

the
**A
B
C's**



to
a

Happy Life!

A practical, step by step,
common sense guide
to achieving
lasting Happiness!



by *kyle gardner*

the

ABC's to a Happy Life!

A practical, step by step guide, to creating a
Happy Life!

by

kyle gardner

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This book is dedicated to the great love of my life for almost fifty years now. None of what you are about to read would have made it from mind, to pen, to page, without a lifetime of support, and encouragement from my wife, my soulmate my Agapaō ... Rebecca.

Thank you my forever love for this Great Adventure!

I also want to acknowledge my children, Tami and Brandon, as well as my siblings Belinda, Barbara and Earl and my sister in law, Irene. This road that we are all traveling together, has not always been an easy one ... but by God's Grace we're all still here pressing onward and upwards to eternity; towards the mark, for the prize of this high calling of GOD in Christ. Beca and I love you all and pray that the LORD continue to Bless you and keep you, make his face shine upon you, be gracious unto you, and all your families ... and give you peace.

In Jesus Name ... Amen!

Prologue

There was a time when I heard a popular Clinical Psychologist that I was introduced to via YouTube, express the following view:

“We focus on the idea of happiness too much and the problem with that is, is that it takes our focus away from aims that would be more productive. It’s much better to aim for meaning than for happiness.”¹

With all due respect I disagree. Being “*Productive*” is way overrated. I want you to be happy. God, the Universe, wants you to be happy. Most importantly, *you* want you to be happy.

How many times over the course of your life when you’ve found yourself beaten down, defeated, exhausted, have you sat alone, pondered it all and said to yourself,

“I wish I were more productive ...”

No, what you’ve said is,

“I just want to be happy!”

We have *all* been there.

Un-Happiness transcends race, color, creed, culture and religion. It transcends every living condition, financial circumstance and social situation. We always think, if only our situation were different we would be happy. When we're going through financial difficulties we think,

"If I only had more money, I would be happy."

When we have plenty of money and lots of "things" or "toys" we think,

*"If I could just minimize, live simpler and stop working so hard ... I would be happy. I would have the time and energy to enjoy my life. If I just aimed higher, aspired towards meaning, if I could just do something or be someone that mattered ... if I could just be more productive, then ... **then** I would be happy!"*

Really? We all know better.

Some time ago I earned a Certification for Life Coaching. A brief definition of Life Coaching is:

'A purposeful conversation between two people, that inspires them to step out of their comfort zones and take the initial steps towards doing what they want to do and being who they want to be'.

Life Coaching, as of the writing of this book, is not something that requires a license or certification, but it is a responsible step for a person to take, to exhibit some credibility in the field.

I like the teacher of the course. He has a good philosophy, good tools and good methodologies. I disagree with him however on one thing: He teaches that Happiness is not a desirable goal, rather, Fulfillment should be our goal.

Productivity, Fulfillment, Meaning ...

What is the problem with wanting to be Happy?

Our Declaration of Independence says:

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of **Happiness**.”*

This societal pressure to achieve Productivity and Fulfillment are burdens we shouldn't even have to *think* about, until we are firmly rooted, in the fertile soil of Happiness. I'm all for Productivity and Fulfillment but let's not get the “*Cart before the Horse*.”

I got burnt out on always having to have a goal. I became exhausted, of always having to *accomplish* something.

When people are *happy*, productivity and fulfillment will follow. When people are *happy*, they want to be alive, they want to socialize, they want to give back. When they're not happy, they don't even want to go out of the house.

The quest for productivity and meaning and fulfillment is useless if we don't start from a place of well-being or Happiness. All our forced actions and pursuits don't matter; they don't work.

The Bible alludes to this principle when Jesus is asked:

“What is the greatest commandment in the law?”

He answers by quoting the Jewish Shema and then adds a commandment of his own.

“And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him,

“The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment, and the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.”

“Love thy neighbor as thyself?”

How can you *love* your neighbor, how can you *give* to them, how can you *help* them, how can you *minister* to them ... if you aren't *Happy*? If you haven't learned how to love yourself?

You can't. It's not possible. It's dead works.

Love, must flow, from a loving, happy heart.

It took me over 40 years to figure this out. I started *trying* to figure it out when I was 15 years old. I've tried *many* different things, I've set *many* worthy goals, I've been involved in *many* worthy causes over the course of my life. I thought they would make me happy. None of them ever truly did.

Happiness doesn't come from outside of us, Happiness comes from inside of us. We are the founders and creators of our own happiness. Our job or career can't make us happy. Another person can't make us happy ... It's not *their* job to make us happy, it's *our* job to make us happy. Not even God, can "make" us happy. God tells us many things that, depending on what we believe about those things, *could*, "facilitate" our happiness. However, I don't know of anywhere in the Scriptures, where God or Jesus say,

"I will *make* you happy."

We are autonomous beings and we were created by God, by the Universe, with the ultimate tool for creating our own happiness or our own Hell; the tool is Free Will. Whatever you believe about the Judeo / Christian writings concerning our creation, they begin the story of the beginning, Genesis, with this foundational truth.

We have all been created with Free Will.

God made a garden for Man and Woman and everything in it was good. God knew however, that was not the end of the story. So, God gave the Man and the Woman everything that they could ever want. He gave them a Garden. He gave them a Tree, in the Garden. An “*apple*” tree, AKA, the tree of “*the Knowledge of Good and Evil*.” He told them to stay away from it. He told them not to eat from it, or they would die. He gave them a choice.

If we have no choice then we are not autonomous beings, made in the image of God. We are merely works of clay, containers of carbon, given the ability to live and move and breathe but never knowing the height and the depth, the length and the breadth or the agony and the ecstasy of existence. Our Creator loved us so much, that he gave us free will. The freedom to choose, whether it be good or bad. How can we ever know good if we don’t know bad?

So, GOD gave his creation a choice;

Do nothing ... and live.

Continue to exist ... in a garden, made just for them with every need met; never knowing pain or suffering or death ... or

Eat the Apple and die ...

And by dying, *truly* live.

There is no good without evil and there is no life without death. I believe this was God’s intention all along.

GOD allowed the “*Evil*” Serpent to enter in to the sanitized, pristine garden to tempt the woman to reject her “*Good*” Creator’s instruction. The Serpent seduced the woman and told her, Eat the Apple ... “Ye shall not surely die, rather you shall become like God!” This was not a complete lie, for as God would later say...

“They have become like us!”

So, Eve *chose* to find out what was on the other side of this bite of the Apple. Adam too, not long after, chose to disobey and to eat as well. Eve really didn’t know the implications of her disobedience. She didn’t know how good they had it because they’d never had it bad. They had never experienced anything else. She didn’t know what death was; all she had ever known was life.

I believe, God *intended* for Adam and Eve to eat the Apple. This may sound crazy to most but even in his instruction to “Be fruitful and multiply” ... how would they ever know the joy and the pleasure of making love if they never had anything to contrast it with? The act would amount to nothing more than obedience and instinct putting us in a position a little higher than the animals.

The point of all of this is that God, the Universe, whatever you believe about the intelligence behind our creation, put the freedom to choose in our hands. Like every other aspect of life, our happiness is our own choice. We can’t always choose our circumstances, but we can, *always*, choose, how we think and process and feel about anything and everything we experience in life. This is truly living!

There are so many “*things*” that happen over the course of our lives that we allow to get in the way of our happiness. Notice that I *Italicized*, things. One of the dictionary definitions of “*things*” is:

*“Circumstances, conditions, or matters that are unspecified:
example: ... things haven't gone entirely according to plan.
synonyms: matters, affairs, circumstances, conditions,
relations, situations ...life”*

“*Things*” are external to who you are. They only affect you, control you, have power over you, as you allow. You may say,

“Well what if I get sick, break a leg, get cancer ... that's certainly some “thing” that would affect me.”

That is absolutely true if who you are is only your physical body, but it's not. You are a spirit, a soul and a mind that inhabits a physical, material, finite, earthen vessel.

Confusion about our identities is one of the main reasons so many people are not happy. Society has conditioned us to believe that people who are overweight, physically challenged, old, feeble or whatever are somehow less valuable than those who are the epitome of health, fitness and physical beauty. This is simply not true.

One of the greatest minds of our time, one of the greatest contributors to science and physics was Stephen Hawking. Hawking was a quadriplegic.

He became paralyzed over his entire body as a result of ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. Eventually, he was only able to communicate by twitching a single muscle in his cheek. Stephen Hawking was not the physical manifestation that we all recognized as his body. Rather, he was a spirit, soul and mind that inhabited that body for a moment in time; and what a moment! Stephen Hawking made an impact in the world that will not soon be forgotten.

It would have been very easy for him, at the onset of this "thing" that happened to him, to simply give up, give in, wither away and die ... but he didn't. He processed this circumstance the way *he* wanted to. He made up his mind to be the master of his own fate, the architect of his own happiness.

This is what I desire for you. You may not be *that* familiar with the concept at *this* stage in your life. You may not understand how you can "*create your own happiness.*"

I don't know what you've been through, up to this point in your life, and I have no idea what's in store for you in the future. I want you to know however, that by getting down to the basics, the ABC's, no matter what "things" no matter what "situations," life may bring your way, they don't have to "*affect you*" in a negative way.

I can teach you how to manage and properly process your thoughts and emotions in any circumstance ... how to create happiness in *any* situation.

At this point, as you're finishing up with this prologue, you may be thinking,

*“Why should I read on any further?
Why should I listen to this guy?”*

The short answer is,

Because ... *I'M HAPPY!* :-)

Happiness is what you are looking for. Happiness is what you are hoping and yearning for, or you wouldn't have opened this book.

I'm going to teach you a set of principles, that I have learned over a lifetime. I *guarantee* that if you learn and adopt and *follow* these principles, they will transform your thinking, and equip you with the tools you need, to have a ... Happy Life!



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Definition of Terms

Before we can begin our pursuit of a Happy Life, we need to come to an understanding of what a Happy Life is. What words immediately come to mind when we're trying to define Happy or Happiness? Cheerful, delighted, elated, glad, jubilant, merry ... great EMOTIONS, but do they accurately define Happiness? Are they sustainable? On both counts, most would likely say no. Most would probably think that sustained happiness is unrealistic. It's fleeting, it's temporal, it's dependent on SITUATIONS.

When we say we want to be Happy, or we want to help others be Happy, we are considered naive. We are told that aspiring for happiness is immature;

“... strive instead for *purpose* and *meaning* and *fulfillment!*”

Granted, these are noble pursuits, great ideals but, indeed, fleeting ... if not built on a foundation of Happiness.

Some say that we were not *meant* to be Happy all the time. For instance, are we supposed to be Happy when tragedy strikes? When someone close to us dies? My position is, we could be, depending on our definition of Happiness.

We'll get into *my* definition of happiness in a bit, but for now, I want to propose to you that it's perfectly reasonable, to experience *true* Happiness, in any circumstance. It all depends on how we look at, perceive and process the difficult SITUATIONS that we all go through.

Most people have heard of “*The Sermon on the Mount.*” This is an event that is recorded in the fifth chapter of Matthew in the Bible. Jesus is up on a hillside teaching his disciples. In the first section of the Sermon, called “The Beatitudes,” he comes to a point where he begins to pronounce certain people “Blessed.” The original Greek text uses the word μακάριος or Makários for this word translated Blessed. It might surprise you to know that another translation for Makários is “Happy.”

In the Living Bible, first published in 1971 and geared for a younger audience, the Greek word Makários is actually translated “Happy.” The Living Bible was one of the most popular bible versions in America in its day, due to its easy readability. Billy Graham was so impressed with it that he often quoted it in his popular crusades.

In that Living Bible “The Beatitudes” are translated as follows:

One day as the crowds were gathering, he (Jesus) went up the hillside with his disciples and sat down and taught them there.

Humble men are very fortunate, for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them!

Those who mourn are fortunate; for they shall be comforted!

The meek and lowly are fortunate; for the whole wide world belongs to them!

Happy are those who long to be just and good, for they shall be satisfied.

Happy are the kind and merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.

Happy are those whose hearts are pure, for they shall see God.

Happy are those who strive for peace - they shall be called the sons of God.

Happy are those who are persecuted because they are good, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

*When you are reviled and persecuted and lied about because you are my followers ...wonderful! Be Happy about it! Be Very glad ... A tremendous reward awaits you up in heaven; remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted too.
(Matthew 5: 3-12)*

Wait a minute ...

Those who mourn are fortunate? The meek and lowly are fortunate?

That doesn't make sense ...

Happy are those who are persecuted and lied about?

Wonderful? Be very glad?

Maybe some of these teachers and life coaches today need to go back and rewrite this stuff. Obviously it's either a mistake, or Jesus didn't know what he was talking about. While they're at it, they had better revisit The Gospel of John the 16th Chapter and 33rd verse. That's where Jesus was telling his disciples that trouble was coming, and they were all about to be scattered. Here's what he said after informing them of what was about to happen:

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Peace? Good Cheer?

In the midst of trials and tribulations?

Jesus must have gone off his rocker!

Of course, he hadn't. He knew *exactly* what he was talking about. In a moment, we're going to dive into what I consider to be, the meaning of true Happiness. You will come to understand how I (and Jesus) are able to say with complete assurance, that it is possible and perfectly reasonable to experience *true Happiness* ... in any SITUATION.

It all depends on your point of view and perspective. Here are a couple of examples from my own life to illustrate:

I've worked in a technical, dangerous industry most of my life. Work tasks, maintenance and repairs must be executed in very safe, specific, defined ways in order to protect personnel and equipment and maximize efficiency.

Written procedures are in place to ensure that work is carried out in a deliberate, step by step, methodical fashion. That being said, procedures are only effective if everyone understands them and carries them out in the same way.

Section I of a formal "Procedure" identifies the "Purpose" and the "Scope" of the Procedure, followed by a section called "Definition of Terms." That means exactly what it says. The various words and terms and phrases in a Procedure must be defined so that;

"Hoist the Main Sail!"

... means the same thing to everyone involved. If one person thinks *Hoist* means to take something down and another person thinks it means to put something up ... they're headed for rough waters. Are you with me so far?

We must "Define our Terms" to ensure we're all talking about the same thing; that we are all on the same page. This principal is beautifully illustrated in the next example:

My wife and daughter owned and operated a Salon and Day Spa together for fifteen years. Two clients would come in and sit down next to each other in their stylists' chairs. They would each ask their stylist for a haircut and say,

“Can you take an inch off of the length?”

Each stylist would take exactly an inch off the length of their client's hair. Client “A” would say,

“I told you an inch! You barely cut anything off!”

Client “B” would say

“Oh my gosh! What have you done to me? That was way too much! My hair is going to take forever to grow back!”

This is an exaggeration of course, but SITUATIONS like this did occasionally arise with new stylists.

My wife would take them aside and gently educate them in her own “Procedures.” She would explain to them,

“There has to be a meeting of the minds. You must know what your client's idea of one inch is. When it comes to color you have to know what your client means by blonde; even if you have a picture you may have to explain to them that a particular hairstyle or color may not look the same on them as it does on the person in the picture.”

Make sure everyone is clear on Definitions, Purpose and Scope.

Make sure everyone is on the same page.

- The “Purpose” of this book is to teach you how to have a “Happy Life”.
- The “Scope” includes anyone who is seeking to have a *truly*, Happy Life.

The Purpose and the Scope are simple and straightforward. In order for *me* to be successful in my goal of *teaching* you how to have a “Happy Life” and in order for *you* to be successful in *learning how* to have a “Happy Life” we must be on the same page. What is a “Happy Life”. What does it look like? What does it feel like?

Let’s take a look at a few dictionary definitions. Dictionaries typically define Happiness as something near or similar to:

Delighted, pleased, or glad, as over a particular thing: *to be Happy to see a person.*

Characterized by or indicative of pleasure, contentment, or joy: *a Happy mood; a Happy frame of mind.*

Favored by fortune; fortunate or lucky: *a Happy, fruitful land.*

I like those definitions. They're adequate ... but for our purposes they fall a little short. They tend to convey the sense of "Happiness" being SITUATIONAL, or depending on SITUATIONS. A person is *Happy* about some *thing* or some *one*; delighted, pleased, or glad, as over a particular "*thing*."

People who understand happiness according to the typical dictionary definition may experience a feeling of giddiness or elation or pleasure over a particular SITUATION. They may at times feel content or joyful when "*things*" are going their way. When "*things*" are working out for them they may feel favored by fortune or luck.

The problem with this kind of happiness is, when SITUATIONS change, when, "*things*" go south ... the giddiness, the elation, the pleasure, the "Happiness", goes with it.

Their "Situational" happiness is replaced by sadness, discontent, depression and sometimes hopelessness.

- True happiness can manifest pleasure,
but pleasure alone is not happiness.
- True happiness can manifest contentment,
but contentment alone is not happiness.
- True happiness can manifest joy,
but joy alone is not happiness.

Happiness, by my definition, for the purpose of this book, is:

“A state of mental and spiritual well-being that is not affected by SITUATIONS or things but is anchored in the firm knowledge and belief that:

- *I’m exactly where I’m supposed to be, right here, right now.*
- *The CREATOR of the Universe, will always work all “Situations and Things” out for my good.*
- *The CREATOR of the Universe, will always bring any extreme situation back to Balance in my life.”*

Some of this may sound a little familiar to some of you. The idea that;

“... the CREATOR of the Universe will always work “SITUATIONS and things” out for my good...”

... comes from the New Testament book of Romans,

“And we know [with great confidence] that God (our Creator) [who is deeply concerned about us] causes all things to work together [as a plan] for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to His plan and purpose. (Amplified, Romans 8:28)

The other familiar principle referred to here is,

“The CREATOR of the Universe, will always bring any extreme situation back to Balance in my life.”

This concept of “*Balance*” comes from Taoist philosophy and the force of

“Yin and Yang.”

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines “*Yin-Yang*” as follows: (I’ve tweaked it slightly for an easier understanding.)

“Yinyang (yin-yang) is one of the dominant concepts shared by different schools throughout the history of Chinese philosophy. Three basic themes form the foundation: (1) yin-yang is the Unifying Field of nature and mind, exhibited in all existence; the active force that holds everything together. (2) yin-yang is the jiao, the waxing and waning, the ebb and flow, the breathing in and out, of the heavenly and human realms. (3) yin-yang is the process of maintaining harmony in creation, ensuring a constant, (yet dynamic) Balance of all things.”
(Yin-Yang)

If you’re a Christian reading *my* explanation of *my* definition of Happiness, you may be offended by the fact that I am blending Christian and Taoist teachings here. If you *are* offended, then please, be patient and keep reading ... because I *guarantee* you’re not Happy. You are one of the types of persons I wrote this book for.

In spite of the fact that you're a Christian, and should be experiencing the kind of Peace, that passes all understanding, and should be living out the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life ... You're not.

The Fruit of the Spirit (Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self Control) eludes you. It's always just beyond your grasp. You struggle to understand why you are *not* Happy and *not able* to live out the basic, foundational principles of your Faith.

Once you've finished this book and applied its principles to your life, you *will* be "Happy" and you *will* also be secure in your faith and your belief systems. You won't have to worry if someone else is or isn't doing life right. All that matters is that *you're* doing it right, that *you're* Happy. Once you are Happy, all of your relationships will be transformed.

A person who is Happy wants others to be Happy; they enjoy *watching* others find their way. They enjoy *helping* others find their way. They find purpose in their life, they find meaning, they find fulfillment. It's not something they strive for; it grows naturally, like fruit, that grows on a tree.

On the other hand, a person who is *un*-Happy is usually irritated by someone who is Happy.

"Why are they so Happy? I should be Happy. After all, I'm a good person ... I do A, B and C and I also do X, Y and Z. They probably don't have to deal with all the stuff (things) that I do. Must be nice ..."

Once again, we see that this person's idea of happiness is dependent on "*SITUATIONS and things*" occurring or unfolding in a way that (they think) serves them.

There is a story in the Bible that illustrates one aspect of what I will refer to as "STB" (SITUATIONS and Things Based) happiness. It's called:

"the Parable of the Vineyard Workers"

"... the Kingdom of Heaven is like the landowner who went out early one morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work. At nine o'clock in the morning he was passing through the marketplace and saw some people standing around doing nothing. So, he hired them, telling them he would pay them whatever was right at the end of the day. So, they went to work in the vineyard. At noon and again at three o'clock he did the same thing. At five o'clock that afternoon he was in town again and saw some more people standing around. He asked them, 'Why haven't you been working today?' They replied, 'Because no one hired us.' The landowner told them, 'Then go out and join the others in my vineyard.' That evening he told the foreman to call the workers in and pay them, beginning with the last workers first. When those hired at five o'clock were paid, each received a full day's wage. When those hired first came to get their pay, they assumed they would receive more. But they, too, were paid a day's wage. When they received their pay, they protested to the owner.

“Those people worked only one hour, and yet, you’ve paid them just as much as you paid us who worked all day in the scorching heat. ‘He answered one of them, ‘Friend, I haven’t been unfair! Didn’t you agree to work all day for the usual wage? Take your money and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you. Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?’

(New Living Translation)

Matthew 20, verses 1-16

The Vineyard owner was true to his word. The worker who started in the morning was likely glad to have work. He was probably in a good mood all day because He was lucky enough to have met the landowner early in the morning. He was going to make a full day’s wages. He probably spent the day planning how He was going to spend his full days wages. There would be a good dinner tonight! Mama will be Happy, the kids will be well fed and content ... There might even be enough to purchase a little wine for the evening. And wouldn’t he deserve it after the hard, full day’s work that He put in? He may have felt a little compassion for the workers who weren’t as industrious and lucky as Himself. He had been in the right place at the right time. Yes, he worked all day a Happy, content man; “*things*” were really going his way.

(all speculation on my part, but not too far off I suspect)

Interesting that with one tweak of SITUATION, namely the great generosity of the landowner, the hard-working man’s happiness came crumbling down like a house of twigs.

In an instant he went from being proud, lucky, happy, and content to feeling insulted, cheated, demeaned and angry ... in an instant!

Nothing at all changed except the way that he now perceived his SITUATION. Sadly, this hard-working man's happiness was flimsy and flighty; dependent on "*SITUATIONS and things*" occurring or unfolding in a certain way; a way that served him.

STB Happiness.

STB Happiness will keep us on a roller coaster ride that will eventually run right off the rails.

The flip side of STB Happiness is what I will refer to as FHB (Faith and Hope Based) Happiness. FHB Happiness is the kind of Happiness I defined a few pages back. It is the foundation of this philosophy and I will be referring to it again and again throughout this book:

- *I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be, right here, right now.*
- *The CREATOR of the Universe, will always work all "Situations and Things" out for my good.*
- *The CREATOR of the Universe, will always bring any extreme situation back to Balance in my life."*

A great example of FHB Happiness comes to us from Ancient Taoist tradition. Its origin is unknown, but its lesson is timeless.

“There once was a farmer in ancient China who owned a horse. “You are so lucky!” his neighbors told him, “to have a horse to pull the cart for you.”

*“**Maybe,**” the farmer replied.*

One day he accidentally left the gate unlatched and the horse ran away. “Oh no! This is terrible news!” his neighbors cried. “Such terrible misfortune!”

*“**Maybe,**” the farmer replied.*

*A few days later the horse returned, bringing with it six wild horses. “How fantastic! You are so lucky,” his neighbors told him. “Now you will be rich!” “**Maybe,**” the farmer replied.*

The following week the farmer’s son was breaking-in one of the wild horses when it kicked out and broke his leg. “Oh no!” cried the neighbors. “bad luck, again”!

*“**Maybe,**” the farmer replied.*

The next day soldiers came and took away all the young men to fight in the war. The farmer’s son was left behind. “You are so lucky!” his neighbors cried.

“Maybe ...”² (The Taoist Farmer)

When our THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS too quickly interpret or pass judgement on the ebb and flow, the heave and ho of ever-changing SITUATIONS, our happiness is as elusive as the wind. We don't have to let our circumstances control us. We don't have to let the waves of the storms in our lives continually toss us to and fro. Once we have cognitively considered and adequately developed the core beliefs ...

- *I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be, right here, right now.*
- *The CREATOR of the Universe, will always work all "Situations and Things" out for my good.*
- *The CREATOR of the Universe, will always bring any extreme situation back to Balance in my life."*

... then we can live our lives like that man who built his house on solid rock. (Matt. 7:24-25)

Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against his house, it won't collapse; it's built on the rock of Faith and Hope based happiness.

Another biblical axiom or truth that comes to us from the book of Hebrews, the 11th chapter and the 1st verse says this:

"Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see." (NLT)

The greatest things in life we could possibly hope for are,

- *we're in the right place, at the right time*
- *everything will always work out*
- *everything always comes back to balance*

Faith assures us that these things are so!

We have Faith that our hopes are not just pipe dreams, but that they will come to pass. We have confidence that the fulfillment of the *things*, we hope for are in fact being worked out and made manifest at every second of every hour of every day of our lives.

These beliefs give us assurance about things that are going on behind the scenes of our lives, behind the scenes of our Great GOD and CREATORS plans. Assurance about things we cannot see. If you are not a spiritual person or have no experience in applying spiritual principles to your life, please don't let that stop you from reading on.

Maybe you've had some spiritual or "religious" experiences in your life, but they were so negative, that you swore you would never again, have anything to do with religion or religious people, or their GOD. I urge you again, don't let that stop you from reading on.

I will teach you how to properly process, any past negative SITUATIONS, park them in a positive place, and move on to experience the Happy Life, you were intended to live.

Are we on the same page now, about the type of Happiness I'm proposing to help you attain? Have I defined my terms properly? Have we achieved a meeting of the minds? I think we have. Hopefully, I haven't offended you to the point where you don't want to move forward. Hopefully, I've piqued your interest and you're asking your-self,

“Is this kind of Happiness really possible?”

It is my friend. It is not only possible, but guaranteed if you're willing to set aside your *ego* and open your mind.

Become a Seeker.

In becoming a Seeker,
your Success is a foregone conclusion.

“*Ask* and it *will* be given to you;
seek and you *will* find;
knock and the door *will* be opened to you:
For every one that *asks* receives
and he that *seeks* finds;
and to him that *knocks*
... it *shall* be opened!”

Now, open yourself up to the possibility that you *can* find true and lasting happiness. You can ... and it begins with learning how to

Accept ...

Section 1

Accept

Accept the Past

The first letter in learning how to live a happy life is “A.”
The first word, in understanding how to Achieve a Happy Life is **Accept**. The first Action we must undertake, at the outset of our journey is to “*Accept*” our past.

The main Emotion triggered, in dealing with the past, is Regret.
Regret serves no positive purpose.

It’s impossible to be Happy if we can’t come to terms with our past. There’s not one un-Happy person who doesn’t look back and say:

“I wish I would have done this or that, I wish I would have said thus and so. Things would be so different now if that had not happened. I would be Happy. That thing in my past destroyed me then ... and it continues to haunt me, every day”

The failure to properly process past, painful, SITUATIONS, can trigger negative THOUGHT and EMOTION cycles. These can produce harmful, destructive, ACTIONS, with sometimes devastating, deadly, RESULTS. So just what is “*the past*” anyway, and how does it manage to exert such control over us?

I like the Oxford Dictionaries definition.

“Gone by in time and no longer existing ...
as in *‘the danger is now past’*

How can something that is “*no longer existing*” continue to ruin our lives today?

The “*past*” is everything that has taken place prior to the words I am now typing on this page.

.....< All past.

The “*past*” is everything that took place before the thought you now have in your head. The only way the “*past*” affects us now, is in the THOUGHTS we think about it. The existence of the past in our present, can be a *good thing* or it can be a *really bad, horribly, destructive thing*.

