknowledged to all human beings; and as a consequence there is proclaimed, as a fundamental right, the right of free movement in search for truth and in the attainment of moral good and of justice, and also the right to a dignified life. — Pope John XXIII

Science may eventually explain the world of *How*. The ultimate world of *Why* may remain for contemplation, philosophy, religion. — L. H. Bailey

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world...It is the opium of the people. — Karl Marx

In every country and in every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own. — Thomas Jefferson

Religion is about turning untested belief into unshakable truth through the power of institutions and the passage of time. — Richard Dawkins

Religion is organized to satisfy and guide the soul—politics does the same thing for the body. — Joyce Cary

Religion is to do right. It is to love, it is to serve, it is to think, it is to be humble. — Ralph Waldo Emerson

Among politicians the esteem of religion is profitable; the principles of it are troublesome. — Benjamin Whichcote

God has no religion. — Mahatma Gandhi

All religions are the same: religion is basically guilt, with different holidays. — Cathy Ladman

Religion. It's given people hope in a world torn apart by religion.
— Jon Stewart

I came to the conclusion long ago . . . that all religions were true, and also that all had some error in them. — Mahatma Gandhi

The principle of the Inquisition was murderous... The popes were not only murderers in the great style, but they also made murder a legal basis of the Christian Church and a condition of salvation.—Lord Acton

All outward forms of religion are almost useless, and are the cause of endless strife.... Believe there is a great power silently working all things for good, behave yourself and never mind the rest. — B. Potter

The ecclesiastical establishments of Europe, which serve to support tyrannical governments, are not the Christian religion, but abuses and corruptions of it. The religion of Christ and his apostles, in its primitive simplicity and purity, unencumbered with the trappings of power and the pomp of ceremonies, is the surest basis of a republican government. — Noah Webster

¶ **Insight from the outside**

Religious believers are often criticized by atheists and agnostics as blindly believing whatever they were taught in their childhood and local culture.

However, I was raised in a professedly Christian (but unChristlike) home, which drove me solidly to atheism. As I researched more and more religions and philosophies, I made another definite U-turn, almost. I definitely came back to Christ, but not so much to typical, institutional Christianity.

To be clear, I believe we can get more done together as a team, but rules and regulations enforced by immature people in power or by outright hypocrites is more harmful than helpful. I share with you what I believe because I believe it, not because someone told me I should or pays me to do it.

Atheists can be just as guilty at playing games as believers.

Discussion

Why should we have freedom for all religions when all religions contradict each other?

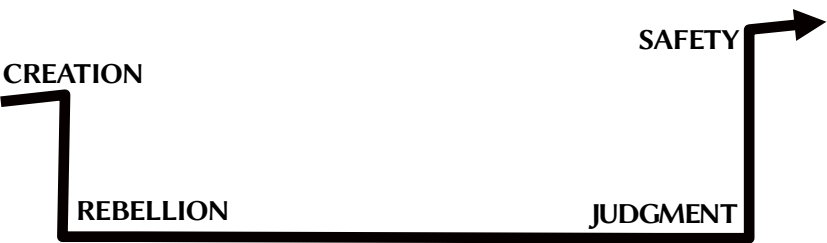
What are the pros and cons of organized religion?

How much truth is there? Can any religion have all of it? Can all religions have at least a little of it?

Plan A



Plan B



Plan C



Big Bible Story

*One sacred text
claims to teach all our essentials.
Is it true?*

Plan A

The Bible uses practical stories of real people in real time to teach a consistent, complete system of truth. It does not share those actual experiences in a dry, abstract way as if it was a debate by academics. It tells things just as they happened, and when we connect those events we may trace a pattern of faith, hope, and love that explains life from beginning to end. As we make those connections, we hear God's voice more clearly.

In this chapter, we will examine the highlights of the actual history of evil sandwiched between the eternities of glory. The Bible records the betrayal of God's people, tell the often brutal truth of institutions, and predict major historical events. Most of all, the Book pivots everything around the mission and sacrifice of the Son of God. The detailed explanations and evidence unfold later in this series, but, for now, you will get the sense of consistency and completeness that God through Scripture has to offer.

II Infinite Good Person

The Bible declares that God is the self-existent one—the I AM THAT I AM. He is all powerful, all knowing, all present, all caring. He is the life of all living things. There is no one equal to Him.

He is Yahweh, Jehovah, Elohim. He is one, and three in One: Father, Son, Spirit. He is the great mystery of godliness.

He is “the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy... [He] dwells in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

II Perfect growing universe

“And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” “Whatever God does it shall be for ever.”

God did not make a sterile universe then tell His children, “Hands off!” He gave us the desires and abilities to both appreciate and shape the beautiful wonders He made. “It is the Father's good pleasure to give [us] the kingdom.”

Infinite Wisdom and Joy has made for us a limitless future that is filled with always new and always fresh insights, delights, achievements, and interpersonal experiences. That which is good

and perfect only gets better and better.

Geographically, heaven is a destination, but spiritually, it is a path ever onward and upward. “You will show me the path of life: in Your presence is fulness of joy; at Your right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

¶ Faith, hope, love

God is love. God is a person. When God made people in His image, He gave them a piece of Himself. God’s unselfish sacrifice for His children started with our creation.

The Father took on parental responsibility and risk by giving us the same power of choice that He has. This freedom was not given abstractly for the sake of freedom, but so that we could experience the fullness of trusting, hoping, loving, and being loved.

Father made us to be sons and daughters, not slaves, pets, nor robots. Trusting and loving God and others more than ourselves is also a risk for us, but the rewards exceed any other way.

Even after falling into sin, we are invited, we are urged to enjoy face to face, heart to heart communion with Him who stays closer than a brother. “He will save, He will rejoice over you with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over you with singing.”

¶ You should have been born in Eden

You were not born to merely fill an empty slot. Your Father created the universe with all its wonders, pleasures, mysteries, and glories to be a home for you. You, as a prince or princess of the King, are the purpose for the cosmos. “According as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the universe, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

Before there was evil, before there was even a creation event, there was you in the mind and heart of God. You were designed to be a precious, holy child of the heavenly Father. You were purposed to be born in a special corner of the cosmos on a planet called Earth in a garden called Eden.

From the moment of your birth through the endless ages of eternity, you were to feel nothing but love. You were supposed to be grow in a home filled with flawless wisdom. You were to visit planets where you become instant friends with everyone you meet. You were to learn science and write songs beyond anything we know so far. That was your original purpose and that is still God’s plan for you when redemption is complete.

Plan B

⌘ **We are not alone**

We humans share this vast cosmos with other beings. The Bible specifically mentions hundreds of millions of angels and their special assignment as God's helpers. For every angel or two there is probably a world of intelligent, holy beings. These "sons of God" agonize for us and eagerly wait for us to rejoin the family.

⌘ **Lucifer**

Lucifer is now a name synonymous with evil and deception. However, it actually means, morning star. It was the name of the nicest angel you would ever want to meet. He was a "covering cherub," meaning that he was an attendant and confidant at God's throne, in His very presence.

Although he was the chief, he was humble and helpful with all the angels as they accomplished goals he communicated to them from God. He was content in his position, a perfect match.

⌘ **All blame on Satan**

God created Lucifer. Lucifer created Satan—the adversary.

"You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you." "The devil... is a liar, and the father of it."

Lucifer was not destined to sin. There was no accident. There was no flaw nor necessity in the universe. It was his choice and totally avoidable, albeit irrational, selfish, doomed.

Why would he decide to be discontent with his contentment? Why reject his friends, his Father, and his perpetual destiny? Like all guilty people, he can blame God and everything else, but Lucifer, a created, finite being, wanted to sit on the infinite Creator's throne. He knew that was as impossible and dangerous as trying to contain a nuclear explosion with bare hands. Yet...

Perhaps the greater mystery is that Lucifer held on to his selfish ambition as one holds onto a red hot coal from a fire. As natural as sin is to us now, it was very unnatural in the beginning. Yet, it was persisted in spite of God's gracious offers of forgiveness and restoration. Lucifer knew he was wrong, but would not let go.