Sometimes I will hear a song that takes me back, in time, in my mind, to some pleasurable event in my life. One song that comes quickly to mind, is “Band on the Run” by Paul McCartney and Wings. “Band on the Run” takes me back to one of those “*good thing*” moments in my past

It was 1975, dusk, on a warm Sunday summers evening. I was riding in a car with one of my High School friends. We had just left a swimming party in the back-yard pool of another one of our friends. My buddy was driving his 68, jet black 396 Chevelle SS. I was riding shotgun.

We were cruising, down a wide, Southwest Bakersfield Boulevard.
All the windows rolled down. Shirtless, barefoot, wet cutoff jeans.
At that moment in time, Happy. Not a care in the world. Kevin
popped a tape into his 8-track car stereo. The slow intro began:

Stuck inside these four walls

Sent inside forever

Never seeing no one

Nice again like you

Mama you, mama you ...

If I ever get out of here

Thought of giving it all away

To a registered charity

All I need is a pint a day

If I ever get outta' here

If we ever get outta' of here

Then the boom, crash, and classic cascade of the rhythm guitars.

Well, the rain exploded with a mighty crash

As we fell into the sun

And the first one said to the second one there

I hope you're having fun

Band on the run, band on the run

And the jailer man and sailor Sam

Were searching every one

For the band on the run

Band on the run, Band on the run Band on the run ... ³

The memory was forever imprinted on my mind. I still love the feeling I get when I hear the song now. That's a part of my past that I choose to cherish and hold on to. A great memory. Properly processed and parked away in a positive place in my mind.

I have another past/memory trigger that is not so nice.

My brother and sisters and I grew up in a family with an alcoholic father. When I was a young boy, many, many, many nights, when I was in bed and supposed to be asleep, I would hear my dad go to our freezer put his hand in the ice tray, and fumble around for some ice cubes. I would hear the "clink, clink, clink" as he dropped the ice into a glass. I knew he was filling the glass with whiskey. What I never knew for sure was, what was coming after that? I could never really sleep after the "clink, clink, clink. I could never be certain of what was going to happen next. Would he stumble into mine and my brothers room, or my sisters room, wake us and slobber all over us as he proceeded to tell us how much he loved us? Or would he start harassing and abusing our mother, culminating in a huge fight?

Fast forward to fifty years later. My father is long deceased and yet, probably 99 times out of 100 when I hear ice drop, clinking into a glass, I think back to those times. It used to really get to me ...not so much anymore. My dad can't come barging into mine and my brothers and sisters' bedrooms anymore; he can't yell and scream and abuse our mother ... they are both gone. The only thing that can cause me grief about *those* days, in *these* present times, are the THOUGHTS, I *choose* to think about them ...

I'm causing my own grief when I don't manage my THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS in a mature rational manner.

Those are just two of my examples. I'm sure you have past memory triggers of your own. Probably some nicer than my "Band on the Run" memory. Probably some a whole lot worse than my "ice clinking into a glass" memory. The point is, hang on to the good ones and let the bad ones go. The people and the SITUATIONS that hurt you in the past can't hurt you now. It is solely your *memory* of those SITUATIONS and your THOUGHTS about them that bring hurt or pain on you. It is solely your EMOTIONS surrounding those SITUATIONS that cause you to lash out at those you care about, to respond im-properly, to take destructive ACTIONS with sometimes devastating, deadly RESULTS. These create *different*, more *difficult* SITUATIONS; which unless you learn to properly process, will only begin and extend the cycle all over again.

So how do you Accept and properly process those memories so that you can park them in a positive place and move forward?

Initially, on purpose, you have to think deeply about those past SITUATIONS. If THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS arise that make you uncomfortable that's ok. Don't run from them, don't deny them ... let them happen. Feel them. Take as long as you need to. This will shorten the duration of the hurt, or shame, or regret, or whatever. When we try to deny our EMOTIONS, try to run away from them, they just chase us around, scream at us, threaten us and eventually catch up with us and beat us up real good.

Denying or running away from our EMOTIONS does nothing to resolve the issues at the root of the painful SITUATIONS of our past. When we allow our-selves to fully feel and experience our EMOTIONS, something amazing happens. After a period of time the hurt, or shame or regret begins to subside. This is because our Minds, our Bodies and our Spirits will not let this type of extreme experience go on indefinitely. At some point, something has to give. Why? Remember one of the keys to True Happiness?

*“... the CREATOR of the Universe ... will always,
bring any extreme SITUATION back to Balance in our lives.”*

This is just a fact. I will give you more information regarding this truth later but for now you're just going to have to trust me.

What happens next however, is *critical*, in dealing with past painful SITUATIONS in ways that you can Accept them, properly process them, park them in positive places and move on. Remember, our Minds, Bodies and Spirits *will not*, allow this type of extreme SITUATION to go on indefinitely.

So, what happens is, the extreme EMOTIONS begin to subside. We get to a point where we don't feel the hurt, shame or regret anymore, we just feel numb. We're not back to Balance yet, but we *are* in a state of mind that is much more manageable than the dark, desperate place, of negative EMOTIONS. Granted, comfortably numb is a much better state to be in than darkness and despair. However it's not a place we want to stay in. So, sooner, rather than later, we need to move forward to the next step.

The next step is simply to breathe ... deeply ... become mindful, aware of where we are, in the now ... our setting, our environment. Breathe in ... breathe out ... breathe in ... breathe out. Find something, *anything*, that you can *immediately* focus on and be grateful for. If you're in bed, think about how good the sheets feel on your body. Think about how blessed you are to have a nice bed to sleep in. Even if you don't think your bed is that nice, at least it's a bed; some don't even have that. If you're outside, stop and take a look around. Breathe slow, deep breaths; the kind of deep breaths that take you from a downcast slump, to an invigorating, erect posture. Breathe in deeply and hold your breath in your lungs for a bit ... feel your blood cells exchanging Oxygen for Carbon Dioxide. Then, exhale slowly, feel all the muscles in your body relax. If the Sun is out, feel its warmth on your face. Kneel down and take a look at a plant or a flower and see how beautifully and wonderfully it's made. Meditate on the positive mood change as you begin to feel better. Appreciate and be fully aware as the heaviness begins to lift.

Facing your past painful SITUATIONS and fully experiencing your EMOTIONS came ... and went ... and you survived. You will learn that you never have to run from your past, or deny your EMOTIONS again. This *particular*, past, painful SITUATION, no longer has power over you. You never have to fear it again. It took its best shot at you and came up short. It may have even knocked you down, but it didn't knock you out. You got back up and knocked *it* out! You took away its power over you. This is how you properly process a past, painful SITUATION. You turn it into a learning experience, a growing experience.

You park it in a positive place in your mind and you move forward. We will get into this whole technique much deeper throughout the rest of this book and teach you how you can effectively apply it in any SITUATION.

I recently had an experience in my own life where I went step by step through this process. It wasn't specifically about the past, but about a SITUATION that occurred, with a lot of ties, to past, painful, SITUATIONS.

I was lying in bed on a weekend morning with my wife when we got some ugly news through an ugly text message. The best words I can use to describe the EMOTIONS I experienced are, extreme heaviness and dread. In the past I would have just tried to “buck up,” deny and bury the EMOTIONS. For whatever reason, that was the way I rolled. I thought it was weak to feel or display my emotions. This time I didn't.

My wife got out of bed. I stayed behind. I let the EMOTIONS envelop me ... flood over me. It felt like a crushing presence all over my body and especially my chest. My breathing was long and labored. I thought about all the possible negative scenarios associated with this SITUATION. I experienced all the painful EMOTIONS that accompanied those THOUGHTS. I probably lay there in that state of mind for well over an hour. Then, that “*something amazing*” began to happen. The EMOTIONS *did* begin to subside. The heaviness *did* begin to lift. Numbness set in. I drug myself out of bed, went into the bathroom and turned the water on in the shower.

After a minute or so I stuck my hand in and felt that it was nice and hot. I stepped in and let that amazing hot water run over my head, my face and down my body. I turned around and let it cascade all down my back. It was wonderful.

My numbness began to give way to gratitude. I thought how *blessed* I was; to be able to have a nice hot shower like this ... anytime I want! I stayed in and enjoyed it and experienced it until the hot water began to run out. I stepped out onto the bath mat and reached for one of our soft cotton towels. I thought again, how *blessed* I was ... to have a wife, who cared about us and our home enough to provide such nice soft towels. I fluffed my hair and patted my body dry. I felt enormous appreciation and *blessing* over the fact that I lived in a country, lived in a state, lived in a city, lived in a nice apartment, where I was able to enjoy these wonderful gifts. I was definitely feeling extreme, amazing EMOTIONS. Then these too began to subside and I quietly, consciously, came back to Balance ...

Peace, Calm and Contentment.

I had experienced the negative EMOTIONS of this event, and all past, painful SITUATIONS associated with it ... and I survived. It's power over me was gone ... properly processed, parked away, in a now positive place.

We *have to* Accept the past because that's the *only* rational thing to do. We *have to* **Accept**, that we can't do anything about it. *It is what it is.*

The only thing we can do is *reprocess* how we *think* about it, feel about it learn from it ... and park it away in a positive place.

I collected comic books as a young boy, and like many other young boys of my generation, I was a huge fan of Superman. One of Superman's many amazing superpowers was that he could travel back in time. He would fly around the Earth at super-speed, counterclockwise and literally "turn back the clock."

In his trips back in time, he would always try to change something in the past. He would always attempt to make something right ... like stop President Lincoln from being assassinated. Try as he might he always failed. Lincoln was always killed. Kennedy was always assassinated. Hitler always rose to power. The Titanic always sank.

Superman, the Man of Steel from the planet Krypton, could never change the SITUATIONS of the past.

Of course, this was Superman of the "Silver Age." The Silver Age of Comics stretched from 1956 to 1970. In the movie Superman, from 1978, the writers allowed Supes to go back in time to save Lois Lane. This really irked a lot of Superman Purists, including myself. I guess because The Silver Age Superman, was the one I grew up with. Anyway ...

Reading these stories would always make me sad. I would sometimes cry along with Superman, when he was not able to right some of history's great wrongs. In the end we both had to Accept

the fact that you can't change the past ... even if you're Superman ...

If *he* couldn't change the past, I know I sure as heck can't. What I can do, is learn to properly process the great tragedies of my life, so that, in some manner, I *can* change them. I *can* in an abstract way, alter those SITUATIONS, by the THOUGHTS, I choose to think about them. Let's move on to the next chapter and begin applying this principle, to those SITUATIONS and aspects of our past that we had no control over.

Accept Situations we Couldn't Control

A cceptance of, reality, is a tool that helps us reprocess our past and, in a sense, change it. We can't literally change the past, but we can change how we view it and think about it and process it.

The main EMOTION triggered in dealing with SITUATIONS we couldn't control is Shame. Shame is an EMOTION created by our THOUGHTS about something that was done *to* us. Some *one* or some *thing* or some SITUATION, made us feel, at our core, inadequate, unworthy, or unloved. Shame can lead us to places of loneliness, isolation, and often addictive behaviors. We feel like we don't fit in with normal society. We're different in a negative way, we're "out of place." However, once we come to the

"... firm knowledge and belief that we are exactly where we are supposed to be, right here, right now ..."

... we can begin to understand that *all* the SITUATIONS that we have *ever* experienced and been through, have brought us, and led us, to exactly where we are at this very moment. Not "out of place" but *in* exactly "the *right* place."

We may not *like* where we are at this very moment. We may *think* that fate has dealt us a rotten hand, that we've been cheated. We haven't.

Everything happens for a reason. Nothing is random. Once we come to terms, with where we are, once we Accept where we are, and realize that we *are* where we *are* for a *reason*, we will realize we haven't been cheated. Rather, we are standing on the verge of a whole new experience. We are at a crossroads, a turning point, a whole new season in our life. Exactly where we're meant to be. So, how did we get here? Let's take a look.

There is so much that happens to us in life that we are not able to control. Unfortunately, this reality manifests very early in life when we are literally at the mercy of almost everyone and everything around us. SITUATIONS that we can't control, begin literally, from the moment we emerge from the womb.

Not all babies are born into ideal SITUATIONS. Many are born sick or premature and are dependent on immediate critical care. There are Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU's) in almost every hospital in the world. The nurses in these units are devoted to giving these helpless little babies the best medical and emotional care that they can.

Here is an excerpt, a glimpse, into the job of a Neonatal Nurse.

“Consider holding a baby that weighs barely a couple pounds. An infant that is attached to medical paraphernalia that must remain in proper position to avoid injury, Imagine caring for this fragile life. Skip the consideration of the education and training that allows an individual to do this day in and day out. Concentrate on the emotional stamina and fortitude this requires, to care for both their patient and their parents. Hyper-vigilance is essential and exhaustive in this environment to achieve those goals. Every fluid and therapy administered must be calculated by the smallest measurement. Literally the wrong decimal point can prompt a catastrophic outcome. So, it is checked, re-checked then done again. Neonatal teams are some of the best there are in medicine. They are highly dedicated and lose sleep, so families don’t have to, while simultaneously absorbing all of their stress and anxiety.”⁵ (The Neonatal Nurse)

Even for normal, healthy babies the first days, weeks and months of life are critical to healthy emotional development. We simply need, love and affection to survive and develop emotionally. As helpless infants, we have absolutely no control over that.

According to a story published in the UK Guardian

“The greatest health challenge of our time is securing good mental health for our nation. To achieve good mental health, we should look to where it all begins; The conception of a baby.

Secure early bonding is the difference between the baby that grows up a secure, emotionally capable adult, and a baby that will become a depressive, anxious child, who will not cope well with life's ups and downs. In the most difficult cases, this baby is more likely to later experience criminality, substance abuse or depressive problems."⁶ (*Early Bonding for Healthy Babies*)

These are SITUATIONS that as babies we don't even really remember ... but apparently, they have a huge effect on us. There are whole schools of Psychology and Sociology that focus on these early years and the affect and implications they will have on us long into adulthood. For more on this subject check out the pioneering work of *Jean Piaget*.

Beyond this time of life, we begin to grow and develop into little children who are aware of what's going on around us. We still have very little control, if any, of the SITUATIONS that occur around and to us. We are all aware, and have memories of the times, the places and the people in our lives during these early, formative years. Some of these memories are good, some ... not so good.

I previously related the story of my drunk, alcoholic father, barging into mine and my siblings' room when we were in our early teens and preadolescence. That story, didn't begin, during those early years. I have those kinds of memories as far back as I can remember going back to at least four to five years old. I remember a counseling session once in my 40's; (one of many one and done unfruitful counseling sessions that I participated in) I was relating a story, to the counselor, that I don't even remember now.

I casually made mention of a situation in which, my father had spanked me. She stopped me and asked,

“What do you mean your father spanked you?”

I explained,

“You know, if me or my brother woke him up while he was sleeping, because he worked nights, he would spank us.”

“How did he spank you?” she asked.

“With a belt.” I again answered rather nonchalantly.

“You weren’t spanked Mr. Gardner, you were beaten.”

The words kind of hung in the air and then sunk in. I still have a hard time Accepting them because I just thought of it as normal. It was hard to Accept, because if he beat *me* ... then he *really* beat my sisters. He would spank them with a belt on their bare legs until he raised welts and bruises. Sometimes they would even bleed.

These are examples of some “*SITUATIONS*” we had no control over.

- We had no control of what would set him off.
- We had no control over what he was going through at work.
- We had no control over the kind of childhood trauma *he* experienced, that had an effect on the kind of man, the kind of father he was.

We all have similar stories we could tell. Some of these kinds of stories have very tragic endings. I want to call attention now however, to the stories of people who also went through difficult situations as children, but then went on to achieve great things, against great odds, after incredible setbacks, and in spite of

“circumstances they had no control over.”

Here are a couple that I would like to share.

Wilma Rudolph

If you're a die-hard fan of the world of Track and Field, you know the name. If you are under 60 years old you've probably never heard of her. In the world of Track and Field, before the Jamaican Wonder Woman, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, before Shericka Jackson, before Sha'Carri Richardson, before All time Olympic Sprints Champion, Allyson Felix, before disgraced Olympic and World Sprints Champion, Marion Jones, before 100 and 200-meter World Record holder and Phenom, Florence Griffith Joyner (aka Flo-Jo) before all of them ... there was Wilma Rudolph.

“... the fastest woman on earth.”

In the 1960 Summer Olympic Games in Rome Italy, Wilma won gold medals in the 100- and 200-meter dashes as well as running the anchor leg for the US women's gold medal 4 x 100-meter relay team.

“Rudolph was one of the most popular athletes of the 1960 Rome Olympics and emerged from the Olympic Games as "The Tornado, the fastest woman on earth." The Italians nicknamed her "La Gazella Nera" ("The Black Gazelle") and the French called her "La Perle Noire" ("The Black Pearl").

Along with other 1960 Olympic athletes such as Cassius Clay(AKA: Muhammad Ali), Oscar Robertson, and Rafer Johnson, Rudolph became an international star.It was the first ever Olympics to be televised worldwide.The 1960 Olympics launched Wilma into the spotlight. The media cast her as America's athletic "leading lady" and a "queen," with praises of her athletic accomplishments as well as her feminine beauty and poise.”⁷ (Wikipedia)

What makes these accomplishments so extraordinary is the path in life that Wilma had to take to achieve such International acclaim and success; SITUATIONS she had to overcome; SITUATIONS that she had no control over.

First of all, she was one of those unfortunate babies I mentioned earlier that didn't get off to a great start in life. She was born prematurely at 4.5 pounds on June 23, 1940. She was the twentieth of twenty-two siblings from her father's two marriages. She suffered from several early childhood illnesses, including pneumonia, scarlet fever, and infantile paralysis, (due to polio) all by the age of five. She recovered from polio, but lost strength in her left leg and foot. Physically disabled for much of her early life, Rudolph wore a leg brace until she was twelve years old. In those days, quality medical care was hard to find for African Americans.

Her parents sought treatment for her at the historically black Meharry Medical College (now Nashville General Hospital at Meharry) in Nashville, Tenn. about 50 miles from her home in Clarksville. For two years, Wilma and her mother made weekly bus trips to Nashville for treatments to regain the use of her weakened leg. She also received at-home massage treatments four times a day. These were administered by members of her family. She wore an orthopedic shoe for support of her foot for another two years. Because of the treatments she received at Meharry and the daily massages from her family members, Wilma was able to overcome the debilitating effects of polio and learned to walk without a leg brace or orthopedic shoe for support, by the time she was twelve years old.

From there, a dream, hard work and perseverance ... paid off. They took her to the pinnacle of success in the world of sports.

Wilma did not succumb to her past. She used her past to motivate and propel her to become “*the fastest woman on earth.*” She could have very easily given up at any point along her grueling struggle and physical therapy. She could have played the victim and cried “Why me?” Instead, she **Accepted** what she could *not* control, worked hard, and excelled in those areas she could control.

- A woman of color
- A woman of courage
- A woman of hard, humble beginnings

An Inspiration and Example for *all* people, for *all* time.

This next story is perhaps one of the most amazing stories I have ever heard regarding someone reprocessing, rewriting, and overcoming a past, she had no control over. You may have heard of her. Her name is Joyce Meyer.

Joyce is one of the preeminent speakers and writers in Christendom today. Her ministry is geared primarily towards women, but many Christian men are avid readers and supporters as well.

Joyce revealed in her book “*Beauty for Ashes*,” published in 1994, that she was sexually abused at a very early age as far back as she could remember by her own biological father. Not her stepfather, her biological father. She endured this abuse until she left home at age 18. At a time when I was dealing with all the horrible SITUATIONS associated with growing up around an alcoholic father, Joyce was being abused and betrayed by the two people who were supposed to be loving her, nurturing her and protecting her; her Parents.

She left home as soon as she turned 18 and shortly after graduating High School she married, as she puts it “... *the first man who paid any attention to me.*” Meyer relates stories of lying, cheating, stealing and adultery with her first husband. The marriage lasted for five years. She married her current husband Dave Meyer in 1967 and has been married to him ever since. The rest of the story is pretty well documented. Needless to say, Joyce and Dave built a ministry, over the years, that ranks among the most influential in the world.

The really amazing part of this story, however, involves what ultimately transpired with her father regarding the horrible SITUATION she grew up in.

A SITUATION that she had no control over.

“God didn’t get me out of the SITUATION when I was a child, but He did give me the strength to get through it,” Meyer said. “It’s true my father abused me and didn’t love and protect me the way he should have, and at times it seemed no one would ever help me, and it would never end ... But God always had a plan for my life, and He has redeemed me. He has taken what Satan meant for harm and turned it into something good. He has taken away my shame and given me a double reward and recompense.” When her father was sick and dying on a hospital bed, he told her, “Joyce, I am sorry you feel I hurt you. But I still don’t understand what was so bad about what I did.” It wasn’t much as far as repentance went. God told her that she was to move him close to her house and take care of him. Meyer’s husband disagreed with the plan, but it soon was confirmed that God had spoken to her. As God supplied the grace, she showed her father love every day. Every need he had, she attempted to meet. She bought his food and clothing. One day he broke down in tears. He called Joyce and Dave to his bedside and fully repented: “I am sorry for what I did to you. I have wanted to say this to you for a long time, but I didn’t have the guts. Dave, I am sorry for what I did to you. I am sorry I hurt your wife. Please forgive me.” Meyer knelt beside him and led her father in the sinner’s prayer.

He then asked Meyer to baptize him. Meyer baptized her father on Dec. 2, 2001 in front of hundreds of people at the Dream Center she founded in St. Louis' inner city. From a "mean snake," God had begun to transform him into a "sweet old man." "I know that I know that I know that God has redeemed, and what Satan meant for bad God has turned to good."

(Joyce Meyer /godreports.com)

In 2018 Meyer shared in a video from one of her many conferences, about how her thinking has evolved even further.

Concerning her years of sexual abuse, in SITUATIONS she had no control over, Joyce had this to say.

"Where was God in all this?" Meyer asks the audience. "I can't explain it to you in my mind...I know that God didn't get me out of it, but he did give me the strength to go through it. God had a plan," she said. "About three years ago, I said that, 'But of course I wish I had not been abused' and God stopped me. He said, 'Stop saying that.' And then I thought about it and I thought, and I know this sounds crazy, but I'm glad it happened. You know why? Because I'm a better person now than I ever would have been," Meyer tearfully explained. "I don't know how to make any sense out of that, but I know that I know that I know that God has redeemed me and he has taken what Satan meant for harm and worked it out for good." Many audience members were visibly moved and crying with Meyer. "I'm stronger. I know God better. I understand people's pain."

"I Believe it's made me able to reach out to you in your pain and your need and to tell you with all passion, God is alive," she said while pointing to her audience. Meyer also tells the crowd that she is living proof that recovery is possible. "Can you recover? You're looking at somebody who did. Amen? You're looking at the evidence that you can recover," she said. "There's no pit so deep that He can't reach down and lift you out of. He will set your feet on a rock. He will give you a wonderful life. He will give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. He will make you a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified."

Joyce's story is a perfect example of someone properly processing their past, painful, SITUATION. She turned it into a learning experience, a growing experience and parked it in a positive place in her mind. She refused to let a SITUATION she had no control over, weigh her down, define her and turn her into a victim for the rest of her life.

There is absolutely no reason for us to ever feel shame for any circumstance or SITUATION that came upon us because of some "one" or some "thing"... some "SITUATION" that we had no control over. We are GOD's creation and that means that whatever was done, or whatever happened, *to us*, doesn't *define* us. We are beautiful and we are loved! We've all had our share of trials, tribulations, and hardships ... but we don't have to let them keep us down. There's a passage in the Book of Romans Chapter 8 verses 35 - 37 that goes like this;

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

I realize this is a spiritual anecdote, but the analogy is appropriate. Right now, in your present SITUATION, despite everything you have been through, despite SITUATIONS you couldn't control, you are still here, still alive, still standing. In spite of all that you have been through, you are ...

“More than a Conqueror!”

You haven't been cheated, you've been purified by fire ... and you're a stronger person because of it.

Don't let what, *“in the past”* may have gotten you down, keep you down any longer.

- Be encouraged,
- Be refreshed,
- Be renewed! you are ...

“More than a Conqueror!”

Your best years are yet to come!

Accept Situations we Could Control

Now ... what about those SITUATIONS that we *could* control, that turned out disastrously? What about all the horrible choices that *we* made that set us back years in our life's plans, our hopes, and our dreams? What about all the harm *we* have caused *others* because of *our* bad choices? How are we supposed to properly process those SITUATIONS?

The main EMOTION involved in dealing with SITUATIONS, that *we could control*, that didn't turn out so well, is *Guilt*.

In the same way as Regret and Shame, Guilt can be very harmful and destructive. It does not serve us, but *often* sends us into a downward spiral of more, negative THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS. These lead to negative ACTIONS, which in turn produce negative, undesired RESULTS.

We then find our-selves again in a negative SITUATION, which starts the process all over again ... We must take control of our THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS, concerning *any* negative SITUATION to produce effective ACTIONS, and positive, desired RESULTS.

One of the first effective ACTIONS we can take, is to give ourselves a break. Imagine that you are a counselor, and someone comes to you for guidance.

“You know, I really need some help and advice. My life is in shambles right now. I’ve done some dishonest things, I’ve cheated people, I’ve stolen, I’ve been a lousy parent, horrible spouse ... I know I’ve done wrong and I’d like to change but I don’t think there’s any hope left for me. I think I’m ready to give up. I think I’m too far gone.”

What would you say to that person?

How would you counsel them? Would you say,

“Yeah, you’re probably right. I don’t think there’s anything I can tell you. Probably best to just crawl in some hole and die. You have nothing to look forward to.”

Of course, we wouldn’t tell someone that! Don’t tell your-self that either! Know that it is never too late to turn around and start making better decisions.

My wife often says,

“You can turn your whole life completely around in a year.”

I would add, you can get a pretty good start in just a few months. Think back to times in your own life where things changed drastically in just a short period of time.

In the last chapter, those who revisited and reprocessed past SITUATIONS they *couldn't* control, learned from them. They used them to move forward. We can also learn to reprocess bad SITUATIONS that we *could* control, that didn't turn out so good, learn from them and turn them into something better.

Here are two examples, of two ex-convicts, who did just that.

Uchendi Nwani

"When Uchendi Nwani's beeper went off during a midterm exam his senior year at Tennessee State University, it did more than break his concentration, it derailed what seemed to be a bright future. The honor-roll student, licensed barber and son of a minister was destined to become a successful businessman until he gambled with the law and lost. Nwani wound up facing 30 years to life in prison after police intercepted a million-dollar cocaine shipment he was expecting. "Chin" Nwani had built a drug empire. He owned a fleet of cars outfitted to smuggle cocaine from Miami to Nashville. He'd been living a double life, even carrying a pistol to church. "All my friends were selling drugs and getting caught, but I figured I was smarter than them. I figured I could deal the drugs without touching them," says Nwani, now 33.

With police looking for him, Nwani fled to Atlanta, where he wandered from place to place for two weeks. He thought about suicide.

Instead, at the urging of his mother, he turned himself in. By God's grace, he got a sympathetic judge. He was sentenced to 6 months in a federal boot camp.

The prison population were white collar type criminals and wealthy men doing time for hacking or insider trading. After enduring 17-hour days of hard labor and soaking up every bit of advice he could pry from his fellow inmates, Nwani was released into a halfway house. He returned to school and got a job at the on-campus beauty salon. He cut so many heads he developed his own time-saving clipping technique. The hardest part was suffering ridicule from the students who remembered his arrest. "You've really got to go above and beyond if you're an ex-convict," he says. "Ninety percent of people treat you like dirt." A year later, he left the halfway house with a business degree from TSU and \$40,000 in his pocket. He used the money to start a pager and cell phone business, which he later sold to open his barber school in 1998. Nwani's Barber and Style Academy is a place where single mothers can get a haircut for less than \$10 and former criminals can learn not only a trade, but also the fundamentals of managing their own business.

The school has five instructors and keeps about 100 students on its roll. Nwani estimates he's graduated more than 300. He bought three properties to open Opportunity House, which shelters 30 former convicts, recovering drug addicts and others who are down on their luck. "God got me out of that. It wasn't nobody but him," he says. "A lot of people helped me. I wanted to give back to people." ([Uchendi Nwani](#))

The previous story is 10+ years old. It is a great story and can't be retold enough. A lot has happened in Uchendi's life since then. To find out more about what's going on with him, these days, please visit the website :

<https://millionairebarber.com>

Jeffery Henderson:

Chef Jeffery Henderson was born in 1964 in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California. He was raised by his mother, June Marie Giles, and never knew his father, Charles Henderson, Jr.

Henderson was born a few months before the Watts Riots of 1965. He attended several elementary and junior high schools including Toluca Lake Elementary School in North Hollywood, California and Hamilton Junior High School in Long Beach, California. While attending John Muir Junior High in Burbank, California, he met a cousin who was a drug dealer and started selling drugs.

Henderson grew up on the tough streets of South-Central Los Angeles and San Diego in areas where local gangs battled daily. In the early 1980s, Henderson moved to San Diego, along with his mother and sister, and his drug dealing habits increased.

He earned as much as \$35,000 a week dealing cocaine in San Diego. Then, in 1988, when Henderson was twenty-four years old, the police arrested one of his couriers with \$40,000 in cash and a large amount of cocaine. The paperwork led them directly to Henderson, who received a sentence of ten years and seven months in prison. In 1989, Henderson entered prison.

While incarcerated, Henderson developed a passion for cooking and was committed to turning his life around. He watched news programs on television, read the "L.A. Times," "USA Today," self-help books and took business courses. He also worked in prison kitchens, starting as a dishwasher, and eventually preparing meals as a chef. In 1992, Henderson was transferred to Nellis Air Force Base and worked in the dining hall. Henderson was Accepted into the Culinary Training School for inmates at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama.

In 1997, Henderson left prison. His attempts to find employment proved fruitless. Eventually he was hired as a dishwasher, and then was promoted to line cook. He moved on to other Los Angeles area restaurants, studying menus and books, and ultimately, he was hired at the Ritz-Carlton in Marina Del Rey, Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles and the L'Ermitage Hotel in Beverly Hills.

Soon, he moved to Las Vegas, and after numerous rejections, won a job with Caesars Palace. Within the year, Henderson was promoted to head chef.

He became Executive Chef at Café Bellagio in Las Vegas. By 2001, Henderson was honored as Chef of the Year by the American Food and Wine Tasting Federation. Soon after he established The Westside Group, a non-profit organization to help troubled kids. In 2007, he published his memoir, "Cooked: From the Streets to the Stove, from Cocaine to Foie Gras." Henderson focuses on giving back to his community with "The Chef Jeff Project," in which he takes six at-risk young adults and commits to turning their lives around by putting them to work in his catering company, Posh Urban Cuisine. Jeff Henderson resides in Las Vegas with his wife and three children. ([Jeffrey Henderson](#))

** As with our previous story, for an update on Chef Jeff now, please check out <https://www.chefjefflive.com> **

These are stories of normal people who made some bad choices that landed them in some bad places and in some bad SITUATIONS. Undoubtedly those choices affected their loved ones and others in their lives. The choices they made were their own. Like all of us' it would have been easy to let guilt get them down. Instead, they saw their guilt for what it was, turned it into remorse, and then repentance, and then change.

We've all done things we regret, maybe even things we are still carrying guilt about. They do not have to define us. We may have made some bad decisions but that doesn't mean we always will. We may have made some horrible mistakes but that doesn't mean we can't learn from those mistakes. In fact, that's *exactly* how we need to view those past SITUATIONS. "Learning Experiences"

If you are at a point in your life where you want something more, something better and would like to make a change, that's a good thing. You can look back at all those bad choices and decisions you've made and realize that all those SITUATIONS have brought you to this moment ... The moment of change.

No doubt, some of our bad decisions had negative impacts on people and loved ones around us ... likely our own families. *We* forced on *them* SITUATIONS over which *they* had no control. I forced SITUATIONS on my family that I am deeply sorry for. My wife, and our children, did not ask for and did not deserve some of the horrible SITUATIONS I put them through. None of our loved ones deserved some of the bad stuff we put on them.

So tragic. We sooo wish we could go back and do things different ... but we can't.

It would be easy for us to get swallowed up by guilt, but how does that serve us? How does it serve those we've hurt?

It doesn't. It is what it is.

Our THOUGHTS, EMOTIONS and ACTIONS about *our* bad decisions are in our control. *Their* THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS and ACTIONS about *our* bad decisions are in *their* control. How *they* choose to process those "SITUATIONS," have become a part of *their* life, *their* journey. They will have to Accept and redefine what those SITUATIONS, that *we* forced on *them*, mean and how *they* will use them in their *own*, personal growth.

This is what life is all about. We've all made mistakes and bad decisions. None of us are perfect. If you want to have a Happy Life, you have to let all of that go.

The key to not getting stuck in Guilt or Bitterness is to continue moving forward and to refuse to become a slave to your SITUATIONS.

Don't get stuck in bitterness, Don't get stuck in regret, Don't get stuck in unforgiveness. In reality you won't be getting "stuck" ...you will be stagnating; rotting, stinking and eventually ...
you will be consumed.

There is a great song by Don Henley, about the consequences of holding on to Bitterness and Anger and the beauty of letting go.

The Heart of the Matter

*I got the call today, I didn't want to hear
But I knew that it would come
An old, true friend of ours was talkin' on the phone
She said you found someone...
And I thought of all the bad luck
And the struggles we went through
And how I lost me and you lost you
What are these voices outside love's open door
Make us throw off our contentment
And beg for something more?*

*I'm learning to live without you now
But I miss you sometimes
The more I know, the less I understand,
All the things I thought I knew, I'm learning again ...
I've been tryin' to get down
To the heart of the matter
But my will gets weak
And my THOUGHTS seem to scatter
But I think it's about forgiveness
Forgiveness
Even if, even if you don't love me anymore*

*These times are so uncertain
There's a yearning undefined
People filled with rage
We all need a little tenderness
How can love survive in such a graceless age?
Ah, the trust and self-assurance that lead to happiness
They're the very things we kill, I guess ...
Oh, pride and competition
Cannot fill these empty arms
And the work I put between us,
you know it doesn't keep me warm*

*I'm learning to live without you now
But I miss you, baby
And the more I know, the less I understand
All the things I thought I'd figured out
I have to learn again ...*

*I've been trying to get down
To the heart of the matter
But everything changes
And my friends seem to scatter
But I think it's about forgiveness
Forgiveness
Even if, even if you don't love me anymore*

*There are people in your life
Who've come and gone
They let you down
You know they've hurt your pride
You better put it all behind you baby
'Cause life goes on
You keep carryin' that anger
It'll eat you up inside baby*

*I've been trying to get down
To the heart of the matter
But my will gets weak
And my THOUGHTS seem to scatter
But I think it's about forgiveness
Forgiveness
Even if, even if you don't love me...*

*I've been tryin' to get down
To the heart of the matter
Because the flesh will get weak
And the ashes will scatter*

*So, I'm thinkin' about forgiveness, Forgiveness
Even if, even if you don't love me ...
Forgiveness, forgiveness, baby
Forgiveness, forgiveness
Forgiveness, forgiveness, baby
Even if, even if you don't love me...
Anymore.⁹*

Such a soulful, heartfelt ballad. Don captures the *essence* of what real life is, what real life is all about. We all make mistakes, we all hurt people, we all get hurt.

*You better put it all behind you baby
'Cause life goes on
You keep carryin' that anger
It'll eat you up inside baby*

You keep carryin' that anger ... it *will* eat you up inside! The Heart of the matter, is to forgive, and move on. Forgive those who have hurt you and forgive ... your-self. If you are able to reconcile or make peace with those you've hurt, by all means do so. This principle is Key in 12 step recovery programs. (steps 8 and 9) Jesus also speaks about reconciliation ...again in the Sermon on the Mount, in the Book of Matthew, Chapter 5

“...If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift ...”

Understand though, that reconciliation is not always possible. *You* can go to your brother, (or your family member, or your coworker, or your classmate, or your Ex) and try to be reconciled but *their* heart may not be open to reconciliation. Their heart may be hardened, may be full of pride. You may be opening your-self up to angry outbursts or insults or abuse. Later in this same sermon on the mount Jesus also alludes to this reality when he says:

“...give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and rend you.”

They turn *again* and rend you ... “rend” literally means to tear you apart. The word “again” also indicates they have torn you apart before. You don’t need to be torn apart “*again*”; you need to heal. So, if you can reconcile, if you can “make peace” Amen! Do so.

GODs WORD says,

“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”

Sadly, it is not always possible. Even though you may think that attempts at reconciliation will bring peace they may bring just the opposite; more strife, more pain, more guilt.

Seriously consider your impulse to seek reconciliation.

Consider the state of mind that those you hurt may be in.

Talk it over with someone you trust to get an objective opinion ...
and, pray about it. Seek the guidance of your CREATOR.

If you determine that you can't reconcile, know that you *can*
and always *should*, forgive. In whatever way any person has
wronged you, especially if it's because *you* wronged *them* ...
forgive.

If you've done everything you can to reconcile, peace will
come. Nothing can be gained by anyone who is holding on to
bitterness or unforgiveness.

You've been living with the demons of shame, regret, and guilt
long enough; it's time to let them go. It's time to boot them out!
For Good!

Not to say they won't rear their ugly heads once in a while, in
an effort to keep you down, but just deal with them! Deal with
those THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS like we discussed in Chapter
1; Move on, move forward, to HERE and NOW.

With our past behind us and all of those old demons dealt with,
we can begin to focus on things that are right in front of us, right
now. Where exactly are we? It doesn't matter how we got here,
we're here. As we learned to Accept all aspects of our Past to begin
to move forward we must now learn how to Accept, and make the
most of, our present SITUATION

Accept our Present Situation

No matter who you are, no matter what your SITUATION, believe it or not, you are blessed. Everyone has blessings in life that we take for granted. In assessing our present SITUATION, let's recognize that and start off on a positive note. I want to encourage you to start learning how to think about, acknowledge and be grateful for your blessings on a daily basis. I know once we start doing or experiencing anything on a daily basis it tends to become rote or ritual, we take it for granted and it loses its meaning. So, I recommend that you mix it up a little during the course of your day.

I'm thankful that I woke up this morning. I'm thankful that God has given me a whole new day; another opportunity to do whatever I choose with my life. In the book of Lamentations in the Bible the author proclaims;

“The steadfast love of the LORD never faileth. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness ...”

The love and mercy of our CREATOR towards us *is* new every morning. What a blessed promise to start our day with.

I'm thankful for clean running water that I can splash on my face to help me wake up. I'm thankful I can take a nice hot shower to wash away some of the nights aches and pains to help me refresh and reenergize myself. I know there are times when the poor among us get their gas turned off. Sometimes their power ... but *most* of us, *most* of the time have hot water to shower in. I'm thankful for a fluffy towel to pat my face dry and a comb to run through my hair.

I'm thankful that I live in a city, in a county, in a state in a country that has a sanitary sewer system that my plumbing is attached to. I'm thankful, again, for the running water that carries all of the waste from my bathroom, my kitchen sink, garbage disposal, washing machine, laundry sink etc ... to a sewage plant, where it can all be cleaned, filtered and recycled. I'm thankful, because without all of that, I would be much more susceptible to sickness and disease. I'm thankful for the Plumbers, who do the work, that helps protect the health of our nation.

I'm thankful for hot coffee or tea in the morning, to help me ease into my day; for a nice peaceful space to sit in, and sip my drink down slowly. Thankful for creamer if I want some, breakfast when I get ready to eat ... I can even break down breakfast bite by bite. Eggs, bacon or sausage; cereal or oatmeal; orange juice or milk; so much to be thankful for.

It's early in the morning ... before dawn. I am taking this opportunity to write a little. I'm thankful for the recliner that I'm sitting back in, nice and comfy.

The lap desk that my laptop computer is lying on. My laptop computer for that matter. I'm so blessed to have one. The TV in my living room that is off right now... but everyone has a TV; to watch sports, to watch cartoons, to watch whatever! The socks that warm my feet, my slippers, my sweat pants and t-shirt, my warm robe.

Of course I *could* go on and on and on ... or I could focus on the slight, nagging, sciatic pain in my left piriformis muscle, or the ache in my chest from a recent surgery that is still healing. Oh, yes, those painful, bothersome things are there also. I find, however, they are much easier to deal with and tolerate when I remember to assess and count my blessings, in the moment, in my present situation.

And then just the simplest of things ... taking the time to stop and appreciate all the wondrous things we walk right by every day. A flower, a plant, a tree ... I used to take all those things for granted. Now, I take nothing for granted. I take the time to appreciate *every*-thing around me, *every* day.

A few years ago, I was going through a very difficult time. One small part of my day, made that time much easier to deal with. I was living at the time in a modest home. Not a large backyard or outdoor space to speak of. My wife, with her incredible creativity, and her inspiring eye for the aesthetic, had turned a little 10-foot by 10-foot patio area outside of the glass sliding door from our kitchen, into an amazing, tranquil, Meditation Space. In this space, was a portable fire pit with an L shaped outdoor sofa and chair.

Lovingly placed, about and around, were several potted plants; some type of flowering vine on the cedar plank fence and some unique patio art mounted on and creatively accenting the fence.

It was Summertime. I would get up in the morning, while it was still brisk. Fresh coffee in hand, I would drift out into that little paradise and take it all in. The morning light on my face. Birds chirping in the trees. The slight scent of the little buds flowering on the vine. It was so peaceful and calming.

The most beautiful, humbling thing though, by far, was when I would focus in on one particular flower or leaf, from one of the potted plants. Studying each fold, of each petal, getting lost in the intricate workmanship. I would follow a small insect trekking its way across the branches, the leaves, plodding through the soil.

My heart and my mind were opened like never before to a CREATOR, who paid attention to life in such awesome detail. It helped me put my challenges into proper perspective. It also taught me how to,

“... Love GOD with all my heart and with all my mind and with all my strength.”

I had heard that phrase all my Christian Life, but it was always just a concept, an abstraction; something that sounded nice but had no real relevance in the “*physical, earthly,*” realm. How could it? How could you love some-thing or some-one that could not be seen or felt or touched?

Don't get me wrong, I had experienced some awesome times in Worship and Prayer ... but this was different.

When I began to understand the magnificence, the depth of the love, of a CREATOR, so intricately and intimately, involved *in* and a part *of*, the tiniest, seemingly least significant, of all his Creation ... I fell in love with him in a way I had never known;

*“... with all my heart and with all my mind
and with all my strength.”*

Now,

- I *see* him in a delicate, dainty flower, in a single blade of grass.
- I *feel* him in a slight summer breeze, or a soft spring shower.
- I *touch* him, every time I run my hand over my little puppy's' silky coat.

He is an awesome GOD and I love him ... *deeply*.

A few months later, after I had begun to Meditate and observe life in this way, I had the privilege of observing this technique, or this *tool* if you will, manifest beautifully in an Artist, my wife and I met on a trip to Carmel by the Sea. His name is Aleks Raskin.

“Aleks Raskin's images are more than art; they are a way to deliver his philosophy, which he calls photo plasticity or seeing the preciousness of the now. His work “Intermission” is like a photo mosaic composed of digitally placed images of a tree, a human model, brick walls, a clock, and sand. “*The image comes first,*” Raskin says.

“Then I walk through the moments of life to find those bits and pieces of reality to support the image in my mind.” A native of the former Soviet Union, Raskin came to California 30 years ago and worked in the Bay Area as a biochemist. In 2003, he quit that career and devoted himself to art, two years later. *“I consciously changed from a life as an upper-middle-class scientist into a starving artist.”* he says.” (Aleks Raskin, Carmel Artist)¹⁰

Raskin was making a “very comfortable” living as a biochemist when he had an atypical artistic epiphany. *“I was looking at the DNA of wheat and a man,”* he says, *“and saw that when they’re split, they’re almost identical. It’s just their arrangement that makes them different. I realized every form in the universe is created through the constant interchange of factors.”* Soon thereafter, he decided he needed a change. *“I left science after 25 years of research because I wasn’t getting my message through,”* he says. *“I needed something new.”* He traveled to Tibet and India, where he spent a year meditating

“I realized if you’re not content and Happy now,” Raskin says, *“nothing in the future will bring that to you. Real happiness is internal.”* When he came back, he chose to settle in Carmel and started producing art. But he still felt a Connection to his previous occupation. He still felt a Connection to those small building blocks. In fact, he started to feel a Connection to everything. *“Art is a part of science,”* he says, *“but the delivery is different. Science is analytical, but art is emotional.”*

“Art without a statement is just a hobby.”

The statement in Raskin’s art is this: Understanding our Connectivity with all living and non-livings things and gaining an Acceptance for both the “good” and the “bad” is the path to happiness. *“If we understand that every object in life and every moment is special,”* he says, *“we will be that much closer to happiness.”* That ethic is clearly evident in his art: It’s built from common things to create something remarkable. *“There are no ordinary objects,”* he says, *“just ordinary points of view.”*

([MC Weekly, Aleks Raskin](#))¹¹

I realize there are those who would say

“Oh that’s great for him. Of course it’s easy to count your blessings when you live in situations conducive to blessings; when you can live in Carmel. When you have enough money, when you’re in good health ... La di da!”

I would respectfully disagree.

We all know, all too well, that fame and fortune and good health don’t guarantee happiness. I’m still sometimes dismayed (but not surprised) to hear of people, who appear to me to have it all together but in reality, are falling apart. I used to be surprised ... I have lived long enough now to see so many who have made shipwreck of their lives because they were looking for “Happiness” in all of the wrong places.

Everywhere but right in front of them. Everywhere but their own present situation. The list is filled with Religious Leaders, Politicians, Business persons, Athletes and Celebrities. As I write these words, a story broke, just recently, about a well known church pastor with a huge ministry who lost it all because of infidelity in his marriage.

I've compiled a brief list of some famous people who *seemingly* had it all, who *seemingly* should have been happy and yet succumbed to depression and hopelessness to the point that they took their own lives.

There is no significance to someone's place on the list; it is in simple alphabetical order:

Chester Bennington (2017), American lead singer of Linkin Park, hanging

Jeremy Michael Boorda (1996), US Chief of Naval Operations, gunshot to the chest

Anthony Bourdain (2018), American chef, author, and television personality, hanging

Jonathan Brandis (2003), American actor, hanging

Cheyenne Brando (1995), Tahitian model/actress, hanging

Capital Steez (2012), American hip-hop artist, jumped off the rooftop of the Cinematic Music Group headquarters in Manhattan

Kurt Cobain (1994), American musician for the band Nirvana, gunshot

Chris Cornell (2017), American singer (Soundgarden, Audioslave, Temple of the Dog), hanging

Brad Delp (2007), American singer-songwriter for the bands Boston and RTZ, carbon monoxide poisoning

Keith Emerson (2016), English rock musician, keyboardist, and composer for the bands The Nice and Emerson, Lake & Palmer, gunshot to the head

Ernest Hemingway (1961), American writer and journalist, gunshot to head

Margaux Hemingway (1996), American fashion model, granddaughter to Ernest Hemingway, actress; overdose of Phenobarbital

Aaron Hernandez (2017), American football player and convicted murderer, hanging in prison cell, five days after his acquittal from a separate murder charge

Margot Kidder (2018), Canadian-American actress, known for her role as Lois Lane in Superman films, drugs and alcohol

Billy Knight (2018), UCLA basketball player, self-inflicted blunt force injuries

Don Lapre (2011), American television pitchman noted for several products, cut throat with a razor blade

Richard Manuel (1986), Canadian pianist and lead singer for The Band, hanging

Mindy McCready (2013), American country music singer, gunshot

Alexander McQueen (2010), British fashion designer and couturier, hanging

Donnie Moore (1989), American baseball player, gunshot after shooting his wife

John O'Brien (1994), American novelist, best known for his novel, Leaving Las Vegas, gunshot to the head

Freddie Prinze (1977), American stand-up comedian and actor, gunshot to the head

Junior Seau (2012), American football All-Pro player, gunshot to the chest

Kate Spade (2018), American fashion designer, hanging

Hunter S. Thompson (2005), gonzo journalist, author of Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, gunshot

Robin Williams (2014), American comedian and actor, hanging

Chris Von Erich (1991), born Chris Barton Adkisson, professional wrestler, gunshot to the head

Kerry Von Erich (1993), born Kerry Gene Adkisson, professional wrestler, gunshot to the chest

Mike Von Erich (1987), born Michael Brett Adkisson, professional wrestler, overdose of Placidyl and alcohol.

This is just a short list of some of the more famous, well known suicides. The last three are particularly disturbing. Three brothers from the sport of Pro Wrestling who each ended his own life before his time. If only they had been able to take the time and make the effort to see the blessings in their lives.

It is always a tragedy when a person can't find one shred of hope, one single thing to live for. Especially when they appear to have so much going for them, so much to live for.

On the other hand, there are other people who you might think *would* want to end their lives; some are seriously ill, some are quadriplegic, some badly burned; some are just in SITUATIONS and living conditions so bad they just don't want to live anymore. I already briefly touched on the story of Stephen Hawking.

Though quadriplegic most of his adult life, Hawking had an incredible mind and a strong desire to live and leave behind his contribution to physics and mankind. There are other Celebrities right now at this moment who are suffering from Lupus, Lyme Disease, Cancer, Diabetes, Hepatitis C, HIV ... yet they generally don't complain about it; they keep their troubles to themselves. They focus on the positive things in their lives.

Dave Roever is a Vietnam Veteran who I first heard about in the late seventies' early eighties. If anyone had a reason to just give up and die it would be Dave Roever. This is an excerpt from his website which you can check out by following the link at the end.

“Dave Roever grew up in a loving, committed family in South Texas. The last thing on his mind was going to war. At the height of the Vietnam War, he received his draft notice. Having no desire to serve in the infantry, he joined the Navy and served as a river boat gunner in the elite Brown Water Black Beret in Vietnam. Eight months into his tour of duty in Vietnam, Dave was burned beyond recognition when a phosphorous grenade he was poised to throw exploded in his hand. The ordeal left him hospitalized for fourteen months, where he underwent numerous major surgeries. His survival and life are miraculous. Today, with his humorous style, Dave Roever is enthusiastically received both nationally and internationally as a public speaker. He is a gifted communicator and speaks in a variety of settings including public schools, military installations, business, men's and youth conventions, etc. Dave is a frequent guest on national television talk shows.

He established compassionate, ongoing missions work in Vietnam and is involved in other nations. In every setting, Dave's message is one of hope. Using his life as an example, he addresses issues relevant to his audience and presents concrete solutions to life's problems. Often drawing upon his war experiences of loneliness, peer pressure, disfigurement and pain, as well as life's triumphs. Dave weaves a message of courage, commitment and survival that touches and transforms those who hear him. The foundation of his hope is his faith, supported by the wholesome relationships with his parents, wife, children and grandchildren.” ([Dave Roevers](#))¹³

In addition to these stories, I would also encourage you to check out a number of books that were written by American POWs during the Vietnam War. Among them:

- *When Hell was in Session*
- *The Passing of the Night*
- *Chained Eagle*
- *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*
- *The Hanoi Hilton*
- *Faith of my Fathers*

I've read these books and a few others about the accounts of the soldiers who were beaten and tortured over a period of years in North Vietnamese Prisoner of War camps. Some of them were subject to two or more years in isolation, solitary confinement where they had no contact with another human soul other than their captors. These men held on dearly to life.

They made friends with the bugs and the rats in their cells. They eventually became aware that, though they were isolated, they shared walls with other prisoners in the camp. They devised a tapping code that one of the prisoners had remembered learning in survival training. They built a communication network throughout the compound that brought them together and helped them survive.

In such extreme isolation many of the men went back, in their minds, and discovered memories long dormant; memories of family, friends, and Sunday School. Some of the men, built houses... put them together stud by stud, brick by brick, all in their minds. Many of these soldiers went on to *actually* build those houses once they were free, and living life back in the USA. Houses designed and constructed in the lonely confines of an enemy prison cell on the other side of the world.

Other men played countless rounds of golf, designed golf courses, tore down and rebuilt car engines ... all while sitting alone, sick, weak and wounded, thousands of miles away from their homes and loved ones. One of the things they continually took time to do was count their blessings. Even in, their *horrible* "Present Situation."

I was sitting one morning out in my little Meditation area that I mentioned earlier, during the very difficult time that I spoke of, and I was thinking of Stephen Hawking and these POWs. I began to meditate on the fact, that no matter what I would ever go through in life, no matter what trials and tribulations, nothing could touch my mind, my soul or my spirit.

In the worst-case scenario if I lost everything, every penny, if I lost everyone close to me, if everyone I knew turned their backs on me, if I found myself homeless, sleeping wherever I could, with just the clothes on my back ... *nothing* could force me to *think* or *feel*, any way that I didn't want to. It was a powerful revelation, an amazing epiphany.

It is *my* Superpower...

It can be *your* Superpower.

- My mind - Your mind
- My soul – Your soul
- My spirit – Your spirit

... these belong exclusively to us! We have complete control, over who we are, what we think and what we feel. No *thing*, no *one*, no SITUATION can *ever* take that away from us! No matter *what* comes my way in the future ...I'll be okay ... and so will you.

Resolve today, that no matter what SITUATION you might ever find your-self in, on your life's journey, you will *always* find your way back to center, *always* stay grounded *in* and mindful of ... NOW! ... the present moment. Resolve that you will always find something good, always find some blessing, always find some-*thing* ... to be thankful for.

There is a song that I first heard when I was a teenager at a Wednesday night Youth Meeting, by a Christian Singer/Songwriter who came and sang and played his guitar for our youth group.

His name was Bob Ayala. He was blind and was one of the most talented artists I have ever heard.

I also write, sing, and play guitar and I used to perform a few of his songs. One in particular, that was always my favorite, had a huge impact on me, and it usually has an impact on people I sing it for.

The song is called “Peace.” It came to me at a time in my life when I was searching for peace ... I longed for peace ... but peace was always just beyond my grasp. It wasn’t until I met my CREATOR, that I finally found *true* peace.

The peace that passes all understanding.

The peace that this song describes.

*Last night while the city was at ease
The fog slept upon the roof tops and trees.
Alone in my room with the candles burning free
Comforted by the One who lives in me.
Nothing can touch me I Believe.
No one can sell me if I’m free.*

*I laid down the burden of my heart in his palm
To sleep through the night and find Peace at the dawn
Peace, like a valley where man cannot come
To tear down the timbers and darken the Sun
Nothing can touch me I Believe.
No one can sell me if I’m free* ¹³

It's true ...

- *Nothing* can touch you when you Believe ...
- *No-one* can sell you if you're free.

Whatever SITUATION you're in right now, you can find something positive. You may be going through a breakup, a divorce, a death; loss of a loved one, loss of a job, loss of health; Cancer, Diabetes, Heart Disease... No one makes it through this life without going through some kind of trial or tragedy.

You may be going through something, right now ,

... at this very moment!

As you assess your present SITUATION don't focus on the negative ... focus on how blessed you are to be alive! Be thankful for every breath you take. Counting your Blessings, will bolster your resolve, buoy your confidence, and boost you back to emotional balance.

We are where we are for a reason.

*We are **who** we are for a reason.*

With all our strengths and weaknesses and with all the gifts, talents and personality traits that make us uniquely who we are. There is no one quite like each one of us and we all deserve to be Happy, to have Happy Lives. In order for that to happen we are going to have to learn to *really* ... Accept and Love our-selves.

Accept and Love Our Self

Self-Concept is a person's overall awareness of:

- 1) who they are
- 2) who they want to be
- 3) what value they place, on their "Self."

Put another way,

- 1) Self-Image
- 2) Self-Ideal
- 3) Self-Esteem.