⌘ **Satan's exile**

Evil in a still perfect universe was a paradox never seen before. Satan used that to spread discontent to about a third of the other

angels. The harmonious peace of heaven was now violently upset with angry voices. Tears of the loyal were scorned by the rebels. The emotional separation was painful.

Finally, the separation needed to be geographical. The Son of God and the loyal angels turned up the light a notch in a final appeal. Perhaps a few rebels changed their minds, but Satan's cohort retreated into a dark corner of the cosmos.

¶ Why exile over execution?

God knew the end from the beginning. He knew the power of sin is only destructive and must end in total self-annihilation. But the loyal angels did not yet know. Letting justice take its course too soon would raise more questions than it would answer.

“By their fruits you shall know them.”

God, the source of all life, gave Satan and the devils life, time, and resources to setup their own kingdom on their own planet. The results would speak for themselves as they descended into utter chaos and violence. The power of destruction cannot build anything that will last.

¶ What should have been

We can only speculate whether it would have taken a few years or a few centuries or more for Satan's cohort to demonstrate their irrational rebellion, incurable misery, and insane violence to the onlooking universe. By unanimous vote the former friends turned rebels would be burned in their own consequences. The dark corner of the cosmos would be repaired. The universe would then be forever immunized against evil, all would be wiser, and all would be happy ever after.

¶ Power is not the answer

The problem that began with a break in faith, hope, and love could only be solved by faith, hope, and love. That takes patience and time to let patterns of evidence and actual experience develop so that onlookers could decide their own beliefs. Evil is not evil because God says so and we must all agree, or else. Evil is actually the opposite of love, because the sinner does not profit, but suffers terrible loss himself as well as inflicting harm on others.

Raw power always has unintended consequences, even if used with good intentions. Love takes the slow way, but it heals as it goes surely on its way to eternal happiness.

The more we love, the sooner evil must end.

Plan C

II gods of this world

God created Adam and Eve “in His own image... and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” They were the king and queen of Earth ruling under God’s power.

Adam was the “god of this world.” Through him flowed God’s power to shape, protect, and improve Earth. When Adam trusted Satan more than God and ate the forbidden fruit this glory was cutoff and Earth fell into mortal darkness. According to Scripture, that is how natural evil started.

Adam was far more intelligent than we are today, but he was inexperienced. He fell partly by Satan’s deceptive puppetry with a serpent. The fallen angel moved into Earth and claimed ownership. Adam’s distrust of God turned the world upside down, but it was still God’s. Yet, Satan gained powerful influence over mortal souls prone to evil, but in pity the Son chose to take individual responsibility for the redemption of humanity.

II Quarantine in Christ

Satan had rebelled in the very presence of his loving Father. Adam was tricked. That ignorance left open the possibility that humans could change their minds through proper education of truth about God and Satan, good and evil, love and selfishness.

The Son of God, known as Christ, the Savior, took Adam’s place to keep Earth connected to heaven. Our area of the cosmos was quarantined to limit the spread of evil and God’s own throne room (aka, temple or sanctuary) became the starting point of a spiritual wormhole. At great cost to Himself, Jesus Christ laid hold on both God and mankind to keep grace flowing to every fallen son and daughter, which includes the selfish and proud, greedy and atheist, pretender and murderer.

II Promise of the Seed

“I will put enmity between you [serpent representing Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; It shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

A descendant of Eve would one day be born who would be God clothed in humanity. A sacrifice would be made that would signal

the end of Satan's rule.

To remind humans to look forward to that first coming of Christ a simple sacrifice was instituted. It also served to drive home the fact that sin was painful and ended in death. Its purpose was real-life education, not appeasement.

¶ Preparing for the Seed to fill the world with fruit

To bring about the full benefit of the Lamb to come, a supportive environment must be created so that the Seed could grow to maturity, fulfill His mission, then the message of redemption could be proclaimed to the world.