The "Esteem" aspect, the "Feelings" the "EMOTIONS" tend to vacillate or bounce around depending how close our *Image* comes to meeting and aligning with our *Ideal*. In other words, how close are we to *being*, who we actually want to *be*? If there is a wide gap between the two, our "Esteem" suffers, and we engage in self-loathing and self-destructive behaviors; destructive behaviors that only serve to widen the "Image – Ideal" gap. Behaviors that widen the gulf between who we are and who, we *really* want to be.

The RESULT of this constant conflict is that we are forever caught up in the vicious cycle, the vicious circle, of Negative Reality.

Negative THOUGHTS, beget Negative EMOTIONS, beget Negative ACTIONS, beget Negative RESULTS, beget more Negative THOUGHTS, Negative EMOTIONS etc. etc. etc..."

The questions we must ask to break out of this cycle are:

1. Is our Assessment of our Self Image true and accurate?
2. Is our Self Ideal reasonable and realistic

People who haven't learned to manage their THOUGHTS or their negative thinking, usually wrestle with a low Self Image, no matter how talented or popular or beautiful they are. Talent, popularity and beauty, are fleeting and temporal. They are fragile and can be lost or destroyed at any time.

The Weight Loss and Cosmetic Surgery industries flourish because the customer base is constant and endless ... people who want to hang on, *cling on*, to their youth, people who want to be beautiful and glamorous; and I'm talking about the people, who are already considered beautiful and glamorous. There is no shortage of clients, who have money to spend, in pursuit of eternal youth.

Others who maybe perceive themselves as not so talented, not so popular, and not so beautiful, also wrestle with a low self-image.

They think these are the traits that make us cool, Accepted and worthy of love. They think they will never have, or aren't worthy of these characteristics. Same dysfunction, same low self-image, two different sides of the same coin. Both sets of people have a low self-image because they don't have a true and accurate assessment of who they are. I touched on this problem back in the Introduction of this book.

“Society has conditioned us to Believe that people who are overweight, physically challenged, old, feeble or whatever are somehow less valuable than those who are the epitome of health, fitness and physical beauty. This is simply not true. One of the greatest minds of our time, one of the greatest contributors to science and physics was Stephen Hawking. Hawking was a quadriplegic stricken by a form of Lou Gehrig's disease who over time, became paralyzed over his entire body. Eventually he was only able to Communicate by twitching a single muscle in his cheek. Stephen Hawking was not the physical manifestation that we all recognized as his body, rather he was a spirit, soul and mind that inhabited that body for a moment in time, in which he made an impact in the world that will not soon be forgotten.”

Stephen Hawking was not his physical body, and neither are you. I don't care if you're beautiful or ugly, popular or un-popular, talented or un-talented. What is beautiful or ugly anyway? Those terms are relative. When the Vietnam POWs were alone in their dark prison cells for years at a time no one saw their haggard faces or their emaciated bodies.

Their families couldn't see them, their friends couldn't see them ... but these were beautiful men, beautiful souls, unbreakable spirits. You are a beautiful soul. You are an unbreakable spirit. The fact that you are alive and reading these words is a testament to the miracle of you.

Do you ever stop to consider, to ponder to appreciate just the simple beating of your Heart? Over the course of a lifetime the human heart will beat two to three million times ... and guess what? No one knows what *literally*, makes us tick. It's a miracle ... here is just a tiny peek into the miracle of Heart Automaticity.

Heart Automaticity ... the automatic continual steady beating of the Heart

*"The heart automaticity is a fundamental physiological function in higher organisms. The spontaneous activity is initiated by specialized populations of cardiac cells generating periodical electrical oscillations. The exact cascade of steps initiating the pacemaker cycle in automatic cells **has not yet been entirely elucidated.**" ([Heart Automaticity](#))¹⁴*

Translation:

We still don't fully understand why the heart beats like it does.

If your heart is still beating, you're a miracle. You have a place in GOD's plan. Every-one has a place and a purpose in our great GOD and CREATORS Universe. GOD is so infinitely awesome and complex we can't even begin to know or understand his ways.

His Word says he knew us in our mothers' wombs; even *before* we were *in* our mothers' wombs. It is GOD who created the spark of life at the coming together of sperm and egg; GOD who caused the single celled organism to divide ... and then divide again and again and again ... The same GOD who day by day is orchestrating the births and deaths of stars and planets at the far reaches of the universe, is the same GOD who is weaving lives together at the sub atomic level in mothers of every creed, color and culture, all across our tiny Globe. The same GOD who knows the number of hairs on your head ... knows when a sparrow falls to the ground.

Whatever your Image of your-self has been, know that you were made in the Image of the CREATOR. Your life is a part of, at one with, and *important* to GOD. When thinking about your being, when meditating on your Image of your-self, give less credence to your physical self, what you do, what you've done ... focus on *who you are!* You are first and foremost a spiritual being. God's Word says that he knew you even *before* you were in your mothers' womb.

I don't pretend to fully understand or comprehend that declaration, but I do know that energy cannot be created or destroyed, it can only change state. In some way, we existed before our physical bodies and I know, in some manner, we will exist after we leave them. We are eternal.

Be humble, be grateful that you matter, and you are important in GOD'S Universe, on GOD's Earth. In your Nation, In your State, In your City, In your Home ... be Happy and be Blessed!

Go with the flow of wherever the river of life wants to take you!

When it comes to the matter of “Who you *want* to be” please understand that no one is perfect. It is however, “*perfectly*” fine to have a Self-Ideal that is “*nearly perfect*”. We should always be desiring to improve and grow and become better versions of ourselves on a daily basis.

The danger, of having a perfect Self-Ideal is the potential for Self-Condensation when we fall short of that Ideal; when we engage in behaviors that are in direct conflict with who we *say* we want to be. This is known in Psychology as “Cognitive Dissonance.” That literally means, THOUGHTS of, or thinking (Cognitive) about, Disharmony. (Dissonance as in musical notes) So, when your Self-Image, falls short of your Self-Ideal, you tend to *think* about your “disharmony,” your failure. It doesn’t take a psychologist to know that kind of thinking, is likely going to cause you some stress.

The High and Lofty Self-Ideal is a noble and worthy goal. Understand and realize however, that moving toward that Self-Ideal is a process and a journey; don’t worry about the occasional stumble. It’s not always our victories and successes that move us towards our Ideals, our defeats and our failures play an equally important role.

How can we ever know “*the thrill of victory*” if we never experience “*the agony of defeat*”?

Here are some of my favorite quotes on defeat and failure.

“Before success comes in any man’s life, he is sure to meet with much temporary defeat, and, perhaps, some failure. When defeat overtakes a man, the easiest and most logical thing to do is to quit. That is exactly what the majority of men do. More than five hundred of the most successful men this country has ever known told the author their greatest success came just one step beyond the point at which defeat had overtaken them.”

(Napoleon Hill)

“I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.” (Thomas Edison)

“Pain is temporary, quitting lasts forever.”

(Lance Armstrong)

“Every adversity, every failure, every heartache, carries with it the seed of an equal or greater benefit.”

(Napoleon Hill)

“You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be *necessary* to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.”

(Maya Angelou)

“Everything you want, is on the other side of Fear.”

(Jack Canfield)

“Somewhere in the world there is a defeat for everyone. Some are destroyed by defeat, and some made small and mean by victory. Greatness lives in one who triumphs equally over defeat and victory.”

(John Steinbeck)

“If we will be quiet and ready enough, we shall find compensation in every disappointment.”

(Henry David Thoreau)

“Failure is a bend in the road, not the end of the road. Learn from failure and keep moving forward.”

(Roy T. Bennett)

“Rock bottom became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life.”

(J.K. Rowling)

“Negative results are just what I want. They’re just as valuable to me as positive results. I can never find the thing that does the job best until I find the ones that don’t.”

(Thomas Edison)

“Failure is fine if you keep moving forward. Defeat is a doorway not a driveway. Something to go through, not somewhere to park”.

(kyle gardner)

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming;... but he who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails,... at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

(Theodore Roosevelt)

“Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never-in nothing, great or small, large or petty — never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

(Winston Churchill)

“In this world, you will have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

(Jesus)

The conclusion of the previous quotations should be that;

“Our defeats don't have to define us”

Our failures don't have to *widen* the "Image Ideal gap" and cause us to once again, get caught up in the vicious circle of negative THOUGHTS, EMOTIONS and ACTIONS.

The RESULTS of our "failures" hinge upon how we process those SITUATIONS, that are commonly referred to as defeats or failures. What kind of THOUGHTS do we have about our "failures?"

I want to answer that question in the context of a technique I have previously referred to. This technique is known as a;

"STAR" Session Interview (SSI)

An Examination of Circumstance Scenarios.

S-ITUATION

T-HOUGHTS and EMOTIONS,

A-CTIONS

R-ESULTS

The STAR Session Interview technique allows us to step outside of ourselves, *Interview our-Self*, and take an objective look at how our minds operate in a given SITUATION.

Let's Imagine any number of failures or "SITUATIONS" we may have experienced and the THOUGHTS (negative) that we *could* choose to think about them:

“I got screwed, I’m too young, I’m not smart enough, I’m a screw-up, I can’t do anything right, I don’t have enough education, I’ll never be able to do anything right, I’m too old, I’m cursed, nothing ever works out for me, it’s not meant to be, this is my lot in life. I don’t deserve a good life, I’m not worthy, not love-able, the world would be better off without me, I don’t care anymore, I’m sick of trying, I’m just going to give up ...”

Here are some EMOTIONS (negative) that are associated with these THOUGHTS:

Anger, Frustration, Disgust, Self-loathing, Fear, Anxiety, Depression, Disappointment, Sadness, Apathy and Despair

Here are some ACTIONS that are born of these negative EMOTIONS:

Lashing out, Deflecting blame, Screaming, Cursing, Insults, Gossip, Hitting Some-thing, Hitting Some-one, Withdrawal, Self-sabotage, Self-destructive Behaviors, Excess Drinking, Drug abuse, Indulging in Pornography and/or Risky Sex, Panic Attacks, Insomnia, High Blood Pressure, Binge Eating, Binge/Purge Eating, Lethargy, Excess Sleeping, Poor Dressing and Grooming, Lapse of Personal Hygiene ... and sometimes ... Suicide.

The RESULTS of these ACTIONS are sad and tragic;

Broken Lives, Broken Homes, Broken Dreams.

The life experiences that you've had or the number of times you've processed SITUATIONS in this manner, the THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS that you have allowed to rule your heart and mind, will determine the kinds of ACTIONS you will take and the RESULTS you will create. Left unchecked, left unresolved, left *im-properly* processed, our negative, toxic, THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS can be disastrous. THOUGHTS conceived, nurtured, and played out inside of our head. THOUGHTS that have no basis in fact or truth.

Becoming aware of our THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS, is the first step in learning how to mindfully manage them.

In contrast to the above *Circumstance Scenario*, let's imagine any number of failures or "SITUATIONS" we may have experienced and the THOUGHTS (positive) that we *could* choose to think about them:

"I know if I don't give up, I can do this. I can achieve the goals I've set for myself. I am responsible for my results and outcomes, I'm young. I've got time on my side, I'm going to get the education I need to do this, I will use my mistakes to learn and improve, I'm going to figure this out one way or the other, it's never too late to stop learning, I will eventually get it right if I don't give up, I'm not too old, my years of experience are an asset, I'm blessed, everything eventually works out for me, it's meant to be, this is my destiny, I deserve a good life. I'm a worthy, love-able person, the world is a better place with me contributing my part, I will never stop caring, I will never, never, never, give up!"

Here are some EMOTIONS (positive) that are associated with these THOUGHTS:

Calm, Empowerment, Self-Respect, Understanding, Courage, Peace, Confidence, Assurance, Hope, Comfort, Joy, Encouragement, Optimism, Determination, Dedication, Commitment.

Here are some ACTIONS that are born of these positive EMOTIONS:

Assumes responsibility, speaks calmly, speaks positively, speaks kindly, stays pure, stays present, stays spirit focused, Indulges in Self-improvement behaviors, eats well, exercises, takes classes, researches, invests in self, takes bold positive ACTIONS, Meditates, takes care of and treats self with love and respect.

The RESULTS of these ACTIONS are uplifting and inspiring;

Happy Lives, Happy Homes, Happy Dreams.

The way we process, the way we think about the gap or the gulf between our Self Image and our Self Ideal will determine if and to what degree we Esteem our-selves. Cultivate a belief that your Self-Image will someday meet and marry your Self-Ideal. Let the relationship grow and evolve naturally. Don't try to force it. Just continue moving forward and embrace the SITUATIONS of your life as they unfold; the good, the bad and the ugly. the successes and the failures ...

They are all a part of what makes you uniquely who you are. In time, the good will overcome the bad, the successes will outnumber the failures. No matter how down on your-self you might be, if you have a desire to move forward, you will be fine. If you have a desire to continue to grow and evolve into a better person, a better version of your-self, closer to your Self-Ideal, then you should begin to Esteem your-self. There is something *good* inside you, something that wants to be a part *of* and contribute *to* the Universe. That's a fantastic place to start.

Once you then learn, to Accept your-self, you will be on the path towards liking and loving your-self. To Accept and love one's self is absolutely necessary for happiness. You must feel good and positive and optimistic about your life on a daily basis. You can't move forward, you can't evolve when you're consumed with Self-Consciousness, Self-Doubt and Self-Loathing. Being "Self-ish" is OK. Just make sure that rather than the latter "Self" characteristics, you are instead *Self-Aware*, *Self-Confident* and *Self-Loving*.

One of the greatest benefits that will come from learning to Accept and Love your-Self is the subject of the next chapter. For some this is going to be one of the highest, hardest, mountains to you've ever had to climb; but absolutely essential on our journey to achieving a Happy Life. Once you've ascended, once you have conquered this peak, you will have begun the process of evolving to a state of being and consciousness where you can learn the secret of how to Accept and love others.

Accept and Love Others

One of the greatest challenges in our quest for a Happy Life, is our struggle with the difficult relationships we experience with the “others” in our lives. A quick Internet search produces hundreds of results on books that are out there, dealing with this subject and all of its sub-subjects.

“How to deal with difficult people, Dealing with difficult people, How to deal with people you can’t stand, Coping with difficult people, Putting up with difficult people, Confronting difficult people ...”

and on, and on and on ...

(for a deep dive into the sub-subjects just replace the word “People” with Family Members, Employees, Employers, Coworkers, Neighbors etc. etc.)

In light of this high demand for books and programs, to instruct and counsel, advise and admonish, I think it is safe to say “*dealing with difficult people*” is a huge issue.

I want to offer you an option that I know will help immensely in this area; specifically as it relates to our stated objective of achieving a Happy Life. That’s what it’s all about isn’t it?

Everything else pales in comparison to Happiness. You will initially resist my advice; it is completely counter to our natural instinct. However, you must understand *and* embrace it to achieve a Happy Life. You may flinch when you read it, you may recoil ... you might just close the book and toss it ... just walk away. If you do, you will be making a huge mistake. You will be walking away from the very principle that can change your life.

This advice comes from Matthew, the 5th chapter, verses 43 - 48.

Jesus is speaking:

Love Your Enemies

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be (children) of your Father in heaven; for He makes “His” sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love only, those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect ...”

By now, I’m sure you’ve realized that I take a great deal of my beliefs and my philosophy from the Bible.

I hope you've also realized that I'm not borrowing from or quoting from the pages of these ancient texts to judge. My goal is not to condemn anyone, but rather to unveil the great wisdom and truth they have to offer, to those who are truly seeking. This passage has been interpreted in a variety of ways by scholars throughout history, but basically boils down to two schools of thought:

1. This is an ideal that Jesus puts forth that is obviously impossible to fulfill and so it demonstrates our inadequacy and inability to live up to GOD's standard and therefore our need for a Savior (i.e. Jesus.)
2. This is an ideal that GOD *fully* expects us to strive for and evolve into.

I use to subscribe to the former school. It was a very convenient way for me to cop out and not attempt to try and adopt this philosophy for my life. Who wants to LOVE, bless and do good to those who hate and persecute us? No, it feels much better (we think) to hate them right back. We hold onto our anger and bitterness and resentment because it makes absolutely no sense for us to do otherwise. It goes against everything in our nature to roll over for bad people or to be a doormat for others.

No, rather we feel we need to stand up and fight back and preserve our dignity, our Pride, our *Self-Respect*. I know so many "Christians" who think they can't follow, or refuse to follow, Jesus clear directive in this matter.

Though they may be very moral and upstanding in every other area of their lives ... they just can't submit to their Good Shepherd in this one area. As a RESULT, True Happy Lives, continue to elude them.

It just doesn't make sense that following that "clear directive" could possibly bring us happiness. But according to JESUS it does. Let's look back at the beginning of his "Sermon on the Mount" and what he revealed to his disciples about the kinds of things that would produce happiness.

Happy are the kind and merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.

Happy are those who strive for peace—they shall be called the sons of God.

These are people who are Happy as a result of *doing* something ... engaging in some kind of *behavior*; being kind, being merciful, striving for peace. Jesus goes on to say,

Happy are those who are persecuted because they are good.

Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you ..."

So, how does it work? How can you be Happy if you follow this crazy, itinerant preachers' advice?

There are two things you must do for this phenomenon to manifest itself in your life. The first *thing* we just covered in the last chapter.

You must Accept and Love your-Self.

If you are to have *any* kind of chance to fulfill JESUS directive to Love thy neighbor, (not to mention his directive to Love your enemies) the first thing you must do is to Love your-self.

So, let's say you've read the last chapter and you've got a pretty good handle on Accepting and loving your-self, trusting the Universe, trusting GOD, your FATHER, your CREATOR, to lead and guide you, mold and make you, pick you up when you fall down, love you and evolve you. You're starting to comprehend the awesome reality that you can trust your CREATOR, the GOD of the Universe with *your* life.

The next *thing*; the second thing you must do is to trust your CREATOR, the GOD of the Universe ... *with everyone else's life!*

Understanding and Accepting this truth will set you free. Free from the burden of having to judge another human being. Just as I learned that GOD wants to lead and guide me, mold and make me, pick me up when I fall, love me and evolve me, he wants to do the same for "others," if *they* are willing. Who am I then, to judge what you or "others" are doing, or have done, or will do? The Word says "*all*" have missed the mark and fallen short of the Glory of the CREATOR GOD.

“All” of our “works” are as filthy rags ...”
before the SUPREME MAJESTY
that IS Heaven, Earth and Stars.

“All” we, like sheep, have gone astray ...
we’ve turned EVERY-ONE, to our own SELF-ish ways.

The Scriptures say;

“ ... there is *none* that is righteous
...*No Not One!*

What do you think GOD, or his Angels, think about us, as they
go about, to and fro upon the Earth, watching us, observing us ...

What do they think about our Wars, our Weapons of Mass
Destruction, our Pride and our Prejudices? We think we have come
so far as a species and yet even a casual observer on the outside of
our world looking in, would no doubt notice just how uncivilized
we are.

However, like any loving father, our FATHER, desires to BE
with US, have fellowship with US and love US. The Good, the
Bad and the Ugly. According to JESUS himself, GOD so loved the
“*WORLD*” that he gave his only begotten son to die for us ... all of
us! Not just the ones we approve of.

*“He” makes “His” sun to rise on the evil and on the good
and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”*

Psalm 103 says:

“As a father has compassion on his children so our FATHER has compassion on those who reverence, honor, respect and stand in awe of him. For he knows our hearts and our minds; our innermost being. He knows how we are formed, how we are framed ... that we are but earth and clay”

GOD knows all the people, that we so often sit in judgment of:

He’s no good, she’s a bitch, he’s a bastard, she’s a whore, ghetto, white trash, liar, cheat, drunkard, tweaker etc. etc.

We’ve all been there. I’ve been there. This isn’t to judge or condemn anyone. The Universe wants us *all* to learn, grow, evolve.

This is what JESUS means when he says:

“I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be (children) of your Father in heaven ... Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

The word, perfect in this verse is a little intimidating and hard to comprehend ... the original Greek expresses the meaning in terms that are a little easier to grasp;

“... full-grown, adult; of full age, mature, more intelligent, ready to apprehend divine things, of mind and character, one who has reached the proper height of virtue and integrity...”

In the end, JESUS is saying, anyone can love and do good to those who love and do good to them. It takes a, mature adult, to love their enemies, bless those who curse them, do good to those who hate them, and pray for those who spitefully use and persecute them. Not a weakling, not a doormat but a full-grown mature adult; someone who has grown up and put away childish things; childish thinking, childish acting.

This is a person who has reached the proper height of virtue and integrity; someone who is ready to apprehend *divine* character.

Knowing this, it should be *easier* for us to move on from the burden of judging others, and leave them to the Universe ... leave them to GOD. He loves them ... perfectly. He knows where they are, knows where they've been, knows where they're going. He is long-suffering, he wants to work with them, work through their shortcomings and help them evolve into better people. I know there will always be those who will say,

“... well what about this, and what about that? You don't know what that person did to me.”

No, I don't. I don't pretend to know it all. I am still evolving, I'm still learning, I'm still growing. At this point in my life, I can only see dimly, as through a glass.

I do know, however, that there is this general principle, woven throughout the scriptures. GOD wants us to refrain from looking outside of our-selves to judge “others” that are missing the mark. HE wants us to look inward, mind our *own* business and focus on *our-selves*.

The principle is all through His WORD, as well as almost all spiritual writings throughout the ages.

If you are reading this now, it’s time for you to put childish things aside and become someone who is ready to apprehend divine character. Let GOD fight your battles. Free your-self up to understand that we are all on our own journey. Give “others” the space to learn from their failures just as the Universe has given you the space to learn from yours.

“Do unto others ... as you would have others do unto you ...”

Before I move on to the last part of learning to Accept and love others, I need to address the matter of the wicked, most evil and heinous among us; those who commit unspeakable acts of depravity and violence against the weak and innocent. I don’t know how to love such people. I don’t know if GOD expects us to love them in the way that I was just alluding to. I do know it doesn’t hurt *them* and it doesn’t benefit *me* to hate them. I have learned, regarding this area of human depravity, and regarding the state and the fate of the wicked, that I *can* relate to what GOD must feel, on a certain level. I think I can understand how GOD must be so hurt and disturbed by the level of man’s depravity.

I recently watched the movie “Once upon a time in Hollywood” about the Manson Murders of the 60’s. The movie had an alternate ending (spoiler alert) regarding the murders of Voytek Frykowski, Sharon Tate and her unborn child, Steven Parent, Jay Sebring, Abigail Folger and Rosemary and Leno Lo Bianco.

In the alternate ending the killers went to the wrong house and ended up being killed or critically injured by Cliff Booth, (Brad Pitts character) and his pet Pit Bull Terrier. What I ended up feeling was a sense of tragedy about the circumstances of what actually did happen, the real murders, the real ending, that I had never felt before. The senseless deaths of those innocent people. The senseless circumstances of those times, that changed the world as we knew it.

Charles Manson and his followers, his “*family*,” unleashed an Evil, a type of criminal behavior that we as a society had never seen or encountered before. I know it serves no benefit for we as *individuals* to stand in judgement and seek vengeance against these seemingly soul-less sociopaths and psychopaths. We as a *society*, however, must stand in judgement; we must seek, not vengeance, but Justice.

There must be rules, there must be boundaries and there must be consequences; for the Manson’s, the Bundy’s, The Dahmer’s, the Gacy’s the Ramirez’s, the Buono’s, the Rader’s the Epstein’s *Et al*. Our society must judge them, and if they must die, it is to preserve a civilized society and the rule of law. It is not a joyous thing to watch.

It is not a Happy thing as a society to participate in punishment meted out.

GOD says in his WORD:

“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked”

...and neither should we ... take pleasure ... in the punishment of the wicked. All life is sacred, given by GOD. When one life is taken, ended prematurely, all of us die a little.

Years back when I was going through some difficult times, I was having trouble dealing with the age-old question.

“Why does GOD allow suffering?”

... and specifically, why does GOD allow *my* suffering? I was also dealing with some pain in my shoulder and sought out the services of an Acupuncturist. During the initial consultation she asked me if I was going through any mentally stressful SITUATIONS. I said I was, and she asked me if I had ever considered the ancient practice of Taoism as a way to deal with my stress. I told her not really, that I wasn't particularly interested in delving into another religion. She began to explain to me that Taoism, was not a religion.

In its original form, Taoism was not a religion. It was the philosophy of its founder Lao Tzu; (who may have been a real person or may have been a creation or a compilation of several men or philosophies. I tend to believe he was a real person)

So, Taoism is essentially, the outlook on life and living, of Lao Tzu, who according to traditional accounts, was a scholar and Keeper of the Archives for the royal court of the Zhou Dynasty. Over the next few weeks and months, I investigated and found, that I tended to agree with and could embrace most of the teaching. I liked the concept of Yin/Yang; the principle that all things return to Balance. I was troubled though, about pain and suffering and

“... the matter of the most evil and heinous among us.”

I wondered how Taoism dealt with this most difficult and hard to understand of life questions. The next time I was in treatment, I asked my practitioner about the issue.

She explained to me that I would have to let go of my preconceived notions of right, and wrong, and justice, and simply trust that the Tao (literally the Way) would right all wrongs, bring all *im-Balance* back to Balance and carry out justice in ways we may not ever see or comprehend. It kind of settled the issue for me, and gave me a gentle peace.

I have learned and I am assured, that no one gets away with anything in this life; not the Psychopathic killer, not the juvenile shoplifter. In some way we all lose something when we violate Natural Law.

Call it Karma, call it Yin/Yang, call it what you want ...

“... whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Trust GOD, trust the Universe and let go of judgement; it will free you, to become who you were meant to be. The Apostle Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans;

“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves,
but rather give place to (GODs) wrath;
for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine,
I will repay,” says the Lord.”

Gods’ vengeance is just and perfect. His ways are high above our own. He knows *all* the circumstances of *every* situation and will always exercise righteous judgement. We are to “Take the High Road,” leave judgment to him; and keep our focus on his exhortation to love.

The High Road is ultimately more gratifying than the low road. Taking the High Road isn’t about the person who wronged you, and what a jerk they may be and what they may or may not deserve. The Universe will give them what they deserve, and you may or may not be around to see it. Taking the High Road is about taking authority over your THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS. Taking this authority produces a cognitive, well thought out, considered ACTION, which dramatically increases the likelihood of a positive, fulfilling, desired RESULT.

I can’t begin to tell you how empowering it is to know that *you* are the MASTER of your EMOTIONS and not vice versa. No one has the power to rattle you, or upset you.

No one has the power to make you to think or feel anything you don't want to. People may be able to insult you, assault you, imprison you, rape you, molest you, and even murder you! However,

*Nothing can touch you if you Believe
No-one can sell you if you're free.*

Loving your enemies, blessing those who curse you, doing good to those who hate you, and praying for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, may or may not have an effect on your enemies. It will however, strengthen, grow and evolve *you* into a better version of your-self.

It was after learning this concept, that I fully understood and began to apply the principle from the Book of James Chapter 1 verse 2 - 4:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you encounter trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Allow perseverance to finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, (perfect) not lacking anything.”

Life is all about opportunities.

Every tragedy, every trial, every difficult SITUATION is an opportunity for us to reach and stretch and change and grow. Be thankful for the trials in your life.

The Universe will work them *all* out! No matter how difficult and tragic they may seem, our CREATOR, our GOD and FATHER is in control. You *are* where you're supposed to be, everything *will* work out, everything *will* return to Balance if you go with the flow and walk in the leading of the SPIRIT of your CREATOR and keep moving forward.

One more thing. Before I move on from this chapter, I want to share with you how I came to fully understand and fully comprehend the meaning of “*Unconditional Love*”. This revelation was for me as a Christian, my Damascus Road. I saw the light that changed my thinking forever.

Unconditional Love is one of those last things that many Christians tell themselves they can't do.

“Well, of course I can't love unconditionally. Only GOD can do that. I'm just a sinner saved by Grace.”