Three times the world rejected the Seed. Therefore, God divided the world into nations and chose faithful Abraham. His descendants, Israel, were to be a demonstration of a trusting, obedient, blessed people. Other nations would be attracted to God's goodness and gradually the world would be united in peace, ready to receive the Savior. Over time, the whole earth would be restored to almost Eden-like conditions.

¶ Old covenant

A wise teacher assesses the current level of her students, then moves them higher one step at a time. To meet the needs of the people, the simple sacrifice was expanded into the "old covenant." Physical rites and ceremonies, external rules and regulations, and seemingly arbitrary exceptions to the moral code were prescribed or allowed to deal with an immature, unbelieving nation.

God knew such a covenant would not convert the soul. He declared it "faulty." Yet, it was necessary to preserve the last best hope of a home for the Savior. An external covenant was better to preserve an externally safer environment than heathen idolatry and authoritarianism.

¶ New covenant

"For the [old covenant] having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers to it perfect.... This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

The new covenant is an internal love affair between the transformed sinner and their Savior.

Infinite Soul Sacrifice

II Incarnation

The infinite Son of God became the Son of man, the baby in the manger, Jesus of Nazareth, God with us. He came to show the truth about God and His ways. He was born in flesh by a miracle of the Spirit so that our flesh could be reborn in the Spirit—us with God.

God in our flesh means everything to us. We are reconnected to heaven. We have divine help to do good, to be good, to become immortal once again. Our emptiness can be filled with Infinity.

II Temptation

Adam and Eve had perfect, immortal natures. Yet, they failed, not because they were weak (Spirit was in them), but because they did not wait to talk things over with God. They impatiently decided to experiment with the devil's lies right away.

Jesus, in weak mortal flesh, waited for 40 days until His Father told Him to eat. Satan tried three times to entice Him to set His own schedule, but Jesus stayed submitted to the Spirit. By the life and power of God, Jesus obeyed God and gained the victory. That great human Victor will help us triumph in the Spirit.

II Substitution

The Father had a heart-wrenching problem. His justice, His creation pledge, demanded the end of sinners, but His mercy yearned to forgive, heal, and restore. However, relieve an evildoer of his responsibility and the only result is a selfish immortal. The entire cosmos is still in danger.

The saving truth of Jesus' death on the cross is substitution and exchange, not a one way transference and scapegoating. The Son of God does not merely die for you. He dies *for* you *as* you. Then He offers you His soul in exchange so that you may live.

On the cross, Jesus lived your sin polluted life as if it was His and thus He died as if He was guilty. Every one of your evil thoughts, motives, and deeds met its shameful end. The peace and security of the universe was restored.

Yet, that is not the end of the story.

II Resurrection

The sacrifice of the cross opens a way of escape from punishment for every sinner, for every person who has ever lived or ever will live. The gift is offered freely.

Yet, a guilt-free death is still death. In the resurrection of the Son of God, we live *by* Him, *in* Him, and *like* Him. He died the death that was ours that we may live the life that is His.

The resurrection makes the substitution complete and effective.

¶ Infinite sacrifice vindicated God

The common misconception, even among most Christians, is that the death of the human body of Jesus was the sacrifice. No, it was just the external, physical container for the sacrifice of His infinite soul. The Father *gave* His Son. The Son *gave* His life, all of it, body and soul, 100%. It was complete, free, unconditional.

God loves you more than Himself. God loves all the people in the universe more than Himself. Infinity gave all until there was nothing more to give. Infinity sacrificed infinity.

Humans, angels, and all other beings could no longer have any questions about God's justice and mercy, about His commitment to maintaining a fair and loving universe. On the cross, God turned His heart inside out to reveal only pure and sincere love.

¶ Cross saved the universe

Thus, it was not only possible for each human to be transformed and redeemed, but all the angels and heavenly intelligences were saved from any doubts that might spring up into rebellion. The cross saved the universe from any repetition of evil.

In practical terms, the loyal angels saw God as they had never seen Him before. They saw to the very depth of His love and found no hypocrisy, no selfishness, no lack in His dealings with humans or demons. The revelation of God on the cross burned into their hearts a respect and a gratitude that will never wear off.

¶ Killing the Lifegiver doomed the rebellion

When from the cross Jesus cried, "It is finished", it established God's throne and condemned Satan's kingdom. Both sides were known by their fruit. That once gentle soul was now a murderer condemned without pity by his former friends.

The death of Christ sealed the death of Satan. Every heart was turned against him for full and final execution. No more kingdom, no more time, no more suffering or aggression. Satan, along with every one of his followers, would be terminated. They would not become sadistic leaders of hell fire. They would become ashes under the feet of the saints and the flowers of God' joy and love would erase even their memory.

One

¶ **Sinner must die**

God's creation pledge promises a perfect eternal universe. Evil is a hole that threatens to sink that whole ship. Therefore, the hole must be plugged. Evil must be judged and terminated.

Because every human is an addicted hole driller, every human must suffer the blame for every hole they drill, then die. The soul that sins must die because the result of evil is death. Those who do evil hate the ways of life. Therefore, they hate life itself.

Forgiveness does not solve sin. Neither is evil cured by loving the sinner more. These charitable acts might make victims feel better and open doors of possibility, but the evildoer remains.

The sinner—the chooser and doer of evil—must die. The sacrifice of the cross does not negate this essential truth. The cross does not sacrifice the safety of the entire universe for an unchanged sinner.

¶ **Will you die in or out of Christ?**

Self can make some outward changes in response to reward or punishment. Self, with its me-first, I-must-survive-even-if-you-don't attitude, cannot and will not conquer itself.

What the Savior has already done is nailed your self to His cross, ending its existence, then resurrected your new soul by the Spirit. Your only choice is whether you will die in or out of Christ.

By faith you let your empty, dead self be filled with the life and soul of the Son of God. You exchange your ways for His ways. You substitute your self-centered motives for His heart of love to all. The darkness with which you were born is filled with Light.

Any way you look at it, the old you is gone.

¶ **Converted sinner adopted by Father**

You are now a Christ believer, Christ follower, a true Christian. You are a child of the heavenly Father. You are one with God, because the new nature inside you is of God.

As you study His scripture, talk with Him about everything, and serve everyone with Him, you will learn to think His thoughts, feel His feelings, and do His will. Over time, you will do good as naturally as you once did evil.

Your mortal body and brain will sometimes balk like a stubborn horse, but pay closer attention and trust more deeply in your Savior as He guides to and through all eternity.

‖ **Human church condemns angel rebellion**

One converted sinner is a miracle. An entire church of true Christ followers is a demonstration of God's creation pledge. It shows just how happy and sure eternity really is when positive faith, hope, and love are the only motives of the soul. God's family prospers. Satan's kingdom fails. His rebellion is condemned. God's children are of one mind and one judgment.

‖ **New covenant church is fruit of cross**

The soul sacrifice on the cross vindicated God. Satan's rebellion was without excuse. Simply put, God could be trusted.

However, God did not rest now that His reputation was cleared. He prepared, and is preparing, a demonstration of eternity's goodness while under pressure in an evil environment.

If simple faith, hope, and love can unite fallen humans into one with God and each other while they suffer hardship, loss, and persecution, then all doubt and excuse is removed about eternity in an environment of immortal glory.

‖ **Perfect church is full, final call to world**

That demonstration in humanity is God's last message of mercy to humanity. The scriptures come to life in Christ's people. The truth shines to all the world in the universal language of love.

There are no misinterpretations, only decisions. All hearts are drawn to the invisible Infinite Good Person. Souls yield in glad adoration and gratitude, or stubborn hearts hide, reject, deny light.

‖ **Clean sanctuary signals universal approval**

The throne room above that for thousands of years was the center of dealing with the darkness of evil is restored to full light. The sanctuary is cleansed from the stench of suffering caused by deception. The whole sad, disgusting record is brought down to earth where all sinners are resurrected.

The whole universe gathers in judgment. The story from beginning to end, with each person's part in it, is replayed. Everyone, saint and evildoer alike, agree on every cause, every effect. Everyone receives either life for good or death for evil and all agree that it is fair. That which ends comes to an end.