Yet, as we have already read, Jesus not only says we can, he exhorts us to do it. He *commands* us to do it, to be perfect (mature) as GOD is Perfect in this manner.

So how do we do it? Do we grit our teeth and say

“... ok then, I'm going to love unconditionally! I'm going to bear down and give it all I've got! If GOD says to do it then, I can do it and I will do it!

And of course, those good intentions, that determination, inevitably falls by the wayside. We feel like failures, we experience painful EMOTIONS and to go back to ...

“only GOD can love unconditionally...”

All the years I tried to *will* myself to overcome bad habits and wrong thinking and wrong living, I always ended up getting my you know what kicked! It was only when I Accepted and learned to love my-Self that I began to evolve. I Accepted and learned, it wasn't my responsibility to change, grow and evolve myself... and that's when *real* change began. I surrendered that job to the Holy Spirit of my CREATOR

It was around this same time, one day, that my wife introduced me to a Podcast called “The Life Coach School” by a Life Coach named Brooke Castillo. I was working in our garage and had been listening to another podcast by a Business Coach who was teaching on Goals and Motivation, etc. My wife popped in and said you need to listen to this person. I really wasn't interested in listening to a “Life Coach.” I didn't really even know what a Life Coach was; I wanted to learn more about business, about money!

But ... my wife has a history of introducing me to good things, so I shrugged and said, “Okay...”

Wow! I was hooked from Episode 1. Long story short, there came a day when I came upon Brooke's podcast, on

“Unconditional Love”

Once again, I was blown away! For the first time in my life, including all my years of Christian teachings, my eyes were opened to this amazing concept of “Unconditional Love.” I had discovered Gold, the Pearl of Great Price, the secret power of Love. (Which in reality it is no secret at all)

This book is about Happiness. My belief is that my own happiness, your own happiness, is our main purpose for being alive. Our CREATORS purpose in creating us was initially for HIS own pleasure. We were created in his image, to be his happy children. Those of us who choose and are able, to pro-create, do so, initially, for *our own pleasure*.

However, intricately woven into *our* desire for pleasure, derived from *our* creation, is our desire that our children also be Happy. God wants to derive pleasure from us but at the same time he wants *us* to know pleasure, to *exist* in pleasure, to BE Happy.

We want to derive pleasure from *our* children, but we also want *them* to know pleasure, to exist in pleasure, to BE Happy. One of the most pleasurable, Happy states of being and emotion we experience ... is Love. When GOD is loving us, we are Happy. When we are loving GOD, He is Happy. Whether we are doing the loving or being the loved, Happiness is the wonderful RESULT.

So, here are some concepts, that are out there in the Universe that I first heard from Brooke Castillo. This is her introduction to her Podcast on Unconditional Love:

"Today I am going to be talking to you about unconditional love. I know that some of you saw the title for this and your eyes rolled and you're like, "Oh, whatever. We're going to be talking about some deep spiritual thing that I can't really grasp or hold up."

That's not what I am going to talk about. I'm going to talk about unconditional love in the way that is the most selfish way for you to experience feelings that you really want to feel. I've talked about it before on this podcast but the concept is, you have the option to feel any way you want at any time. That is always available to you.

Sometimes we choose to feel sad and angry and frustrated, and that's awesome. That's our choice. We can choose to feel however we want, but it is always a choice. It's when we start to Believe that how we feel isn't a choice that we get our-selves into some trouble.

One of the things that I work with my clients all the time is asking them, how do you want to feel about this (relationship) SITUATION? Most people will say,

"What do you mean, how do I want to feel about it? I want them to change and then I'll feel different."

I'll say,

*"No, no, no. This SITUATION doesn't change at all."
Right? "Nothing changes about the SITUATION.*

The only thing that changes is how you feel. How do you want to feel about the SITUATION?"

A lot of times, people will say to me,

"Well, I guess neutral"

or,

"I guess just indifferent is how I want to feel."

I always come back with,

"Okay, so of all the EMOTIONS available to you on the planet, all the EMOTIONS that you could choose from, you're going to go with? Indifferent? That's the one you want? Right? You want to feel neutral? Oh, I can't wait to feel neutral today."

I know that, I'm kind of giggly today. I don't know what's going on. Sorry but you just have to deal with it but, here's the thing. Neutral does feel a lot better than anger or frustration and it's definitely one of the EMOTIONS that we can aim for when we are in a really severe, negative space but if you could choose any emotion to feel, most of us want to feel amazing. We want to feel excited. We want to feel peace. We want to feel love. Right? Love is one of the best feeling EMOTIONS that most any of us can claim to have felt.

In our relationships, that feeling of love is always available to us. Now, so many of us decide that we don't want to feel it. We don't want to feel love towards someone. On purpose. Now, I want you to just take a minute. That doesn't make any sense.

Why would we choose not to feel love towards someone? Love feels amazing. Do we not want to feel amazing? Why are we denying our-selves that feeling? The reasons we give are lame. Right?

We say,

"Well, I don't love him (or her) because he doesn't take out the trash"

or “

I'm not feeling loving because he was in a bad mood"

or

"I'm not feeling loving because he doesn't help me around the house"

or

"I'm not feeling loving because of some horrible thing that he did... ”

But the truth is that you not feeling loving is only hurting you. That lack of love is just you not feeling it. A lot of us think that when we love someone and when we feel love towards someone, that it somehow benefits the other person. Right? That when we don't feel love towards them, that it somehow doesn't benefit the other person so we get locked into this idea that,

"Well, I can't love him or I can't be in this loving place. I can't feel the emotion of love right now because of what they did or didn't do.” The truth is, you get to feel love whenever you want.

Nothing that anyone does or doesn't do can ever deny you that feeling. I think that's the best news ever. I think it's amazing that we get to choose how we feel about other people, regardless of how they treat us. So, if we want to love someone, we love them... ["Brooke Castillo on Unconditional Love"](#)¹⁵

I don't really agree with the direction Brooke has taken in the last couple of years, but I do have to give her props for the lessons I learned, from her early teaching on unconditional love.

We do get to *choose* love ... anytime we want. Love is always available to us. As with everything else in our lives, how we process any relationship in which we are involved, is a choice.

This is the great gift that our CREATOR has given to us. I realize that sometimes things happen, sometimes people say things or do things that initially take us off guard. Our immediate reaction might be one of shock, anger or hurt. That is human, reasonable, understandable; but after the initial *EMOTION*, I submit that we have the *choice*, to think about the *SITUATION*.

We have the choice, to consider the fact, that we can stay angry and lash out, or stay hurt and run away, ... or we can consider that one of our options is to choose Love; because we know that love brings us good feelings, good EMOTIONS.

Love is a Happy state of being.

We may not always choose love. Sometimes we want to take the "Low Road.

Sometimes we want to feel the raw EMOTION of Anger. Sometimes we may feel like opening the flood gates and having a good cry; experiencing the pain of hurtful SITUATIONS ... and that's ok. That's what growth and evolution is all about. Undeniably though, it's much nicer and much more pleasurable and fulfilling to choose to live in love. My wife refers to this cycle of human experience as "*practicing the love walk.*" and as she continues,

"... like anything else in life, the more you practice something, the better you get at it."

Like learning to play a musical instrument, it's not easy but the reward of making music is worth it. The reward is our Happiness. Wouldn't you love to learn to play *that* instrument? Sing *that* love song? Out of our "*Happiness Concerto*" grows and flows our purpose and meaning. Love, like forgiveness, is not for or about the other person. Though it may or may not benefit another person, our choosing love is for our benefit, our state of mind, our well-being.

In case you still think that only GOD can love unconditionally let's take a look at what GOD says love is and think about whether we are able to practice it or not. I'm not saying all the time but if we can practice love *sometimes*, then we can conceivably get *better* at it *over* time. But what exactly is love? What is this emotion, this feeling that we are all familiar with but have a hard time expressing in real, tangible terms?

Most Christians, are at least familiar with the “Love Chapter” of the Bible, so from I Corinthians 13 in the WORD, here is a good description of the attributes of love. There are questions after the listing of each of these attributes of love that I want you to think about and carefully consider before answering. Think of specific examples of loving ACTIONS you have chosen in various SITUATIONS.

- Love is patient

Do you have the capacity and have you at times chosen *patience* in a difficult SITUATION with a difficult person?

- Love is kind

Do you have the capacity and have you at times chosen *kindness* in a difficult SITUATION with a difficult person?

- Love does not envy

Do you have the capacity and have you at times chosen not to feel *envy*, aroused by someone else's possessions, qualities, or good fortune even if you felt the person was undeserving?

- Love does not boast

Do you have the capacity and have you at times chosen not to **boast?** About your possessions, your qualities, or your good fortune even if you felt you were deserving?

- Love is not proud.

Do you make a practice of being *proud*, arrogant, or conceited about your possessions, qualities, or good fortune?

- Love does not dishonor others

Do you make a practice of *dishonoring* others?

- Love is not self-seeking

Are you *self-seeking* to the detriment or harm of others?

- Love is not easily angered

Do you make a practice of being *easily angered*?

- Love keeps no record of wrongs.

Do you make a practice of *keeping a record of wrongs* concerning difficult people in difficult SITUATIONS?

- Love does not delight in evil

Do you *delight in evil*?

- Love rejoices with the truth

Do you *rejoice with the truth*?

- Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Do you have the capacity, and are you sometimes able to be a person who *protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres* with difficult people in difficult SITUATIONS?

If you answered these questions honestly you probably discovered that you are a person who, not always, but at various times, has been able to love, the way GOD loves.

If you have exercised and demonstrated this kind of love in the past, then you can do it again. You can get better at it, you can do it consistently, as you choose to become a person who is

“...practicing the love walk.”

As Brooke Castillo says,

“Why would we choose not to feel love towards someone? Love feels amazing. Do we not want to feel amazing?”

Love does feel amazing ... and if you Believe what the Bible teaches about the matter, Love never fails. Can we even conceive of that? This is not a maybe or a sometimes ... this is an absolute! No matter what *we* may choose to feel or think about it, the WORD of GOD says that anytime we choose to act in love, out of a heart motivated by love, that action, no matter how it may feel or look to us, will *NEVER* fail! There are not too many guarantees in life as solid as that one. As we move forward, *choose* to feel amazing ... choose to adopt a principle, a mindset that NEVER fails ... choose LOVE!

Now that we have effectively addressed, our past and our present, we can move on to the final chapter of the Accept section. The unknown. The Future. I’m going to offer some instruction on how we can best move forward into the future, in a way that most serves us and moves us towards our goal of constructing and achieving a Happy Life! *Read On!*

Accept Responsibility for our Future

We've all heard this one ... "Wow, that "*so and so*" has a lot of potential! "... and then later, "Well, you know, it's a shame but (he or she) is just not living up to their potential."

It seems to me this idea of potential, whether intended or not, ends up being just another way to build some one up or tear them down.

Websters dictionary defines potential as:

"Having or showing the capacity to become or develop into something in the future." Collins English Dictionary goes on to say "If you say that someone or something has potential, you mean that they have the necessary abilities or qualities to become successful or useful in the future. ... If you say that someone or something has potential for doing a particular thing, you mean that it is possible they may do it."

- develop into *something* in the future?
- become *successful or useful* in the future?

So, what is “*something*” and what is “*successful or useful?*”

Everyone has;

“the capacity to become or develop into something in the future.”

As a matter of fact,

everyone *will* ... develop into “*something*” ... in the “*future*”
...

Unless you drop dead this very second ... you have a future!

If you knew that you only had one hour to live you might get on your phone and call or text people in your life that you care about, or despise, or love, or hate, or that you have wronged ,or that have wronged you. You might laugh with them, cry with them or apologize to them. You might forgive them or just tell them you love them and wanted to say goodbye.

A last hour spent like that would likely have a very powerful effect on those that you reached out to. You could light a candle and burn some incense and play some soft music. If you had one special person in your life you could spend it with them as the candle burned down and the incense burned up. If not, you could spend the time with your faithful pet. If you didn't have any of those things you could spend that time in peaceful solitude ... alone with GOD.

One hour to live and yet so many different choices of how to spend your one last hour of your time, your future. *You* are the *only person* that gets to determine *your* “future” potential. You are the one who gets to decide what you are going to develop into “*in the future*” ... and the sooner you rid your-self of this notion of whether or not you are successful or useful to *anyone* but you ... the better off you will be. I know this sounds harsh and self-centered but it actually goes to the core of what this book and this philosophy are all about.

If you are Happy, you will be successful, you will be useful. Things will get done, goals will be accomplished, the Universe and those around you, those in your sphere of influence will be affected in a positive manner, so yes, you will have developed into “*something*” ... something “*successful*” something “*useful*.” Not because you have accomplished or met some standard that someone else set for you but because you’re Happy; and Happy people are successful, useful people.

From a very early age, almost from the womb, expectations are being set, our lives are being laid out for us. Those that brought us into this world have plans for us. Lying in our cribs, wrapped in swaddling clothes, they envision for us, a life of unlimited potential! If we live up to that potential and if we achieve the goals that they have in mind for us then they will be very “Happy” parents; and if we don’t, maybe not so much.

It’s an awesome responsibility; bringing a child into the world; keeping it safe, healthy and happy.

I had no idea of the enormity, the responsibility of it all when my wife and I brought our two children into our lives. Charting their early course in life, instilling values, teaching character.

It all starts out with happiness and high hopes for everyone all around. As the years go by, however, the novelty of our new puppy wears off, and while we still get great joy from our little creations, there are other things vying for our time and attention and affections. Children often wind up wondering “What did I do wrong?”

There is nothing “*potentially*” wrong with wanting our children to excel, however we need to check our motives. Are we thinking about their self-esteem or our own? The bottom line is most of us, in some way, shape or form, grow up with the deep-seated impression, that in order to be Loved and Accepted, we have to meet someone’s expectations of who we should be.

It’s enough to get this from our parents or early caregivers but some children get a double whammy from their peers:

- If they happen to be poorer and less fortunate, not able to dress the same or have the same material possessions as their peers;
- If they happen to be overweight or not as easy to look at, not as smart or maybe a little clumsy.

These children are judged as having little or no “*potential*” at all.

Their fates are decided, in the mind of others, at a very early stage in life. Others are judged to have great potential, enormous potential! They spend their *lives* trying to live up to the expectations of others and usually, in their own minds, not quite making it. As we learned in an earlier chapter, no matter how famous and successful a person might be, if, in their own mind they have not lived up to their “*potential*” they can easily fall into a state of depression that in the worst cases may even lead to suicide.

Peer pressure can be extremely powerful. I fall into the age category of “Baby Boomer.” A Boomer is generally defined as someone born between the years of 1946 and 1964. The Baby Boom was the generation conceived after the end of World War II. There was great optimism for the future of the country and great expectations for human potential. In particular, there were great expectations for the potential of the children of the Baby Boom. We had it better than any generation before us and were expected to live up to our *potential*.

We grew up with TV programs like *Father Knows Best*, *Donna Reed*, *Leave it to Beaver*, *Ozzie and Harriet*. These were programs that depicted idyllic lives where Dad went out and worked at the office all day. Mom stayed home and raised the kids. She did the cooking and kept the home fires burning in their storybook cottage with three bedrooms, a well-manicured lawn, all protected and cozy behind a white picket fence. Truth be told this kind of life existed almost nowhere in early 1960s America. Yet it was an ideal that we were all told and persuaded we needed to strive for.

In fact, the sixties turned out to be one of the craziest times in our nation's history. The Cold War, The Nuclear Threat, Bomb Shelters, The assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy. The Vietnam War and the Student Protests and Civil Unrest that it spawned. Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll, Women's Lib, Watergate, the Moon ...

Through all of this turmoil, the idea of, the pursuit of, the American Dream survived and flourished. Success was finishing High School, going to College, getting a job, buying a house, having a couple of kids, working thirty or so plus years, retiring, enjoying the grandkids, that your kids, who were following in your footsteps, were having and bringing up in the same way that you brought them up and so on and so on and so on ...

The thing is, it almost never worked out in such neat cookie cutter fashion. *Generations*, ended up feeling like they had failed; had not lived up to their *potential*. Culturally, entire races of people felt like the American Dream had left them behind.

When I was a young man in my twenties, I had a small construction business. My own parents had divorced, I started, but then dropped out of college, went to work, got married, had a couple of kids ... you know the rest. Anyway, I had a very nice hard-working guy, Richard Serrano, about my age, working for me. One day he and I and a couple of other workers were sitting on a concrete slab, eating lunch, in a tract house in the framing stage. The tract was one of many large housing tracts, that were under construction in Southern Calif. in the early to mid-eighties.

The conversation got around to TV shows that we had watched as children. Aaahhh ...those were the days ... *Father Knows Best*, *Donna Reed*, *Leave it to Beaver*. Richard told us that when he was a kid, he used to feel so bad watching those shows.

“I thought all white people had perfect families and nice houses and clothes and cars ... I really didn’t understand until I got to Jr. High and started having more white friends and going over to their houses, meeting their families and seeing all their problems that, wow! They don’t live like Leave it to Beaver either!”

Fast forward more than fifty years later and in some ways society has changed tremendously. Who would have known that every home would have a personal computer? Who would have imagined all the great leaps forward in Technology? In other ways, little has changed at all. We’re still living with social, political, racial and cultural unrest. One thing that has changed very little, is that perceived pressure to achieve the 5 *G*’s... fulfill our “*potential*.”

- *Graduate*
- *Get a Job*
- *Get married*
- *Get a house*
- *Get some kids, etc. etc*

The Contemporary R&B, Hip Hop singer Lil Mo sang about these ideas in 2003 in her song.

“4Ever”

*“Baby, I'm at the point in my life
When I'm tired of playing games
I'm ready to settle down
I'm ready to buy a house
And I'm ready to change my last name
Ready to have some kids
Ready for the life to live
And all love has to give
I've been your superwoman for so long
I'm ready to be your wife”¹⁶*

These are hopes and dreams that Society has taught us, need to be attained in order to be “Happy.” To be normal, fit in and be Accepted. I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with these hopes and dreams but what if it doesn’t work out that way for some people? Does that mean they’ve failed to live up to their potential? That they’ve “missed the boat?” They’re somehow something less?

God forbid, No!

I had a conversation recently with a young man who has been in four serious long-term relationships, engaged twice, but has never quite made it to the altar. That could change at any time, but for sure his life has not followed the high school, college, job, marriage, kids, grandkids, bada bing, bada boom! ...Trajectory.

He owns his own business and has a very fulfilling career. His work has taken him all over the world, to many different countries. He has snow skied in Northern France, explored the ancient Middle East, hiked the length of South America, staying in homes and hostels and immersing himself in foreign cultures, cuisines and customs along the way. In his line of work, he has met and enjoyed time with multiple celebrities, actors, and musicians ... and yet he confessed to me, that he sometimes gets down because he doesn't have the house in the suburbs, with a white picket fence, a wife and kids.

He has a sister, on the other hand, who has all the above. *"Why? He wonders. 'I'm a good person ... Why don't I have what others have? I've been faithful to GOD, why has he not blessed me in the same way?'"* I explained to him as I am explaining to you, that just because you have those "things" just because you've attained the so called "American Dream" doesn't guarantee that you will be Healthy, Happy and Fulfilled. You might be Happy, but you just as well might not be. His sister may, or may not, be happy. Even some of the celebrities he's known have confessed that though they are hugely successful in their professional lives ... they long for things they've missed out on in their personal life. I explained to him that Happiness isn't found in pursuing and attaining the American Dream, not found in Fame and Fortune, it's found in pursuing and following our own dreams.

We're all familiar with the term "people pleaser." Individuals tagged as such, are deemed to be weak, insecure, not having their own mind, but always trying to please others, to be *"Accepted."*

No one wants to be labeled a “people pleaser” but in a sense we all are. The majority of people in Society are caught up in the pursuit of the American Dream which, if in our minds and collective consciousness is attained, will please people and provide us the love and Acceptance of our parents, our peers and other persons we care about.

We do not have to buy into this notion. We don’t have to follow a certain path in life, just because society says so. Just because it has been conditioned into us that “*this*” is the successful path. We are not, nor do we have to be “people pleasers.” We don’t have to please anyone but our-selves.

If we hope to achieve *true* Happiness, our potential needs to be what we decide it to be. Its fulfillment needs to be in our own hands. We are the masters of our own destinies, in the will of and the walk with, the SPIRIT of our CREATOR. The fulfillment of our potential will be realized to the degree in which we learn to experience true Happiness. True Happiness can be found in any walk, any station ... any “SITUATION” in life.

It’s time to cast off the yoke of “*potential*.” There is no need, from this point forward, to spend any more of your precious time trying to live up to and/or meet the expectations of others. Right now, today, as you finish this last chapter, of this First Section, make a decision to make a change. A major change.

Take control of the reins of your life. Accept responsibility for your *own* potential, your *own* Happiness, your *own* future. *Amen!*

This concludes Part I of the ABCs to a Happy Life.

Accept.

- Acceptance is not “giving up,”
- Acceptance is not "giving in,”
- Acceptance is not “settling for “something less.”

Acceptance is a jumping off point, a starting point

From the Collins Dictionary:

“A jumping-off point or a jumping-off place is a place, SITUATION, or occasion that you use as the starting point for something.”

Finishing Part I, understanding and embracing Acceptance is your opportunity to make this a *“starting point for something.”* This is your starting point for your next step in learning the ABC’s to a Happy Life; the “B” section, the “Belief” section.

If you want to take a rest and just bask in the warmth and peace that comes with Acceptance, with letting go, that’s ok. Take your time, take a rest, smell the roses.

When you’re rested and ready, jump off! Take the leap into the unknown, the next chapter, the next leg of your Journey on your way to your new, Happy Life!

Section 2

Believe

Introduction to Belief

The second word in learning to live a Happy Life is **Believe**. The logical follow up question to that exhortation is “What then, should we Believe?” and even more foundational, What is Belief and what is it “*to Believe?*” The Oxford dictionary definition of Belief is:

“An Acceptance that a statement is true or that something exists ... trust, faith, or confidence; in someone or something.”

and following,

“to Believe” is to Accept (something) as true; to feel sure of the truth of and / or hold (something) as an opinion; think or suppose.”

One of my favorite definitions of Belief and Believing comes from Thayer's GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON of the New Testament, 4th edition.

“... the conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative and law of his soul.”

Beliefs and believing are fascinating concepts.

Concepts are abstract. Abstractions, by definition, exist only in thoughts, or as ideas. Of themselves, Beliefs have no basis in physical or concrete existence.

Some people, particularly those persons who embrace the title of Skeptic, have little to no use for Beliefs. Especially for those that are not grounded in and founded upon scientific fact, reason and rationale. Unfortunately, Skeptics, in my experience, are rarely the lovers of Happy Lives.

Skepticism, in its truest form, doubts everything; religion, values, credos, plans, statements, human character, human institutions. They reject as invalid, a life lived according to faith and belief, simply because the foundation of most belief systems cannot be factually proven ... according to the scientific method. Skeptics maintain that real knowledge of *things*, is impossible; that nothing can be truly known. According to Nihilism, an extreme form of Skepticism, there is no reality, no existence and therefore no possibility of an objective basis for truth. Pretty Dismal.

However, if everything is just illusion or something even less, I will choose to adopt the logic of the 16th century philosopher, Rene Descartes, who put forth the notion,

“I think, therefore I am.”

In light of this philosophy; if my reality depends on my thoughts;

- *I think* I will establish for *my* reality, a set of beliefs, based on the experiences, *I think*, that I have had for the last 60 years of what *I think*, has been, *my* life.

- *I will*, to Believe that I have the ability to exercise choice and free will.

- *I choose* to establish a set of beliefs for *My-Self*, that will have a positive impact on *my* life and enable *me* to attain “Happiness” in the *way* that I have defined “Happiness” throughout this book.

“... a state of mental and spiritual well-being that is not affected by SITUATIONS or things but is anchored in the firm knowledge and belief that I am exactly where I am supposed to be at this point in Space-Time and that the Universe, and the CREATOR of the Universe will always work “SITUATIONS and things” out for my good and will always bring any extreme SITUATION back to Balance in my life. “

So, even if the Skeptics and the Nihilists are right, (they’re not) you can still have a “Happy Life” based on *your* Beliefs. Your beliefs will never satisfy the Skeptics in your life. That’s ok. They’re not their beliefs, they’re your beliefs. Our capacity to Believe, is one of the greatest gifts we have been given by our CREATOR. Beliefs are powerful. Beliefs affect Behavior. Beliefs can change your life. No one can change your beliefs; no one can shake your beliefs; they’re yours. They reside in the deepest parts of your soul and no one can take them from you. Remember the song I shared at the end of Chapter 4, about Peace?

The last lines sum all of this up perfectly.

“Nothing can touch me I Believe.

No one can sell me if I’m free. “

Let’s revisit another excerpt from that same chapter.

“I was sitting one morning, out in my little Meditation area ... and I started meditating on the fact that no matter what I would ever go through in life, nothing could touch my mind, my soul or my spirit. In the worst-case scenario if I lost everything, every penny, if I lost everyone close to me, if everyone I knew turned their backs on me, if I found myself homeless, sleeping wherever I could, just the clothes on my back ... nothing could force me to think any way that I didn’t want to think. It was a powerful revelation, an amazing epiphany. It is my Superpower... it can be your Superpower. My mind - Your mind, My soul - Your soul, My spirit - Your spirit ... is something that we own, that we have complete control over. No-one, no-thing, no SITUATION can ever take that away from us.

No matter what comes our way in the future, we will be okay. Resolve today, that no matter what SITUATION you might ever find your-self in on your life’s journey, you will always find your way back to center, always stay grounded in and mindful of the present moment, and always find something good, always find some blessing, always find something to be thankful for.”

I can't stress enough how important a role "Beliefs" play in our lives. Everything we think, every THOUGHT we have; Everything we feel, every EMOTION we experience; Every move we make, every step we take, is a direct result of what we "Believe" about any given circumstance or SITUATION.

Knowing this, we *must* give serious consideration to the Beliefs we hold.

Are they the result of Introspection? Investigation? Inspiration?

Do we even know how we came to believe what we believe?

If not, the time to know is now.

So, here are the "B's" that I want to share with you, the "Beliefs," that I know will change you forever. They will transform you and give you the tools you need to attain "A Happy Life!"

1. Believe in Belief
2. Believe in Nothing
3. Believe in Everything
4. Believe you're in the right place at the right time
5. Believe Everything will always work out for your good
6. Believe Everything will always come back to balance
7. Believe Everything will give you the desires of your heart.

I wanted to introduce you to all of them at once so you'll have an idea of what's ahead. Have I piqued your interest? Good. Now onto the next chapter, Believe in Belief!

Believe in Belief

Before we dive into the details of the Believe step, in the attainment of Happiness process, I want to build upon what I touched on in the Introduction to this Section regarding how important Belief is in the realm of human existence. Early on in the Hebrew Torah we have two stories that underscore the power and the benefit of Belief, as well as the power and the consequence of un-Belief.

The first story, which begins at the end of the 11th chapter of the Book of Genesis, is the story of Abraham, the father of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths.

“Abram” as he was originally called, lived with his Father Terah and his brothers Nahor and Haran in an area that was known as Ur of the Chaldees which is generally Believed to have been in Mesopotamia near the Cradle of Civilization. At some point, Terah’s son Haran died and Terah moved his family out of the area with the intention of traveling to and settling in the land of Canaan. Instead, he ended up stopping and staying in Haran, an ancient city in the area that is today, Turkey.

When he was 75 years old, GOD Communicated with Abram and told him to leave his Father’s house.

He was to journey to a place, that GOD would show him, to settle. There, GOD would make of, he and his descendants, a great nation. Abram trusted GOD, uprooted his family, and did as GOD instructed him to do.