The universe is now rid of a nightmare. Not a trace of evil, death, hell, or pain remain. God and His family move forever onward and upward as one.

More Thoughts

¶ Quotes

Let us remember that every worldview-not just Christianity's-must give an explanation or an answer for evil and suffering...this is not just a problem distinctive to Christianity. It will not do for the challenger just to raise the question. This problem of evil is one to which we all must offer an answer, regardless of the belief system to which we subscribe. — Ravi Zacharias

¶ My final thoughts and appeal

To end this little volume let me take you back to its beginning, although at the time I had no idea what had started. The great turning point in my life and thinking happened in a library.

In the late 1970's I was a young teenaged atheist researching a different topic. Of the few dozen books the card catalog indicated might be helpful, I selected one and sat down at a table to read.

It opened with a description of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. I was struck by how Infinite Power was powerless to save people from their own choices.

That is when Jesus appeared before me. In vision or in reality, I still do not know. He smiled deep into my eyes and mind for just 5 to 15 seconds. However, those few moments flashed everything in my life and my knowledge of history.

I saw it. It was choice. I was making choices. All of us had been, and are, making choices. God was making choices. Personal decisions were both the trigger and the limiter of interaction. The God I thought was dead was alive and well and working behind the scenes as much as I would allow.

It was like I had fallen through a wormhole and come out the other side into a new universe. I did not know what to believe about God or anything else, but I knew there were new possibilities.

This first book in the Seven Pillars series is one blossom from the seed planted that day. A miraculous hunch, a Divine encounter, has become an organized, consistent, complete belief system based on obvious evidence and able to inspire real hope and change.

When you take the principles of this book then meditate upon them and put them into practice, you also must come face to face with God. Apply these truths to Scripture—the word of God—and you will hear the Word of God.

He is our Redeemer and the redemption process fixes what is broken and creates life where before there was only death. God is not only the God of the gaps, but of the whole cosmic machinery.

Redemption closes the gaps, heals the wounds, dries the tears, and enlightens the mind. It does this by bringing evil to an end. It is the only way. Trying to heal the wound without removing the knife is only to perpetuate pain and skepticism.

God is about to bring evil to an end. He does this by separating the sheep from the wolves, the wheat from the weeds, the selfish from the unselfish. Truth, and the love of it, is the great divider.

This separation process does not fall along religious lines. It cuts across and through them. It is a matter of heart, mind, and soul.

That means choice.

The end is near, not because God is forcing it on us, but because we are bringing it about through our own choices. This is not a matter of political parties or religious denominations. People are polarizing over truth. They are choosing for or against faith, hope, and love, for or against selfishness or unselfishness.

Like electricity, greater polarization results in greater voltage which results in greater shock and destruction.

This worldwide process can be stopped no more than a tsunami can be stopped with a pushbroom. You can only prepare by seeking higher ground ahead of time.