While living in Canaan, Abram went through some major trials. He had been there for around ten years and I'm sure he was beginning to wonder about GOD's promise. GOD once again appeared to Abram in a vision and the following conversation took place:

"...the LORD spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great. "But Abram replied, "O Sovereign LORD, what good are all your blessings when I don't even have a son? Since you've given me no children, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth. You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir." Then the LORD said to him, "No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir." Then the LORD took Abram outside and said to him, "Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have! "And Abram Believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith. Then the LORD told him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession."

GOD did indeed make of Abram a great nation.

Because of his trust and his *Belief*, GOD accounted or imputed or conferred upon him, righteousness or right standing. This is a miraculous thing in the context of human history as told from a religious perspective. Abram was granted right standing, and fellowship if you will, with the CREATOR of the Universe, simply because of his Belief.

In later Generations, one in particular that we will examine in our next story, right standing with GOD could only be had through a priest or mediator, by way of blood sacrifice. Now, GOD *did* establish a blood covenant with Abram, concerning and confirming his promise to make of him a great nation, but as to his “*right standing*” that came about solely because of his Belief!

Later, when he was ninety-nine years old GOD appeared again to Abram and changed his name to Abraham, meaning “Father of a multitude.”

Contrast the story of Abraham, a tale of the power and the benefit of Belief, with the next story, a tale of the power and the consequence of un-Belief. This story begins in the 13th chapter of the book of Numbers.

In this story GOD had recently delivered the descendants of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, out of the bondage of Egypt by the hand of the deliverer Moses.

Life during their first year of freedom, was spent shaping the former slaves, into a moral, organized, self-governing society.

There were some basic moral laws to be laid down ... documented in the giving of the Ten Commandments by GOD to Moses. There were religious practices and observances, a Tabernacle to be set up, priestly duties to be established ... all these outlined in the book of Leviticus.

After a while, things began to normalize a bit ... the people were starting to get comfortable; to relax, to enjoy their freedom and settle down after all they had been through. Life was not bad, not bad at all. We've all been in similar SITUATIONS at one time or another. I know I have. There have been times in my life after dealing with some difficult SITUATIONS, that I just wanted to relax and settle down.

Unfortunately, this was not the place, GOD *wanted* his chosen people to settle down. He brought them out of Egypt, to bring them back to the land, that he had promised to Abraham. The land of Canaan. So, he brought them into a region called the Wilderness of Paran. Paran was on the outskirts of the lands, of the tribes that inhabited the lands, that surrounded the land of Canaan.

From Paran, GOD intended that they would strategize, analyze, and determine what they would have to do, to proceed and move through these borderlands and onto their ultimate destination ... Canaan; The Promised Land, across the Jordan River.

With that background here is an excerpt from the book of Numbers that gives us a major life lesson on the consequences of un-Belief, Fear, and the lack of Faith. (Belief)

There came a time when ...

GOD spoke to Moses, saying, "Send men, that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel. Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, "Go up this way by the South, and go up into the hill country. See the land, what it is; and the people who dwell therein, whether they are strong or weak, whether they are few or many; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it is good or bad; and what cities they are that they dwell in, whether in camps, or in strongholds; and what the land is, whether it is fat or lean, whether there is wood therein, or not. Be courageous and bring some of the fruit of the land." Now the time was the time of the first-ripe grapes. So they went up and spied out the land.

They came to the valley of Eshcol and cut down from there a branch with one cluster of grapes. They bore it on a staff between two (men). They also brought some pomegranates and figs. That place was called the valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the children of Israel cut down from there. They returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days. They went and came to Moses, to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, to the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word to them and all the congregation. They showed them the fruit of the land. They told him, and said, "We came to the land where you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit, but the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large.

Moreover, we saw the children of Anak there (Giants). Amalek dwells in the land of the South. The Hittite, the Jebusite, and the Amorite dwell in the hill country. The Canaanite dwells by the sea, and along the side of the Jordan.” Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it!” But the men who went up with him said, “We aren’t able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.” They brought up an evil report of the land which they had spied out to the children of Israel, saying, “The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that eats up its inhabitants and all the people who we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim. We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.” All the congregation lifted up their voice and cried; and the people wept that night.

All the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “We wish that we had died in the land of Egypt, or that we had died in this wilderness! Why does GOD bring us to this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will be a prey! Wouldn’t it be better for us to return into Egypt?” They said one to another, “Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.” Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were of those who spied out the land, tore their clothes.

They spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceeding good land. If GOD delights in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it to us; a land which flows with milk and honey. Only don't rebel against GOD, neither fear the people of the land; for they are bread for us. Their defense is removed from over them, and GOD is with us. Don't fear them." But all the congregation threatened to stone them with stones.

The glory of GOD appeared in the Tent of Meeting to all the children of Israel. GOD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? and how long will they not Believe in me, for all the signs which I have worked among them? I will strike them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they." Moses said to GOD, "Then the Egyptians will hear it; for you brought up this people in your might from among them. They will tell it to the inhabitants of this land.

They have heard that you GOD are in the midst of this people; for you GOD are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them, and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if you killed this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of you will speak, saying, 'Because GOD was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore to them, therefore he has slain them in the wilderness.' Now please let the power of the Lord be great, according as you have spoken.

‘GOD is slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, forgiving iniquity and disobedience; and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and on the fourth generation.’ Please pardon the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your loving kindness, and according as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”

GOD said, “I have pardoned according to your word: but in very deed, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of GOD; because all those men who have seen my glory, and my signs, which I worked in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have tempted me these ten times, and have not listened to (Believed) my voice; surely they shall not see the land which I swore to their fathers, neither shall any of those who despised me see it. My servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and has followed (Believed) me fully, him I will bring into the land into which he went. His seed shall possess it. Since the Amalekite and the Canaanite dwell in the valley, tomorrow turn, and go into the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea.”

GOD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, that murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. Tell them, ‘As I live, says GOD, surely as you have spoken in my ears, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness.

All who were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, who have murmured against me, surely none shall not come into the land; concerning which, I swore that I would make you dwell therein, except Caleb son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. Your little ones, that you said should be a prey, them I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have rejected

... as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. Your children shall be wanderers in the wilderness forty years, and shall bear your unfaithfulness, until your dead bodies are consumed in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which you spied out the land, even forty days, for every day a year, you will bear your iniquities, even forty years ... and you will know my alienation. 'I, GOD, have spoken. I will surely do this to all this evil congregation, who are gathered together against me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.' (Numbers 13, 14)

Wow! That is such an awesome story! Even if you aren't Jewish or Christian the story is an amazing life lesson.

GOD by miracles and a mighty hand had brought Abraham's descendants out of Egypt to give them the land he had promised to them because of Abraham's belief. Unfortunately, because of their fear and unbelief, they forfeited the blessing and lost their birthright. Their descendants, led by Joshua and Caleb, *did* Believe in GODs promise, *did* appropriate their birthright, *did* receive their blessing, and *did* enter into GODs Promised Land.

As we move into the Believe section of “*the ABCs to a Happy Life*”, do not lightly dismiss the principle of Belief as, blind faith or naïveté. Faith, even the size of a mustard seed can move mountains.

... and

“All things are possible to him who Believes.”

- Beliefs are powerful:
 1. Abrahams Belief made him righteous before GOD.
 2. The former slaves of Egypt Belief caused them to forfeit GODs promise.
- Beliefs affect Behavior:
 1. Abrahams Belief instilled confidence. He knew and Believed GOD’s promise and he acted accordingly. He was not afraid to do battle because he knew GOD was with him. He was not afraid to take bold steps because he knew GOD was with him. Everything Abraham did prospered.
 2. The Beliefs of the former slaves of Egypt, instilled fear.

They *knew*, but did not *Believe* GODs promise.

They were afraid to do battle because they did not *Believe* GOD would be with them. They were afraid to take bold steps because they did not *Believe* GOD would be with them. Nothing the former slaves of Egypt did prospered. They wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and did not enter into GODs promised land.

- Beliefs are a choice.
 1. Abraham chose to Believe and be obedient to GOD The former slaves of Egypt chose not to Believe; rather they chose to be disobedient to GOD. The choice is yours today to Believe, receive and live, a *Happy Life!*

Believe in Nothing

After that grand introduction, I'm now going to ask you to do something that at first will seem the exact opposite of what we just learned about belief. I'm going to ask you to Believe in Nothing. Some of you may get what I'm asking, others may be saying

“What the?! What is he talking about?”

Of course, I want you to cognitively consider and hopefully adopt for your-self, the Beliefs I will be sharing with you in the next six chapters; but first you will need to clear your mind and your spirit, of all of the negative limiting beliefs that have held you down in the past.

You shall no longer *Believe*, all the garbage and lies, that deadly, destructive forces have fed you in the past ... lies that caused you to Believe:

“I’m a loser, I’m too young, I’m not smart enough, I’m a screw-up, I can’t do anything right, I’ll never be able to do anything right, I’m too old, I’m cursed, nothing ever works out for me, it’s not meant to be, this is my lot in life, I don’t deserve a good life, I’m not worthy, not love-able, the world would be better off without me ...”

Most of us have probably heard at least one of those lies in our head at some point in our lives. This is not an exhaustive list, but I think the majority of our negative beliefs probably fall into one of those types of categories. I'm sure, like me, you've had to deal with some very negative lies, that were very specific to you. Lies that birthed and fostered some very specific, deadly, destructive beliefs in your life. Here's one that was specific to me that caused me a whole lot of havoc over the course of my life. It falls into the category of: "I'm not lovable."

When I was about eight or nine years old, I apparently was part of a test at my elementary school that indicated I showed some aptitude for being a "Rapid Learner." I say apparently because I have no recollection at all, of the test. All I know is that one day I was living my little third grade life, running around the playground with my friends, playing kickball and tetherball and what have you, and the next day I was being told that I was going to be going to a new school for the fourth grade and that because I didn't live in that school district, I would have to catch a bus each morning that would take me to the new school. I wasn't too happy about the prospect of leaving my simple life behind. My parents were elated.

I shared earlier how I grew up in an alcoholic environment so there was already a lot of dysfunction surrounding that whole dynamic. The thought of losing what little security I did have in my little third grade life was daunting. I would have to make friends all over again. There was one boy on the bus the first day I caught it. Johnathan. I was the next pick up, and the third stop picked up Eddie. The three of us, bonded pretty quickly.

So, things didn't turn out too bad at the new school and I ended up spending the next five years with the same group of other "Rapid Learner" students, or MG's (Mentally Gifted), as we came to be known, for the duration of my Elementary and Middle School years. It was a great experience and a great story for another day but how it relates to this topic and the lies we hear in our heads and the beliefs that we form because of those lies, goes something like this.

As I said before, my parents seemed to me to be elated about the whole idea of me being something, or someone special. Especially at first. I began to notice rather quickly, that I seemed to be getting more attention than I was before. It was very subtle, but I picked up on it even at this early age.

I don't know exactly when or how but at some point, I developed, I think, some kind of subconscious notion that the love and Acceptance of my parents, was tied, not to who I was but to what I did. I get put into a special academic class, I make my parents proud, they give me some extra attention and somehow, I make that mean, if I wasn't placed in a special academic class, they would love me less. That morphed into the lie / belief that only the special, smart me was lovable. The real me was not.

How did I come up with the notion that the smart me and the real me were two different people? Don't ask me, but I did. As my insecure, pre-pubescent life evolved, there were other things that persuaded me that the real me was not lovable, that my love and Acceptance was conditional upon my performance.

Like many other young boys during this time, I was involved in Little League baseball. Depending on how I performed at my games, my dad would often yell at me and berate me. Other times he would acknowledge that I did ok and lecture me about how I needed to do (be?) better. I remember many times driving home in his pickup after a poor game performance feeling insecure and uncertain about what kind of treatment or attention or love or lack of love I was going to get from my dad.

This kind of dynamic with my father lasted all through my adolescence. When I entered High School, I began to rebel a bit. I decided I would never play organized baseball again ... and I really liked playing baseball. Nevertheless, I had determined, I wasn't going to let my dad bring all those years of abuse over into my teens. I did play football, but I played because I wanted to. By that time My dad was getting deeper into his alcohol addiction and rarely went to any of my games anyway. Don't get me wrong, this isn't about me whining and complaining about "poor me, I had a mean father ..." as a matter of fact, I loved my dad very much and I really looked up to him for the longest time. This is just to say that many SITUATIONS during my growing up somehow left me with the impression that, again, my love and Acceptance from anyone who meant anything in my life, was dependent on what I did, not who I was.

In my mind, I Believed that I was a poser, a pretender and that if anyone ever got to know the real me, they would see I was just a nerdy little kid. I became very good at reading people and tailoring my relationships to get what I needed out of them.

In many ways, I guess you could say I was a people pleaser. (though in many ways, in many areas, I couldn't care less what other people thought of me) I didn't like conflict, due undoubtedly, to the violent, volatile atmosphere in our home. Most of the time, I would try to keep peace in my relationships at any cost. It wasn't until later in life that I had to take a good look at myself. I had to analyze this negative, destructive belief. I had to find out what the basis of it was, uproot it, and cast it out of my life.

A conflict arose, a SITUATION if you will, in one of my relationships, that disrupted the "peace" of that relationship. My initial instinct of course was to try and figure out what I would have to do to maintain the harmony of the relationship; What I would have to do to "please" the other parties involved. I came to the realization that I had been "people pleasing" all my life and that "keeping the peace at any cost" was no longer, and never was the answer. It may have worked as a temporary fix in the past but was no longer conducive to my "Self-Esteem" and long-term Happiness.

My initial THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS, were that if I didn't "fix" this SITUATION, I would lose this relationship, this person. Even if I tried to fix it, there was no guarantee, this time, that I could... that I would be able to control and manipulate the persons involved to achieve my desired RESULT, which ultimately was to avoid pain and rejection from those I loved.

I thought about the SITUATION long and hard. I knew that it was time to approach it from a different perspective.

I realized these behaviors and beliefs, that I had developed over a lifetime, could be traced all the way back to that little third grader who listened to a lie in his head. The lie that people only loved him because of things that he did. A lie, that developed into a Belief, that spawned behaviors, that were focused on one central goal;

Ward off rejection to avoid pain.

Ultimately however, you can only “ward off” rejection so long.

Eventually, everyone experiences rejection in some form. None of us can consistently avoid pain on any level. Pain can’t be denied. It has to be “experienced and processed properly.”

When I thought about losing this person, I let the pain that I had typically denied and avoided come upon me, engulf me and squeeze me until I thought I might pass out. I felt that I might faint from the heaviness outside, pressing on the emptiness inside. Again, I don’t remember how long this whole process lasted but I think it played out over several days.

Eventually, as I explained in Chapter 1, the pain began to subside, the heaviness began to lift ... this is when I first began to experience the “*Way of Balance*”

... the Core Truth that

“...the CREATOR, the CREATORS Universe, will always bring any extreme SITUATION back to Balance.”

I hadn't yet *learned* that truth, but I had *experienced* it.

I *Accepted* that I might lose this person from my life, I experienced the pain of that reality, and I moved on. I didn't try to "fix" the SITUATION, I didn't default to people pleasing, I just let things take their own course.

As a result of the THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS I experienced dealing with that terrible SITUATION, I had determined that my subsequent ACTION, would be non-ACTION. That's right ... I did nothing. Believe it or not, nothing *is* something; non-ACTION is a form of ACTION.

As I related back in Chapter 6, I had recently been introduced to Taoist philosophy. Within that philosophy there is a concept known as;

Wu Wei

"Wu Wei refers to the cultivation of a state of being in which our ACTIONS are quite effortlessly in alignment with the ebb and flow of the elemental cycles of the natural world. It is a kind of "going with the flow" that is characterized by great ease and awareness, in which—without even trying—we're able to respond perfectly to whatever SITUATIONS arise."

The result of my ACTION (or *In-Action*) was that the relationship survived the crisis. I eventually learned the valuable lessons that set the course for the rest of my life. I came to understand that pain is not about killing us, it's about *Evolving* us.

GOD is not against us; HE and his UNIVERSE are for us.

Born out of these trials was my learning and embracing of another Core Truth, of GOD's Truths, and the development (by experience) of one of my other Core Beliefs. The basis for this truth comes from the Book of James, first chapter second verse.

"... Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Eventually I adopted this Truth as one of my "Core Beliefs."

*"the CREATOR of the Universe will always work
"SITUATIONS and things" out for our good."*

Looking back now at the SITUATION that I faced as a young boy, I know my CREATOR, used it, used this time in my life to work everything out for my good and *Evolve me* in the long run. As a matter of fact, the boy Johnathan, who I first got to know riding on that school bus to a scary new school, played an instrumental role in my life years later. He came back into my life in high school and was the first person to "witness" to me and share with me about the "Jesus Movement" that was spreading across the country. I laughed and ridiculed his "*Belief*." It was insensitive of me, but I still remember his patience and kindness. It made a big impression on me and bore good fruit in me later on.

GOD took the lies, that deadly, destructive, forces meant to use to create SITUATIONS that would destroy that young boy and worked it all out for good. You may think it's a reach to say that these lies come to us through deadly, destructive forces but what *do* these negative beliefs produce, *except* death and destruction?

To bring it all full circle, I spent a lifetime harboring
insecurities and doubts.

Insecurities and doubts that were a result of the lies I heard in my head and the *Beliefs* that I developed because of those lies. Sometimes they just gnawed at me like little rats, sometimes they exploded with great damage and destruction.

I want you to recognize the lies that you've been told and rid your-self of the destructive beliefs they've spawned. They are no good for you and do not serve you. I want you to clear your mind of them and cast them far from you; for a moment,

“Believe in Nothing”

Become a clean empty vessel.

Meditate on that for a moment.

... the Nothingness of your beliefs.

Peaceful, Serene, Sublime

Be done with all that has caused you pain, distress ... depression.

Cast all your cares, all your anxieties, all your worries, and all your concerns, once and for all, on your CREATOR. He cares about you with the deepest affection, and watches over you ... as a good Shepherd over his sheep.

Let all your burdens fall away ...

If you're having any trouble getting to nothingness, here is a brief exercise that will help you rid your-self of the Negatives in your head. Expose and evict your deadly, destructive beliefs by speaking to and naming them; curse them and then demand that they leave you and don't come back. Repeat each Declaration out loud and with conviction.

- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that I am a loser. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.

- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that I am too young. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.

- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that I am not smart enough. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.

- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that I am a screw-up. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.
- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that I can't do anything right. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.
- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that I'll never be able to do anything right. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.
- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that I'm too old. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.
- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that I am cursed. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.
- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that nothing ever works out for me. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.

- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that it's not meant to be. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.
- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that this is my lot in life. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.
- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that I don't deserve a good life. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.
- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that I'm not worthy. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.
- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that I'm not love-able. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.
- I speak to the deadly destructive belief that the world would be better off without me. You are a lie and I no longer Believe you. I resist you; I curse you and I demand that you leave me and never return.

This is by no means a complete exhaustive list of all the deadly, destructive beliefs that hold us down. Whatever beliefs *you* may have that are holding *you* down, add them to this list and expose and evict them from your life. Thoughtfully consider that you are clean ... that you are free and no longer a slave of deadly, destructive, limiting beliefs. You have:

1. Accepted your past
2. Accepted SITUATIONS you couldn't control
3. Accepted SITUATIONS that you could control
4. Accepted your present SITUATION
5. Accepted and learned to Love your self
6. Accepted and learned to Love others
7. Accepted responsibility for your future

Now, you have rid your-self of all of the deadly, destructive, limiting beliefs that have made your life so un-Happy up to this point. You are a clean slate ... almost like being born again.

Of course, there will be times when these old lies and limiting beliefs will try to creep back in and get a foothold in your life but the difference now is, that you will be able to recognize them as lies, resist them, rebuke them and force them to flee ...

This process will get easier and easier as you begin to replace the deadly, destructive, limiting beliefs with life giving, life building, empowering beliefs.

So, what is the first belief that I want to introduce you to now that I have persuaded you to Believe in nothing?

Now that you Believe in nothing, I want you to learn to ...

Believe in Everything!

Believe in Everything

Before you close this book and think that I've lost my mind, let me explain myself. It was *necessary*, to get to nothing in the last chapter because it *is* necessary to rid our-selves of any beliefs that are not life-giving, life-building and life-empowering.

When I speak of “Believing in Everything,” I’m making a case for Believing in the Laws and Principles of “Everything.” Believing in an “Ordered Universe” and Believing in the Love and Power of GOD, who created “Everything.”

I may begin to lose some of you at this point ...

“Oh no, here goes, it all boils down to Religion ...”

No, it doesn't.

It boils down to being honest, intellectually and otherwise about what is reality, what is existence and once we've answered that question, where do our lives fit in?

Let's start at square one, about the little we humans know about how we came into existence; how something came from nothing. The most popular model we have at the present time is the Big Bang Theory.

“According to the standard Big Bang model, the universe was born during a period of inflation that began about 13.8 billion years ago. Like a rapidly expanding balloon, it swelled from a size smaller than an electron to nearly its current size within a tiny fraction of a second.” ([Live Science / Big Bang](#))¹⁷

Ok. That’s fine. I can Accept that as a possible scenario. So, the next question is “How did the “Electron Like Particle” come into existence? Some would say GOD ... but then, where and how did GOD come into existence? If we take it one step further (or backwards) How can something come from nothing?

There are a few varying ideas of what “nothing” actually is. Ethan Siegel wrote in Medium online that there are *four* different scientific meanings of “nothing” (Medium 7 Feb, 2018)

The long and short of it is, there really is no true “nothing” This notion is underscored in an article from [BBC.com](#) entitled

“Why is there Something rather than Nothing?”

An excerpt from the article explains:

“Quantum mechanics tells us that there is no such thing as empty space. Even the most perfect vacuum is actually filled by a roiling cloud of particles and antiparticles, which flare into existence and almost instantaneously fade back into nothingness.”¹⁸

What we're left with then concerning the existence of "*roiling clouds of particles and antiparticles*" or "*Quantum Foam*" is that we *think* it/they *may* exist and that it/they *may* explain *some* things about our origins, but we will likely never be able to see it or know it; and, by the way, if it is true, it creates huge problems for Einstein's General Theory of Relativity. Relativity and Quantum Mechanics are fundamentally different theories that have different formulations. It's not just a matter of scientific terminology; it is a clash, of genuinely incompatible descriptions of reality.

Let's conclude then, that belief in GOD, is just as legitimate and viable as belief in nothing. In fact, as we can say from the general consensus that there is no true nothing, belief in GOD is actually *more* legitimate and *more* viable.

Now we have established that the "Mystery of GOD" is unknowable. It is at least beyond our human comprehension. But what about Creation? What about *our* Universe? What about "*Everything*" else? Can we make reasonable assumptions about those things ... and from those reasonable assumptions can we form credible Beliefs? I think we can.

First of all, I'm willing to Accept that the GOD we think of as creating our existence may be one of a many number of entities

Genesis 1:1 says

*In the beginning
GOD
created
the Heavens and the Earth.”*

Is it reasonable to Believe this statement?

It's perfectly reasonable.

When we think back about the mystery and complexity of Existence and First Things, Earth Creation would be a snap. The second verse of Genesis goes on to say:

*“And the earth was without form, and void;
and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
And the Spirit of God,
moved upon the face of the waters.”*

This statement, tells us that there was already “*something*” in existence, before the creation of Adam and Eve’s Earth. There was already an earth. It was just without form, and void. There was darkness, there was the deep, there were waters. We also learn a little later, in vs 26, that there was more than one entity present during the creation of MAN.

*“...Then God said, “Let US make man in OUR image,
according to OUR likeness; let them have dominion over
the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the
cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that
creeps on the earth.”*

Fast forward about 4000 years to the Gospel of John the 1st Chapter, the 1st verse:

1) *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

2) *The same was in the beginning with God.*

3) *All things were made by him; without him was not anything made that was made. ”*

In light of these statements, I will stipulate the following;

- The writers of these statements, in Genesis and John, were obviously making statements based on what “GOD” told them or what their knowledge was of their known creation, existence or universe at that time. I have no problem Accepting that the GOD referred to here could have been:

THE SUPREME GOD CREATOR

(who may or may not be *the* force behind, or in fact **BE** *roiling clouds of particles and antiparticles, which flare into existence and almost instantaneously fade back into nothingness.* ”)

- Or he could have been a deity or deities, advanced life form(s) (read Angels? sons of GOD?) who came here and created our species under the authority and direction of

THE SUPREME GOD CREATOR

I happen to Believe the former, but it would not shake my faith if the latter were true. My ultimate belief is in:

“... the Laws and Principles of “Everything,” of an “Ordered Universe” and in the Love and Power of GOD, SUPREME and CREATOR who spoke “Everything” into existence.”

Skeptics may say,

“Yes but there are so many different accounts of creation, how can you Believe in the statement you just made?”

My answer ... It is *precisely because*, there are so many accounts of creation, that I can Believe in a SUPREME GOD CREATOR. Because there *are* so many CREATION / Origin accounts, it becomes obvious that “*something*” ... happened,

“In the beginning”.

The fact that there are so *many* stories of our Origins, indicates to me, that there *is* a story of our Origin.

Some have said;

“Well, man just has a need to explain our existence.”

I could say with equal or greater veracity, that man didn't necessarily fabricate a creation account just because he had this deep need to explain his existence.

Maybe, and I say, *likely* ... they were passing down *stories* of our origins because there *was* a story of our origins.

Most people are familiar with the game of “Telephone” and / or “Chinese Whispers” Whether you know the name of the game or not, I’m sure you’re familiar with how the game is played.

The following is an excerpt from the Wikipedia entry on the game and an explanation of how it is played.

“Chinese whispers or Telephone, is an internationally popular children’s game in which players form a line, and the first player comes up with a message and whispers it to the ear of the second person in the line. The second player repeats the message to the third player, and so on. When the last player is reached, they announce the message they heard to the entire group. The first person then compares the original message with the final version. Although the objective is to pass around the message without it becoming garbled along the way, part of the enjoyment is that, regardless, this usually ends up happening.

Errors typically accumulate in the retellings, so the statement announced by the last player differs significantly from that of the first player, usually with amusing or humorous effect.

Reasons for changes include anxiousness or impatience, erroneous corrections, the difficult-to-understand mechanism of whispering. Players may deliberately alter what is being said to guarantee a changed message by the end of the line.

The game is often played by children as a party game or on the playground. It is often invoked as a metaphor for cumulative error, especially the inaccuracies as rumors or gossip spread, or, more generally, for the unreliability of human recollection or even oral traditions."
(Wikipedia, Chinese Whispers)¹⁹

Here is a real-life example of this game played among a group of co-workers:

The Telephone Game

Some time ago when I was teaching a college class on responsible leadership, I asked the class to play the "Telephone Game." The "Telephone Game" is a classic Communication game in which the person in the front of the room is given a short phrase to remember and then whispers the phrase into the ear of the person next to them. The process continues until the phrase reaches the last person in the room. The phrase I used that day was, "Great teams become great when each team member does more than their role, and each team member delivers their absolute best." After about 5 minutes and twenty-five college students whispering the phrase to each other, the last person in the room to receive the phrase was asked to say what they heard out loud:

"Great teams are the best. Let's get on the bus."

As I shared the original phrase with the class, we all had a good laugh.

I asked the group their thoughts on why the final phrase was so different from the original phrase. Students in the class called out,

- *"It was too much to remember."*
- *"I just told the person next to me what I thought was most important."*
- *"I guess I didn't listen carefully enough."*
- *"I should have had the person repeat it several times."*
- *"I think someone purposely changed it!"*

The "Telephone Game" is a game that is played each day at work. If we do not hear something directly from the source, the message tends to get distorted in translation. This is particularly important when something is summarized, relayed from a third party, or contains only the most dramatic and stunning parts of the story...

([the friday story / telephone game](#))²⁰

In all of our Creation / Origin accounts, I am convinced, *I Believe*, that something happened. I Believe that CREATION, in some form, happened. Just as in the Telephone Game, something happened; a statement was made. The diversity of accounts in our multitude of societies, cultures and histories, owe to the inherent weakness and susceptibility to error and misinformation of oral histories and traditions. How then can we put our trust and faith and belief in *any* account of CREATION or any account of GOD?

I submit that there are very effective, extremely reliable ways and means we have to sift through the plethora of GOD beliefs in circulation today. I personally Believe in the Judeo-Christian account. I will gladly elaborate on and explain my beliefs to anyone who wants to hear them.

For now, though, let me say I have no problem with a person who may have strong beliefs in *another* story or tradition; whether it be Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam etc. If these beliefs serve you in the ways that I have described and are bringing you true happiness, excellent!

It is not my goal in this book to proselytize. One of my Core Beliefs is;

“... If you seek, you will find”

My message to anyone is, never, ever, stop seeking, even in the context of your current belief system. There is always room to learn, grow and evolve. If you are seeking, I have every assurance that you will find. Believe in Everything then; Believe in the power of GOD’s CREATION to move you forward.

Come and move forward with me!

Believe you're in the Right Place at the Right Time

Now we come to the first of the “*Core Beliefs*” in what I have defined as happiness. Remember back at the beginning of the book, Chapter 1;

“Happiness, for the purpose of this book, is a state of mental and spiritual well-being that is not affected by SITUATIONS or things but is anchored in the firm knowledge and belief that one is exactly where one is supposed to be at any point in space-time...”

Yes, we are in the Right Place at the Right Time. This Core Belief is related to the principle of Acceptance of Our Present SITUATION, yet it also kind of encompasses it. Just because we have *Accepted* Our Present SITUATION doesn't mean that we *Believe* we are in the right SITUATION.

Sometimes, we may say,

“I'm in this SITUATION and I Accept it but I really don't like it and I need to get out of it.”

It's ok to want to be moving forward.

However, we must not drift into thinking

“I don’t like this SITUATION; I shouldn’t be in this position and I won’t really be happy until I’m out of it.”

It’s a very subtle mind shift but it can hinder us from evolving in a positive manner. As we learned back in the Chapters about Accepting past SITUATIONS, part of that process involves taking an objective look at past negative SITUATIONS and understanding that they actually played a part in the persons we became.

Let’s look back again to the story of Joyce Meyer. It’s such a powerful testimony that I think it part of it bears revisiting in this context.

In 2018 Meyer shared in a video from one of her conferences posted to her Facebook page, how her thinking has evolved even more over the years concerning her years of sexual abuse in SITUATIONS she had no control over.

“Where was God in all this? Let’s talk about that for a minute,” Meyer tells the audience. “I can’t explain it to you in my mind...I know that God didn’t get me out of it, but he did give me the strength to go through it. God had a plan,” she said. “About three years ago, I said that, ‘But of course I wish I had not been abused’ and God stopped me. He said, ‘Stop saying that.’ And then I thought about it and I thought, and I know this sounds crazy, but I’m glad it happened. You know why?”

Because I'm a better person now than I ever would have been," Meyer tearfully explained. "I don't know how to make any sense out of that, but I know that I know that I know that God has redeemed me, and he has taken what Satan meant for harm and worked it out for good."

We must look back and repair the damages we suffered from various horrible SITUATIONS in our past. We must decide, that we were meant to be in those SITUATIONS because, we *were* in those SITUATIONS. Those SITUATIONS ultimately benefitted us. They evolved us, shaped us and molded us into the persons we are today. And who are we today? We are persons who have made decisions to be Happy; to lead Happy Lives.

"Our time is now, and our best years are yet to come."

If we can Believe that about our *past* experiences and SITUATIONS, we can easily Believe that about our *current* experience and SITUATION. We can Believe that we are exactly where we are supposed to be in space-time. We are exactly in the country, in the state, in the city, in the residence that we are supposed to be in ... for now. That may change tomorrow but for *NOW*, we are exactly where we are supposed to be. We are living at the time we are supposed to be living. We could have lived thousands of years ago ... could have lived decades ago ... but we are living *NOW*; meant to live and breathe and move in this moment, in this reality. In this time of Protests, Pandemics, and Political Pandemonium. This is the place, and this is the time, that GOD our CREATOR has us in, to learn and grow and evolve.

In the New Testament book of James, the writer opens his epistle with this greeting.

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:”

James is writing to his Jewish brothers and sisters. Children, as regards their common heritage, of their father Abraham, and his son Isaac, and his son Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons whose offspring, all cousins, became known as the twelve Tribes of Israel. The tribes had survived many trials and tribulations but in AD 70 The Roman Empire crushed the Jewish People, destroyed the Temple they had built and consecrated to their GOD, and scattered this seed of Abraham across the known world to all the nations. In verse 2 (as we have read before) James goes on to say to them:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

Surely these kinsmen had been through great trials, yet James essentially tells them:

“Look brothers, sisters and kinsmen. I know you have it rough. We all do; but our common heritage unites us and empowers us.

So have a good attitude; GOD knows what he is doing; we are all here for a reason. Be patient and let GOD accomplish his good work in you; Have faith! Persevere! On the other side of this you will have evolved into mature, complete Believers, not lacking in anything!”

Once we’ve settled in our minds that we are exactly where we’re supposed to be in space-time, good things will begin to happen. We will cease, always thinking about the grass on the other side of the fence and start tending to our own lawn. As a result of our renewed vision and focus, life will begin to flourish in *our* yard. No longer will we constantly have our eyes and our hearts on someone else’s plot of ground; thinking how much more bountiful it is than ours. Of course it *appears* to be! Our own trees and shrubs and flowers are suffering because of our lack of love, care and tenderness for them. We must keep *our eyes* and *our Hearts* and *Minds* on what is right in front of US! We are exactly where we’re supposed to be, right here, right now! Everything that has happened to us up to this point has made us the persons we are, as well as the persons we’re going to be. If we look back over our lives, we will be able to discern that if one little step we took or one small decision we made were a little different our life right now would be *completely* different. If we would have gone right rather than veered left at that “Fork in the Road.” If we wouldn’t have missed that plane flight. What if we had checked our oil and water before leaving on that road trip? Things may have turned out completely different for us. Life seems so random, so prone to turning on a simple twist of fate ... I’ll give you an example from my own life.

When I was 17 or 18, I belonged to a Youth Group at a church I attended. I had only been a Believer for a couple of years. One day my buddy and I decided to stop by the Church and drop in on our Youth Pastor. (this is same buddy with the black 68 Chevelle back in Chapter 1) We were both feeling a little down and unsure about our futures. We talked a while and then as we got up to leave, Richard, our Youth Pastor, said he wanted to pray for us. He proceeded to pray for our futures and asked GOD specifically, to begin preparing for me the woman that I would marry, and that he would begin preparing me, for her. It has always been interesting to me. I don't remember much else about that time together, but I remember vividly, him praying regarding my future wife. Fast forward a couple of years later ... I had gone off to college to pursue my dreams and fell flat on my face. Nothing worked out. My first year was ok but the second year was a disaster. I don't remember exactly what it was ... things were falling apart back home ... my father's alcoholism was out of control; my parents were getting a divorce ... but that was not an excuse. I was just uninterested, unmotivated, and un-happy. I moved back home, used what savings I had to get an apartment with my other best friend, Larry, and started looking for a job. I had always worked in the grocery business, progressing from Box Boy (now they're called Courtesy Clerks) to Retail Clerk so that's where I naturally started looking. I went back to a couple of grocery stores I had worked at before, but nothing panned out. Larry was working in a grocery store at the time and he tried to get me on with him but that didn't materialize either.

Finally, I saw an advertisement in the want ads of my local paper.

Back in those days, there was no indeed.com, no monster.com. You had to get the paper every day, and scour through the “*Classifieds*” to find a job and jump on it before someone else did.

Anyway, there was an opening for an Inside Sales position at a wholesale distribution company called Keenan Pipe & Plumbing Supply. It was an eight to five job, Monday through Friday. A real full-time job. I had never worked that kind of job before. In the Grocery business the hours were always varied and changing. You might work six hours one day, eight the next, four the next ... even when I worked a full forty-hour week the hours could be dayshift, swing shift, nights, weekends ... whatever the need. This was, in my mind, the opportunity to go to work in what I considered “the real working world.” My plans had been, to come home, get a job in a grocery store, with a flexible schedule, that would allow me to continue my education at our local college. The Inside Sales position sounded very interesting ... something I had never done before. I called, inquired about the position and was invited in to apply. I went in, filled out the application and was interviewed by the Branch Manager right then and there. No real HR department to speak of in those days. You dealt directly with the person who hired and fired. He was a straight-up, no nonsense kind of guy who seemed to run a tight ship.

A few days later one of the Secretaries (that’s what Administrative Assistants were called back in the day) called me and informed me that I didn’t get the job, they made a decision to go with an older, more experienced applicant. I was *a little too young*. “Fine” I said, “no hard feelings ...” and never gave it a second thought. At nineteen years old, I was “*a little too young*.” She told me that.

Something you could never get away with today. No big deal. I completely understood. I went back to my job search, focusing on the Grocery business, hoping to land a job as a clerk on a night crew. Eventually, my efforts paid off and I was hired by a company called Alpha Beta. I was jazzed. I was itching to get back to work. Alpha Beta was a chain of grocery stores that saw their heyday in the sixties and seventies. They eventually got bought up, sliced and diced, absorbed or sold off, like so many other medium sized markets of that era, by the likes of Ralphs, Albertsons, Lucky etc. Alpha Beta's policy was to have a new hire attend a three day orientation and training at their corporate offices in La Habra CA. It was a Monday afternoon and I was at my apartment in Bakersfield CA with my roommate Larry, getting packed and ready to drive down to spend the night in La Habra. I wanted to be fresh and ready to go for my training class the next morning.

At about four o'clock or so my phone rang. I picked it up and answered "Hello?"

It was Bill Babb the Branch Manager of Keenan Pipe and Supply. He was calling to let me know that the other applicant hadn't worked out and if I still wanted the job it was mine. I was a little shocked. Here I was a couple of hours from taking off for So Cal for my new job and I get this last-minute phone call.

"Could I have a little time to think about it?" I asked

I explained my SITUATION assuming surely, he would understand why I couldn't give him an immediate answer. Turns out, he could care less about my SITUATION. Straight-up, No nonsense guy.

“I’m here until five.” he said “If I don’t hear from you by then I’m going to call the next guy in line first thing in the morning. “

Fair enough.” I answered.

I got off the phone and told my buddy what had just occurred.

“What do you think I should do?” I asked.

“Hey, that’s your call,” he replied, “but Alpha Beta is a good company to work for.”

I thought about the offer really hard for the next forty-five minutes. Just shy of Bill Babb’s deadline, I picked up the phone and called him back.

“Hi Bill, this is Kyle. When do I start?”

“Be here tomorrow morning a little before eight o’clock.”

“Ok, see you then, goodbye ...”

I was a few months away from my twentieth birthday and had made a radical decision to jump off, to venture out, in a completely different direction. I made a decision to enter “the real working world.” Someday I may tell that whole story in print but for now the incredibly short version is, I went to work for Keenan Pipe and Supply at an Inside Sales desk, and I met the beautiful young woman who would become my wife.

Beca worked at our corporate office in Southern California. We got married, I got into the Construction industry, we moved to Southern California, had two children ... and we've been together ever since.

The entire course of my life changed because I was in my Apartment, at a particular place, at a particular time, when I received that phone call from Bill Babb. If I had been out riding my motorcycle that afternoon instead of packing, I would never have received that call. There were of course no cell phones then and answering machines wouldn't become popular and in widespread use until the mid-eighties. In those days, you miss a call, there could be big consequences. You might miss a huge opportunity ... but I *didn't* miss the call, I seized on the opportunity and it has been the great adventure of my life. I was in the right place, at the right time.

Every so often I reflect back to the time when my buddy and I just *randomly* stopped by our Youth Pastors office ... and he just *randomly* felt impressed to pray for GOD, to prepare for me, the woman I was going to marry. ... I reflect back on that Monday afternoon, sitting in my apartment when I got that phone call. I could have easily, easily, made the choice to turn Mr. Babb down. Incidentally, Bill also was instrumental in my decision to pursue a relationship with my soon to be wife, even though she lived two hours away at the time.

Looking back, I know beyond a shadow of doubt, that I was exactly where I was supposed to be at that moment in space-time. Looking forward, I know beyond a shadow of doubt, that I will be *exactly* where I am supposed to be at any future moment in space-time ...

Right here, right now, typing away on this keyboard, I know, beyond a shadow of doubt, that I am *exactly* where I am supposed to be at this moment in space-time. I know this in the good times, and I know it in the bad times.

I know that:

*“To everything there is a season and a time,
to every purpose under Heaven.”*

Though we may not yet fully understand the hard times we’ve endured, they do serve a purpose in our lives. GOD does know what he is doing. For now, understand that, we *can* be confident, we *can* know, we *can* develop the Core Belief that we are exactly where we are supposed to be at this point in space-time ... the right place at the right time.

Knowing this, we are ready to move on to the next chapter, where I will explain the core belief that;

*“the Universe and the CREATOR of the Universe
will always work SITUATIONS and things
out for our good.”*

Believe Everything, will always, work all things, out for your Good

You will notice that for the first time in this book our chapter truth differs just a bit from the truth as it is written in our core belief statement:

- ... *the Universe, and the CREATOR of the Universe will always work “SITUATIONS and things” out for our good ...*

The reason I am making this distinction at this point is because I want to elaborate on my exhortation to you in Chapter 10 about “Believing in Everything”.

“When I speak of Believing in Everything, I am making a case for Believing in the Laws and Principles of “Everything”, of an “Ordered Universe” and Believing in the Love and Power of GOD, who created “Everything”

We must come to the realization, that Everything will always work things out for our good, because GOD, our CREATOR, created Everything. He created our Universe and whatever other Universes are out there. He created our Galaxy, our Solar System.

He created the Moon and the Stars, Heaven and Earth, the Quantum Foam, the Cattle on a Thousand Hills ...

He created it all for his pleasure *and* ours. GOD has declared that he has plans for us; plans to prosper us, not to harm us ... plans to give us hope and a future. Think about that ...

The GOD who created everything ...

THE GOD who created everything ...

THE GOD WHO created everything ...

THE GOD WHO CREATED everything ...

THE GOD WHO CREATED EVERYTHING

That GOD ... loves us and has a plan for our lives!

I want you to let that sink in ... really, really, really let that sink in. There are a lot of people walking around on the planet, professing themselves to be Christians or Muslims or Jews or Buddhists; professing to be followers and disciples of our GOD.

I think in reality, most of us are just living out our lives in a manner that tailors GOD to *our* lifestyle and allows us to wear our “God Suit” in a way that is most comfortable, most attractive and most benefits us.

While we should be awestruck and humbled by GOD’s declaration that he has plans for us, we instead, either consciously or unconsciously, declare that *we*, have plans for GOD. We live our lives in that mind-set and wonder why, whether rich or poor, successful or struggling, no matter what we do or how hard we try we can’t seem to catch that bright, elusive butterfly of Happiness.

Solomon, King of Israel, was referred to as not only the richest but also the wisest man to ever live. Everyone has heard at some time in their life, one of his Proverbs.

A proverb is, according to the King James Version dictionary;

“A short sentence often repeated, expressing a well-known truth or common fact, ascertained by experience or observation; a maxim of wisdom.”

Proverbs Chapter 16 verse 9, the Contemporary English Version says,

*“We make our own plans,
but the LORD decides where we will go.”*

It's ok to make our own plans, to set our own goals and to move in the direction of, and in step with those plans and goals. But, know for certain that GOD our CREATOR *will* direct our steps, in accordance with *His* plans; not only for our lives and happiness but intertwined *with*, the common good *of*, and the ultimate purpose *for*, His *entire* CREATION.

This is not to say that GOD is going to spoil our plans or *force* us to do something we don't want to do. One of the wonders of our Supreme Intelligent Benevolent Father is that he has, and will instill *our* plans, *our* goals, *our* hopes and *our* dreams within us, because ... *our* happiness is HIS happiness. We will dive deeper into this concept in a few more chapters.

For now, we will stay focused on the Core Belief, and the theme for this chapter, to:

*Believe Everything, (our CREATOR)
will always, work things out for our good!*

There are so many stories I could tell, and I'm sure there are so many that you could tell me, about SITUATIONS in your life that initially seemed to be tragic, disastrous or catastrophic, but ultimately, worked out for your good. Situations that ultimately brought you to a place in your life, this place in your life, exactly the place you are supposed to be right now at this point in Space-Time.

When I was 30 years old, my father was murdered ... by his third wife ... who caught him cheating with another woman. I was living a few hours away from him at the time, and let me tell you that next week, after his murder, was incredibly stressful and surreal. Hours after his funeral my wife and I collapsed on the bed, in the place where we were staying. It was the first real rest we had allowed our-selves since first hearing of his death.

Our much-needed rest was disturbed by a phone call. My brother-in-law, my wife's brother had been murdered in Los Angeles. We had to immediately get our-selves together, pack our bags, load up our kids, and drive to LA to identify his body. After his funeral we drove home to San Bernardino, again looking forward to finally getting some rest; only to discover that our home had been broken into and looted while we were gone.

Someday I might go into the circumstances of these difficult days in greater detail but for now, let s just say, it was a tough time. There was one thing, however, that I took away from that series of calamities.

My brother and I decided to share the Eulogy at my father's funeral. During my turn at the Podium, it must have been during a song, I looked up towards the heavens.

An overwhelming sense of awe came over me. I felt the presence of GOD envelop me in a way that I had never experienced in my life and never have since. I didn't hear his voice, no lights or thunder ... but I was in *his* presence ... more accurately, he was in *my* presence. For moments or maybe minutes, I was oblivious of everyone and everything around me. The CREATOR of the universe assured me that he was in control ... assured me, not in words but in some kind of Communication that went beyond words. It was tangible, powerful, humbling and ... assuring. I felt him draw away, his Glory subsided, and I was back in the moment and finished up my Eulogy.

Over the years, I have been through many trials, stumbled and fallen many times... but I've never forgotten that moment. Today, one of the Bedrock Solid Foundations of my Happiness is the knowledge and firm belief that;

*“... the CREATOR of the Universe will always work
“SITUATIONS and things” out for our good...”*

Now you may be thinking,

“Yeah, that may be great for you but what about your father? He lost his life. What about his wife? She went to prison! What about all the innocent people who have suffered or been tortured or died? Did it work it for them?”

Let me answer that question by telling you another story.

My wife and I have some friends who lost their daughter in an Earthquake. She was one of two women who were killed when an Unreinforced Masonry Building collapsed on them. She had everything going for her ...

She was engaged and soon to be married. Our daughter was to be the Maid of Honor at her wedding. It was a horrible tragedy. Out of that tragedy however, her parents were led into a deeper walk with GOD. They got involved in prison ministry and have helped many lost souls find their way again. But what about their daughter? She lost her life. Was GOD in control? Did everything work out well for her? The answer is ...yes.

My wife is a very intuitive, spiritual person. One night she had a dream. In the dream she met and talked to this couple's daughter. She saw her in a beautiful gown, dancing, with a big smile on her face. My wife knew that she was happy; that she was with her CREATOR; her “Abba Father.” She shared her dream with the young woman's mother. The mother related to my wife that she had always longed to dream that dream.

She didn't understand why GOD didn't give *her* the dream but it gave her great peace hearing that story from my wife.

At the same time my wife didn't really understand why GOD gave *her* the dream, rather than the young lady's mother. She may never know ... But GOD knows.

Unfortunately, we can't communicate with the dead to ask them if they are ok. We can't tell them how much it hurts to know that they endured such horrible pain and suffering and death. I don't know if my earthly father is with my "Abba" FATHER ... it's not my concern.

My concern is to live my life and become the best person I can be. Sometimes people suffer the consequences of their own ACTIONS and sometimes they don't ... at least that we are able to see.

I do however know, beyond a shadow of doubt, that my Heavenly Father does not kill the innocent. The suffering of the innocent must be laid at the feet of "the father of lies." His name is Lucifer ... Satan ... the Devil. He is a thief and a liar. He hates GOD and he hates GOD's creation; *especially* the innocent. The thief, (Satan) comes *only*, to steal, to kill and to destroy.

Is GOD in control? Yes! he is. He has a plan for us, and he has a plan for our planet. A plan that involves free will and free choice. Sadly, not everyone exercises this precious gift of free will wisely.

The Bible says in Psalm 91:

“He that dwells in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely, he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flies by day; Nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness; nor for the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. With thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation”

I Believe beyond a shadow of doubt, that if we *choose* to dwell in the secret place of the Most High, he will be our shield and our fortress. If on the other hand we choose to get out from under his protection, we open our-selves up to Evil's desire to steal from us, to kill us and destroy us. Some of the more vile sociopaths among us exercise their free will, under the leading of the father of lies, to commit unspeakable evil and suffering. Be assured however, that there will come a day when Lucifer, and all his demons of darkness and wickedness will get what is coming to them. In the meantime, we should seek to always be sheltered under the wings, and in synch with the plans, of our CREATOR, our refuge.

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

I Believe with all that is within me, that the innocent who have suffered to the point of death in *this* life, have ceased from *all* suffering, and are now present with our LORD in the next life.

All the babies who have been aborted, all the innocent children who suffered and were abused, beaten, tortured and killed by evil, psychopathic creatures; they are ALL with the Good Shepard ... for eternity. Our GOD is a Good and Just and Loving GOD. No small, young, innocent life is deserving of the evil that these sick souls subjected them to. More than anyone else, our GOD knows this. He is kind and merciful and these precious little lambs of his are with their Good Shepherd.

GOD *is* in control.

*“... the CREATOR of the Universe will **always** work
“SITUATIONS and things” out for our good...”*

Our part in all of this is to not get too caught up in things that hurt us and trouble us and cause us to question or doubt, but to trust and keep moving forward and keep pressing on. Every time you fall, get back up and keep going! Keep seeking.

... If you seek you will find!

Everything we experience in this life is meant to bring us closer to GOD ... and though the thief would seek to slow you down and hold you back and ultimately kill and destroy you, don't give up. GOD will work it out!

I want to conclude this chapter with an excerpt from the book of Acts in the New Testament, chapter 17. This excerpt tells the story of the Apostle Paul addressing the high-minded Greek thinkers of Athens. They all thought they were the smartest kids in the room. They had questioned Paul about some of the “strange things” he was teaching around the city and were anxious to understand what he was talking about. Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, describes them like this:

*“... all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there,
(Athens) spent their time doing nothing but talking about and
listening to the latest ideas.”*

Paul set them straight with what became known as;

The Mars Hill Sermon.

“Men of Athens, God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all, life, breath, and all things. He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth. He has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings ... so that they should seek the Lord; in the hope that they might grope for Him ... and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him,

we live and move and have our being ...”

Everything that happens in this life, everything that GOD allows, good or bad, including the things that the Evil one means for our destruction, GOD will take those things and use them;

“... in the hope that we might grope for Him ... and we might find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.”

Seek for, and yearn to know your CREATOR ...

You **will** find HIM. He wants to be found. He wants to bless you!

“Believe ... and Everything (our CREATOR) will always,

Work things out for your good!”

Believe Everything, will always, come back to Balance

Happiness, for the purpose of this book, is:

“...a state of mental and spiritual well-being that is not affected by SITUATIONS or things, but is anchored in the firm knowledge and belief that;

- *I’m exactly where I’m supposed to be, right here, right now.*
- *The CREATOR of the Universe, will always work all “Situations and Things” out for my good.*
- *The CREATOR of the Universe, will always bring any extreme situation back to Balance in my life.”*

I want to start this chapter with a short anecdote related to this Core Belief. It is an old Jewish fable entitled,

“This too shall pass”

“King Solomon was trying to humble his wisest servant, so he asked him to perform a seemingly impossible task: to find something that did not exist. He requested a magic ring—one that, if a sad man wore it, he would become happy and if a happy man wore it, he would become sad. The servant took the challenge, searched high and low in the land, but on the night before he was supposed to report back to the King, he still had nothing. Then the idea came to him: He went to the local jeweler and had three words inscribed on a plain gold ring:

*Gam ze ya'avor.
This, too, shall pass.*

King Solomon was delighted at such a phrase because it was true whether someone was happy or sad, in all times and SITUATIONS. He saw when he was melancholy, the ring would comfort him and remind him of sunnier days ahead. When he was at the height of contentment, the ring would humble him and remind him of life's fleeting nature. Legend has it, he never took it off and could be heard saying to himself

*“Gam ze ya'avor:
This, too, shall pass.”*

In modern times, the phrase Gam ze ya'avor was made popular by Abraham Lincoln who used it often in his speeches (in the English translation) to challenge and inspire his listeners.

This phrase is timeless and it's meaning rich. It should resonate for each of us. Every individual knows melancholy and joy. And each of us knows how quickly things can change. For the most part, we don't use the phrase, "This too shall pass" when we're in a good place. We use it in times of difficulty and darkness. It is reassuring and comforting, with its promise of an end to troubles. Distressing times in life can be overwhelming and suffocating. Sometimes just living feels like a burden and the stress always seems to come when we feel least able to carry it. Professional challenges, maintaining a home, difficult children, aging parents, dealing with illness and death—whatever it is—we take a deep breath and remember in times like these, there have always been times like these. This too shall pass. It isn't the first hurdle and it won't be the last. I would argue, it's just as important to take a page from King Solomon and invoke this phrase when things are going well. Solomon also used the phrase to chasten himself in times of pride and contentment ..."

(This too shall Pass)²¹

This story underscores not only the impermanence and constant change that is life, but also the truth that all creation, while dynamic and fluid, also functions according to physical and spiritual laws, seeks homeostasis, and always returns to Balance.

We see it all around us in nature. The earth spins on its axis 1000 miles per hour, separating and balancing the night from the day, the dark from the light. At the same time, we are moving in orbit in our solar system, around the sun at 67,000 miles per hour.

In the space of 365 days, due to that orbit, and our planets axial tilt in *relation to* the Sun, our planet goes through 4 different “Seasons” or environmental, climatic changes that bring about aging and death in the winter, and birth with new life in the Spring

We see it as the bare, seemingly dead trees begin to bud; as the dry scraggy bushes begin to flower and soon after our surroundings are vibrant and alive again. The greens, reds and blues ... oranges, purples and pinks ... that only GOD can produce, burst forth in a brilliant kaleidoscope of color. In due time, Spring gives way to Summer. The heat turns up and brings the full light and energy of the sun to bear down on all of creation. We grow and adapt and are strengthened. The Mighty Oaks and the Giant Redwoods sink their roots deeper into the earth and reach higher and closer to the rays that give them life.

Some of the more colorful, yet less hearty of our creation, our annual Flora, treat us to spectacular feasts for the eyes, but after their glorious presentation, are all spent. After flowering, they begin to wither and die. In his infinite wisdom however, our Creator ensures that a part of them will return next year to do what they do so well. By releasing their seeds, letting them fall to the ground and seemingly die in the earth, they make certain that their beauty and glory will return year after year after year.

Meanwhile our very food sources, our fruit trees and vegetable gardens and splendorous grasses are growing and greening and ripening until the late summer and early fall, when harvest time arrives, and they give up their bounty to feed the world.

Leaves begin to change color and drop to the ground. The nights begin to get colder and crisper. Inevitably the air becomes much colder; the skies darken and once vibrant and colorful fauna and flora retreat into safe spaces as the rains and the snows of winter bring life to a standstill. Cold, wet Winter eventually subsides and in the Spring the earth awakens from its sleep, starting the cycle all over again.

All the while that this is going on, our earth is traveling around the sun at 67,000 mph, our solar system is moving through the galaxy at 515,000 mph and our galaxy is hurtling through our universe at a whopping 1,300,000 miles per hour! These natural, physical forces are unfathomable. Most of us go through our days and sometimes our lifetimes without ever giving this miracle a moment's thought.