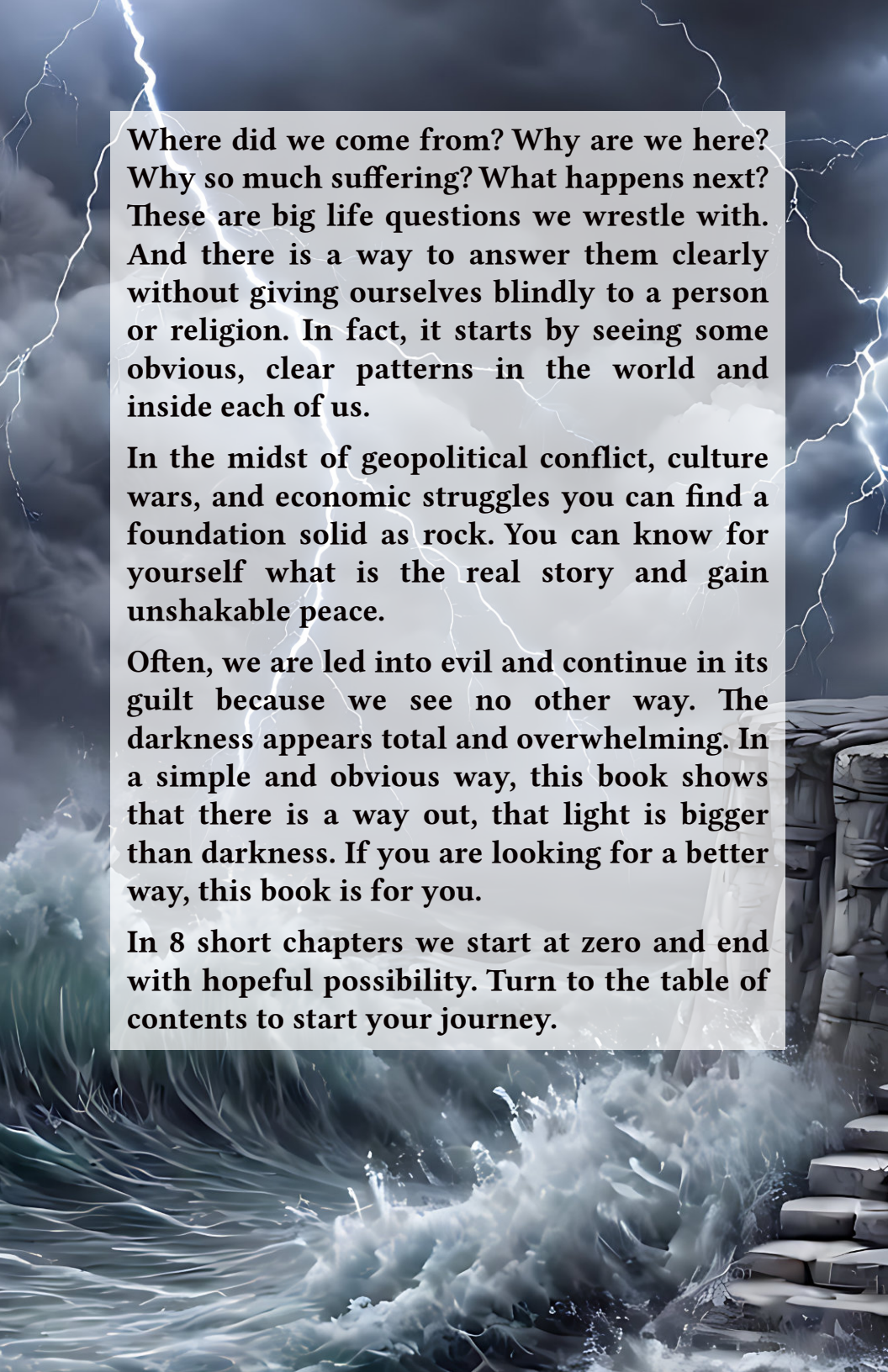
Read the Bible, especially the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Continue with this series. Find other people who also love and pursue all truth.

Most of all, believe that God loves you as His precious son or daughter. Find a quiet time and space to spiritually go into His presence to pour out your heart, to make your requests, to give Him thanks for grace in your life, and to receive His power and encouragement to walk with Him and like Him each day.

The Infinite Good Person of the universe wants to make you an eternal good person in His eternal good family.

¶ Discussion

How has your understanding of yourself, God, good and evil, changed from reading this book?



Where did we come from? Why are we here? Why so much suffering? What happens next? These are big life questions we wrestle with. And there is a way to answer them clearly without giving ourselves blindly to a person or religion. In fact, it starts by seeing some obvious, clear patterns in the world and inside each of us.

In the midst of geopolitical conflict, culture wars, and economic struggles you can find a foundation solid as rock. You can know for yourself what is the real story and gain unshakable peace.

Often, we are led into evil and continue in its guilt because we see no other way. The darkness appears total and overwhelming. In a simple and obvious way, this book shows that there is a way out, that light is bigger than darkness. If you are looking for a better way, this book is for you.

In 8 short chapters we start at zero and end with hopeful possibility. Turn to the table of contents to start your journey.