The state in which all of these things exist is Balance. The Universe wants and demands Balance. Changing the spin or the tilt or the orbit of the earth, just slightly, would result in an im-Balance that could bring about an end to life as we know it ... a Cataclysm.

Nevertheless, the Universe would adjust and adapt. The debris of such an event would be enveloped and absorbed into the overall Balance of the universe ... an imperceptible blip on the immense radar screen of existence and reality.

Our civilizations, our political systems, our societies, our neighborhoods all exist in Balance ... Our bodies and our health exist in Balance.

It's amazing how we just happen to be in synchronization and harmony with the natural cycles of our days and seasons. As I wrote earlier about the Yin/Yang, like the Balance of the seasons, even our day is a microcosm of our year, ebbing and flowing in a natural Balance. We rise in the morning, work through the day, rest, and wind down in the evening and sleep through the night. Only to rise again in the morning and start the cycle all over again.

We may sometimes push our-selves, beyond our limits, deprive our-selves of sleep, trying to finish a project, or work a double shift or drive all night to get to a destination on time, but normally, our bodies need, crave, cry out for Balance. Sleep and rest are a part of that Balance. Our personal biological systems are not designed to accommodate or exist in extreme states of "im-Balance." We are not designed to accommodate extreme periods of sleeplessness, lack of water, lack of food, lack of sunlight ... Or on the flip side, too much sleep, too much water, too much food, too much sunlight. Alcoholism, Drug Addiction, Sexual Addictions, Obesity, Anorexia, Bulimia ... All are altered states of im-Balance.

There are serious consequences of spending too much time in those altered states. Our bodies need for Balance and the forces of our universe will bring about SITUATIONS that will lead us; that will physically, mentally, and spiritually nudge, coax, persuade and sometimes push or even force us, back to Balance.

At times in our existences, SITUATIONS occur and combine even at our cellular, molecular, atomic, and subatomic levels that bring about sickness and disease in our bodies.

Harmful bacteria, viruses and aberrant out of control cells wreak havoc. These produce Flu's, Pneumonia, Auto-immune Disorders, Diabetes, Heart Disease, Cancers.

When we are young and healthy our bodies defenses are usually able to ward off and vanquish these threats. As we age and our bodies break down and weaken, we are less likely to battle these threats successfully. Sometimes even the young and healthy are unable to prevail against some of the more powerful of these invisible invaders. Unfortunately, we all have friends, relatives and loved ones who have lost their lives to these sicknesses and diseases. Some have waged long, agonizing wars with these illnesses, only to succumb in the end.

Even in these examples of extreme altered states of existence, our bodies and the Universe are seeking restoration to Balance. The universe wants our bodies to live; free of sickness and disease. When this becomes impossible or unlikely, our physical bodies, our flesh, dies and sets our spirits free to transition into a higher plane of existence, in Harmony and Balance with another aspect of GODs glorious, CREATION.

For those who have lived their lives seeking and abiding and walking in the Spirit, this transition is not traumatic, rather, it is transcendent. Moving from the shadows of our earthly existence to the light and radiance of this higher plane. The shedding of our sick, diseased, corrupt flesh is a welcome event; a discovery of a new divine Balance even in death. Instead of sorrow, there is joy. As the apostle declared,

*“O death, where is thy sting?
O grave, where is thy victory?”*

In our civilizations, wars create an extreme im-Balance, but eventually peace and harmony return. In our societies, extreme im-Balances often exist in the disparity between different classes, different races, different genders. These im-Balances give birth to the Ghandi's and the Mandela's and the King's. People who led movements in history to restore Balance to the human condition.

In our political systems, around the world, the Balance of Power regularly moves back and forth between parties and ideologies. Even the neighborhoods we live in whether rich, poor or middle class, exist in some form of Balance.

In America, most of us have experienced driving on a fast moving, busy freeway. In larger metropolitan areas it is a normal part of our daily lives. In my observation, it's almost a miracle, the way so many cars, driving so fast, go to and from their destinations each day with so few upsets ... a picture of precarious Balance.

What happens, however, when some-*thing* upsets the Balance? When some-*one* recklessly disregards posted speed limits and safe driving practices? A collision happens. Movement grinds to a halt; horns blare, drivers frustrated because they are late for work or school, or dropping kids off for school or appointments. The Highway Patrol show up, cars must shuffle around to try to make a way. Tow trucks and sometimes unfortunately, Ambulances are called to the scene.

They too must snake through the maze to make their way to the accident. Sometimes lanes have to be closed on the other side of the median in order for Emergency Services to gain access ... and though the First Responders are well trained and very good at what they do, it is not uncommon for these incidents to take hours and hours to clean up and get traffic flowing normally again.

Eventually, things do get moving; one lane is opened to let cars through... slowly ... then another ... then another, until all that is left is a crew with brooms and buckets sweeping in the one last lane that is still closed. Finally, even they toss their brooms and their buckets and barricades into the back of their trucks and drive away.

The next day or night, at the scene of the accident, cars are speeding by 65, 70, 75, 80 sometimes even 85, 90 miles per hour. Once again in precarious Balance; delicate synchronicity, oblivious to the carnage, confusion, and chaos that was unfolding here, just twenty-four hours earlier. The Freeway was designed to function in this fashion; ...designed for cars to move and flow in progress unimpeded; in Harmony and Balance.

In the Judeo-Christian record of creation starting from the very first sentence of the very first chapter of the very first book, the CREATOR establishes Yin /Yang. Harmony. Balance.

Heaven/Earth ✧ Light/Darkness ✧ Day/Night ✧ Adam/Eve

GOD declared it *all* Good!

Everything we do and everything we are, whether we know it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not will always come back to Balance.

In light of this truth, these three things I know:

- I know when I find myself in an extremely challenging SITUATION, that this too shall pass.
- I know when a SITUATION occurs that brings me extreme joy and pleasure, that this too shall pass.
- I know “the Universe will always bring any extreme SITUATION back to Balance ...”

Knowing and believing these things, I have come to the point in my life where I can say with the apostle Paul;

*“I have learned in whatsoever state I am,
therewith to be content.”*

In closing I would like to share something, that my wife shared with me, not even a week ago as we were enjoying our morning coffee, regarding this principle of Balance.

It blew me away. She had no idea where I was at this stage of the book. No idea that I was at this point, teaching on this topic. I was actually wondering how I was going to wrap this chapter up and then she gave me a precious Gem.

In the New Testament Book of Mark, the writer relates a story that is generally known as “*Jesus calms the Sea*” The story is also told in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke but Marks telling has a unique aspect that the other two writers do not relate.

Mark was an associate of Paul and a disciple of Peter. This is likely a story he heard directly from the mouth of one of Jesus inner circle. It relates a miraculous incident that occurred, in the life of Jesus and his disciples. Jesus had been teaching all day on the shores of Galilee, from a boat. At evening time, the decision was made to sail on over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and rest up for the next day. You can picture the sun going down and a peaceful calm settling in. Jesus himself, settles into the stern of the boat, finds himself a pillow and lays down for a nap. A picture of serenity and Balance, which is soon upset to the extreme.

“On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us cross over to the other side.” Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” Then He arose, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea,

“Peace, be still!”

And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.”

This is the Gem that my wife gave me, concerning this story.

“Notice” she said, “In the midst of the storm, Jesus speaks to the wind and the sea and commands, *“Peace, be still!”* “That,” she continued “... is how we need to handle the *storms* in our lives.”

So true! What an Epiphany! The universe is always seeking Balance. *We* also have the power to restore extreme SITUATIONS in our lives, our storms, back to Balance!

“Peace, be still!”

Believe it! Speak it!

Truth be told, GOD *wants us* to calm our own storms. Jesus said:

“...truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”

Of course, as I have related throughout this book, we can always learn and grow and evolve through our difficult times but I am persuaded that the sooner we learn these difficult lessons and the sooner we evolve, the fewer storms we will have to weather. Peace, Harmony and Balance will become our physical, mental and spiritual Homeostasis. For now, while we are still growing, when we do go through those trying times, let us remember, hold on to and find hope ... in the comfort and in the knowing.

Gam ze ya'avor

Believe GOD, will give you, the Desires of your Heart

The Old Testament book of Psalms, Thirty Seventh chapter, the third verse says:

“... Delight your-self also, in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your Heart ...”

Many Christians, including myself, consider these types of affirmations to be “Promises” from GOD to his children. Like many verses in the Scriptures this verse is filled with wisdom and nuance and double meaning. To get a better idea of the vibe, the spirit of this verse, we need to go back and include the previous verse.

*“Trust in the Lord, and do good;
“Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.”*

In the original Hebrew, the phrase:

“Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.”

breaks down like this:

“Dwell,” conveys the idea to abide, relax, take it easy ...

“feed,” suggests the act of grazing ... in a pasture, like sheep.

GOD and his universe want to take care of us; want to provide for us; want to give us the desires of our hearts. Like sheep, all we need to do is surrender our will to our good Shepherd. Our loving, CREATOR, FATHER, GOD wants to give us the desires of our hearts. He wants to instill them, and he wants to fulfill them. Some, upon hearing this affirmation, will challenge it based on their personal experience;

- *“It doesn’t work! I asked GOD for a new Mercedes and he didn’t give it to me ...”*

The ridiculousness of this statement is clear. Following this logic, one could also say:

- *I asked God to give me a million bucks and he didn’t!*
- *I asked God to make a woman fall in love with me, he didn’t!*
- *I asked God to make me the smartest person in the world and he didn’t!*
- *I asked God to kill this person who ran me off the road and he didn’t!*
- *I asked God to make my team win and he didn’t!*

The absurdity of such “*desires*” are obvious. However, If the verse doesn’t mean what it says, that GOD *will* give you the desires of your heart, then what does it mean? This is where the wisdom and the nuance and the double meaning comes in.

The word translated “give” in this verse comes from the Hebrew word “Nathan” (Naw-than) Nathan can also be translated “to put” or “to set”. This passage then could just as easily be translated, GOD will (put in, set in, *instill* in you) ... the desires of your heart. The implication is, that when you Trust in, Abide in, Feed on the Faithfulness of, and Delight in the LORD ... he will remove your self-centered, self-absorbed, self-ish desires and put in, set in, *instill* in you, his heart, his spirit, his desires, for your life and happiness. His desires will be your desires ... desires that will ultimately be, infinitely better than anything you could hope for, wish for and desire for your-Self.

Remember earlier when I wrote about GOD’s desire for our happiness and well-being? That knowledge is gleaned from the 29th chapter of Jeremiah, the 10th and 11th verses. The LORD is talking to the prophet about his peoples exile in Babylon. They had been overrun and carried away after numerous warnings about what would happen to them if they continued in their self-centered, self-absorbed, self-ish ways. As we know, they did, ignore *all* of GOD’s warnings, and ultimately, suffered the consequences.

The LORD lets Jeremiah know however, that he will not leave his children in exile; after a period of chastisement and humbling he will bring them back.

"This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

GOD's desire is our happiness. Our desire is our happiness. No problem, we all want the same things, right? In theory, yes; except that most of the time we think we know what is going to make us happy. Most of the time, however, *our* pursuits, *our* desires, especially if they are self-centered, self-absorbed, and self-ish, end up leaving us feeling un-satisfied, un-fulfilled and un-Happy. Is it such an unreasonable thing, to Accept that maybe surrendering our will, our plans for our lives, to GODs will and GODs plans, might bring us the Happiness that we have for so long sought after?

The idea of surrender is not limited to Religion, by the way. "Ego Death" is a popular notion that has been going around for some time now in various religious and philosophical circles. You can do a simple internet search and find out all you want to know about it. Honestly? I'm not really impressed.

Most of what I've read involves a long drawn-out process of self-examination and self-denial and self-discipline to get to the point of ego death.

Another, reportedly more immediate process, involves the use of psychedelic drugs. Ram Dass, an acclaimed American spiritual teacher, psychologist and author said this about the process.

“...psychedelic chemicals have a capacity to cut through places where you are attached and clinging, to set them aside and show you a possibility. The problem is that they don’t allow you to become the possibility, they only show you the possibility.”

Ramdass / Psychedelics ²²

I don’t advocate the long drawn-out process or the faster, more immediate path.

The kind of letting go and Ego death that I advocate, is between you, the Universe and your CREATOR. We can’t fight the immutable unchanging laws of physics and nature and we can’t fight GOD ... oh we can, but we’re not going to win.

GOD doesn’t want to *win*; he wants to persuade us to surrender to and abide in his love and salvation. I know that word “*Salvation*” sets off alarm bells within those of us who have our guards up.

Don’t listen to the bells.

The word for Salvation in ancient Hebrew is an all-encompassing word. Yeshua.

Yeshua - deliverance, victory, health, welfare, prosperity.

In a nutshell all that GOD and his Universe want for us, is to live and experience the best life we possibly can; the life that we’re meant to live. He wants it more for us than we want it for ourselves.

That brings us right back around to this concept of Ego death, and that idea scares the heck out of a lot of people. That is, if we put our Self, our Ego, *to death*, and surrender our will to GOD's, that he will force us to do something we don't want to do; go to a far-off place and become a missionary; sell everything we have, worse yet, give away everything we have and go live in poverty.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Jesus was actually way ahead of the crowd when it came to the whole "Ego death" thing. He called it dying to self. Here are some thoughts by Dr. D.W. Ekstrand an adjunct professor of Christian Studies at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, and Religious Studies in the Maricopa Community College District in Arizona, on "Dying to Self"

"Jesus described the "dying to self" process ("denying self") as part of following Him — "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Mt 16:24); He then went on to say that "dying to self" is actually a positive, not a negative: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it!" (Mt 16:25).

In dying to the self-life, we discover an "abundant life" by depending on God, who provides much more than we can imagine. Jesus put it this way: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24; Gal 5:22-23).

Part of the life we discover when we give our lives to Christ, is freedom from a life of self-obsession. As such, we experience the joy of Christ, and we become more accepting, generous, and loving of others. So, when we die to self we set aside “our wants and desires” and instead focus on loving God and valuing others as highly as we value ourselves (Mt 22:37-39). This moves us away from “self-centeredness” and more open to being a follower of Christ who cares deeply for others.

*The essence of a being’s “existence” has to do with the fact that he is a “living reality” — if one no longer has life or the functions of vitality, they are said to “no longer exist.” So, the essence of “death” is the absence of “life”.— therefore when one dies “one ceases to exist.” To carry the argument into the spiritual realm, when someone “spiritually dies to self,” self, ceases to exist – that is, **SELF IS NO LONGER THE REASON FOR ONE’S EXISTENCE.***

As such, the individual is no longer concerned with “his own will or happiness,” because he is no longer in the picture... he is no longer the center of his own little universe... he no longer continues to arrange the world around himself. The individual who “dies to self” understands that God created him for a reason; that he is a part of God’s plan for the world. To be used of God one must understand the “essence of who he now really is,” and how it is that God can use him. Every genuine child of God wants to be used by God to accomplish His purposes in the world.

Jesus said, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (Jn 15:8). That is the essence of God’s plan – we are saved to bear fruit; created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph 2:10). We bear fruit when Christ lives His life in and through us (Jn 15:5; Gal 2:20). The apostle Paul said, “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). The Lord wants us to live a godly and spiritually productive happy life.
the transformed soul / dying to self²³

Now, there *may* be a time when GOD leads you to get out of your comfort zone and do something that you wouldn’t normally do ... something noble, self-sacrificing and giving. Like maybe reaching out (in love) to someone in your sphere of influence about an issue where they may be missing the mark. Granted, this might be a little uncomfortable, but it is a far cry from being forced to submit to a life of hardship and want.

GODs leading, when embraced, always ends in evolution and personal growth. The kind of growth and evolution that moves us towards our greater destiny, our higher calling. He knows our calling; he determined our destiny. GOD planted in our DNA the seeds of our unique strengths, abilities, talents, personalities, and desires. He designed the framework for each one of us to grow into the men and women we were, and are meant, to be.

God doesn’t want to take our desires away; he wants to develop them and use them in a way that pleases both him and us. He wants to bring optimum joy and fulfillment to our lives.

If it *is* your heart, your calling, to sell or give away everything you have, to travel to a far-off land to be a missionary or help the sick, poor, and hungry ... do it! Follow your dream. ***If*** it is in your heart, ***if*** it is your passion. Don't do it if you view it as a sacrifice, a burden to be borne, to be laid at the LORD's feet in recognition of your piety. There are plenty of people who have the strengths, abilities, talents, personalities and yes desires... to serve and excel in that capacity. Likewise, ***if*** it is in your heart, ***if*** it is your passion to be the best firefighter, police officer, dentist or doctor, lab tech or lawyer, carpenter, plumber, heart surgeon or home maker... whatever you want to do, whoever you want to be, if you have the strengths, abilities, talents, personalities and yes desires... to serve and excel in those capacities then do so! With GODs blessing.

Trust him, abide in him, feed on his faithfulness

*“...delight yourself also in him,
and he will give you the desires of your heart...”*

“...Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

This concludes Part II of the ABCs to a Happy Life. “*Belief*”.

Belief is not “blindly following “some “*thing*,” or some “*one*,” or some “*truth*.”

The Belief that we are endorsing here is a creed, a system that one arrives at after cognitive, careful, consideration and investigation.

As you grab hold of and embrace these Beliefs, they will become a solid foundation to guide you in your quest for a Happy Life.

Acceptance gave us a jumping off point, we made the leap and now we see that it was a good decision.

Finishing Part II is basically the completion of the preparation for what comes next. It's like making the decision to start working out and getting in shape. You buy some workout clothes, you buy some new shoes, you buy a gym bag, you load it all up with supplies ... you're ready to go! Now ... you gotta go! You gotta take that step, gotta start doing the work! That's what comes next ... the work.

Before you get started on the work, you might want to take a little time and conduct a little exercise like we did in Part I.

“...if you want to take a rest and just bask in the warmth and peace and the anticipation that comes with creating, crafting, and solidifying your new Belief System, that's ok. Take your time, take a rest, smell the roses. When you're rested and ready, take the next leap into the next chapter, the next leg of your Journey to a Happy Life ... Connection!

“...my goal is that you may be encouraged in heart, united in love, so that you may have the full riches of complete understanding ...”

Section 3

Connect

Introduction to Connection

The final principle, the final letter, the Last Word in the ABC's to a Happy Life is the letter C, the word Connect. Connection is the key that brings the ABC's full circle. The key that turns them on, that energizes them, that gives them life.

In its most basic form the word means simply, to join one thing to another ... Connecting an appliance cord or plug to an electrical outlet. Connecting two pieces of pipe or tubing to each other. Pretty straightforward, right? We don't give much thought to plugging a lamp in or gluing or screwing two pieces of pipe together. The RESULTS of these "simple" ACTIONS are actually quite amazing.

- The Connection of plug to outlet facilitates the flow of harnessed electricity from point A to point B; from a power generating source to our living room lamp ... giving us light to read by.
- The Connection of one pipe to another, facilitates the flow of liquid or gas from beneath the ground to your kitchen sink, your cook-top, your home heating system. These results of things joined, things bonded, things Connected are everyday miracles that we too casually take for granted.

It is not an exaggeration to say, Connections are the foundation of and underpin and uphold our modern way of life. Our ancient ancestors, on foot, blazed trails and wore paths that Connected one village to another. In early wooden ships, they crossed oceans. They created sea routes that Connected one continent to another. In rocket ships they pierced the veil of our atmosphere and established stations in space that Connect man to the Stars.

In the beginning, in the Garden, GOD declared “It is not good for man to be alone...” and created Eve to Connect with Adam. We were created to Connect.

The most basic dictionary definition of Connect is:

“to join or fasten together ...”

In the scriptures “Connect” does not really appear much. When it does, it is associated with the idea of fastening. The word “Join” however does appear and is more associated with the idea of being united, bonded together with someone or something for an exchange or a mutually edifying purpose.

The Greek word is κολλάω or kollaó, originating from the word kolla, which literally means “to glue”. More broadly the word means:

“kolláō (from koala, "glue") – to bond (cleave), adhere to (literally, "glued together"); to cleave, join to; (figuratively) intimately Connected in a soul-knit friendship.”

This principle was illustrated powerfully, in the New Testament scriptures in the context of intimate human and spiritual relationships. I'm going to give a couple of examples to make the point.

Let's start in the book of Matthew, the nineteenth chapter, the third verse.

“The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him,

“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?”

“And He answered and said,

“Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Again, in 1 Corinthians Chapter 6, verse 16, Paul expounds on just how deep and powerful our “Connections” can be.

“... he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”

Connection is not always this intimate or intense. We can also Connect in some way, shape or form with anyone who comes into our sphere of influence. Connection in this sense means:

“to have or establish a rapport” a friendly, harmonious relationship especially a relationship characterized by agreement, mutual understanding, empathy or respect, that makes Communication possible or easy”

Finally, it is also possible to Connect with our past or present situations. Something that reminds us of a special time or a special place maybe.

Better yet we can simply connect with the moment. The wonder of creation and the beauty of life that is all around us; even the fauna and flora. Returning to the book of Matthew, the 6th chapter, Jesus tells us:

*“... look at the Birds of the air ...
... consider the Lilies of the Field...”*

The word “Consider” here means:

*“To learn; to grasp something conclusively
by considering it carefully ...”*

How often do we pass by a beautiful bed of flowers and never even give them a glance or a second thought? How often do we stop to consider the magnificence of GOD’s CREATION.

How often do we take the time to consider and appreciate man's creations?

I routinely drive along a tree lined parkway almost every day, on my typical travels about town. I Consider, I Connect, with the fact that someone planned and designed the parkway. A work crew laid the asphalt; a landscape construction crew planted the trees. City maintenance workers ensure that they are all kept watered, kept healthy and properly pruned.

Every time I drive that parkway, at some point, I connect with the beauty of man and nature working together to produce such pleasing Results. I Consider the fact that in the not-too-distant past, all of this was just foothills and tumbleweeds. I wonder about the early miners that walked these same hills before there even *were* automobiles, much less tree lined parkways.

Considering, Connecting ... so many ways, so many opportunities to Connect with anything and everything around us. *Nothing is ordinary!*

Now that we have learned about Acceptance, now that we have learned about Believing, we have in essence, laid the foundation, built out the structure for our Happy Life.

It's time to do the finish work.

All of the wire has been pulled, all the rough piping and ductwork are in. Drywall, doors, windows ... all installed.

However, without the light switches and plugs, without the cabinets the carpet, the plumbing fixtures and faucet trim, without the AC Unit and air registers, without the finish work complete, all you have is a fancy shed. We need to finish out our house to make it habitable, livable and lovable. We need a “*finished*” product.

Connection *is*, the “*finish work*” of Acceptance and Belief. So, here are the “C’s” that I want to finish off our Journey to Happiness with. As with our Beliefs, these “Connections” will change your life, transform you and give you the tools you need to attain A Happy Life!

1. Connect Here and Now
2. Connect with your CREATOR
3. Connect with your Self
4. Connect with your Agapaō
5. Connect with your Friends and Family
6. Connect with Acquaintances, Enemies et al.
7. Connect with Eternity

Now on to the first chapter, of the last section of,
the ABCs to a Happy Life!

Connect Here and Now

Welcome to all about Connecting. This is where our journey really starts to get practical. Time to put what we've learned into ACTION. Committing, from this moment on, to always being in and Connecting with the Here and Now, this present moment. Life is lived in the Now. We see this principle, even in the Hebrew name of GOD. When GOD commands Moses to go to Pharaoh the leader of Egypt in the well-known Bible story, and tell him to:

“Let my People Go.”

Moses asks him,

“Who shall I say sent me?”

GOD answers profoundly,

“Tell him, I AM that I AM sent you.”

“I AM” ... Always in the moment, always Connected.

I've been guilty for many years of being dis-Connected; being in SITUATIONS and not being fully present.

This state of being is so prevalent in today's high tech, high speed, high stress society that we've come up with many pop-culture terms for it; dis-Connected, out of it, disengaged, checked out, on coast, buffering, lights are on but no one's home...

The fact that we live such a high tech, high speed, high stress lifestyle, is exactly what leads us to being dis-Connected. There are so many demands on our attention that sometimes we just want to shift into neutral, kick-back and coast. We don't realize the harm we are doing to those that have to be around us when we are physically present but mentally absent.

I can't get back all the time that I spent dis-connected ... time spent with my family, going places and doing things, enjoying myself sure, but not enjoying myself as deeply and fully as I could have. I spent so much time thinking about what was going on at work, or how I was going to handle a financial challenge, or sometimes just dwelling in numbness and spacing out because I was so mentally spent. I was there, but I could have been so much more there. I'm not going to go into all of the things that I did not do or should have done. We've already covered that territory and we know that it doesn't really serve us to dwell in what was ...

GOD is "I AM"!

I was made in the Image of GOD so,
in a manner, in His image,

"WE ARE!"

So, let's get right into all of the benefits that are available to us when we live a life that is consciously, continuously, completely, Connected!

The first and most tangible benefit of Connecting Here and Now is that you will immediately begin to experience life on a deeper level. You will look for the Gold in any given moment. Let me explain.

In any given moment, there are literally thousands of things going on in the same place, at the same time. Right now, in this moment, I'm typing on the keyboard of my Apple MacBook Air. If I pause from my typing, take my mouse in hand and click on the "Finder" (the happy little square blue and white smiley face in my menu bar) navigate to the "Application" folder and then to the "Utilities" folder and then to the "Activity Monitor" application ... I will find that there are thousands of things going on right now, right under my nose, right under my fingertips; literally right under my MacBook keys. Activity Monitor shows you all the "*processes*" that are running in the background on your computer.

I just got up and went into the refrigerator and got myself a small bowl of grapes and cherries. I popped a grape in my mouth and started eating while I'm typing. All of a sudden, I feel a reaction on the back of my tongue and in my throat. (I sometimes have a slight allergic reaction to fruit) I take a drink of water with ice that also has a bit of a carbonated water drink mixed with it. The room is on the cold side; about 65 degrees or so. There is a hum of machinery operating not far away.

There's a lot going on; and I just scratched the surface of *this* moment. The question is where is the Gold? What is going on in and around and through me that I really want to extract the most from? In this moment it is my writing. I want to stay focused and fully Connected to the words I'm writing and the story I am crafting.

Obviously, I don't want to stop and focus in on what's going on beneath my keyboard ... though if I were troubleshooting a performance issue I might. I probably shouldn't be eating while I'm working ... I can't give complete focus and fully Connect to two things at once. So, I'm going to stop writing for a moment and eat a grape. Yes, I know I said I had a slight allergic reaction a few minutes ago. However, the grape tasted so good I'm willing to take the risk. Such a simple act ... eating the grape ...

The grape is eaten and I'm back now to share the experience. There are 6 cherries, 5 large green grapes, and 4 smaller red grapes left in my little plastic bowl. I've already eaten 5 grapes and 6 cherries. I don't know if the grapes I ate previously were red or green because I wasn't really paying attention and I wasn't fully Connected to my consumption of grapes. I have the 5 empty stems, but I still can't tell whether they were red or green without performing a much closer forensic inspection. Keep in mind as I'm writing that my eating of the grape happened five minutes ago. I am relating it to you as best as I can remember, in the present tense, the "I AM" tense. Upon closer inspection of the stems, I see that all the grapes I've eaten so far have been green. I pick up a single green grape and feel compelled to study it.

It is still attached to about an inch-long stem, which I have learned is called the Pedicel. I hold the grape before my eyes between my thumb and forefinger ... I turn the grape around and examine every millimeter of its surface. I pull it away from its stem (Pedicel, if you insist) and ponder the fact that this grape has been attached to that Pedicel for a very long time, relative to its short life. and just like that I tear it away.

I think about how the existence of that grape started, probably, about 4 to 5 months ago ... from a small little bud. It could have been much longer than that, years even, if the potential and the building blocks for that grape has always existed in the vine... I wonder to myself, “Where has it come from?” What part of the world? ... definitely somewhere with the proper climate ... probably Northern California. What is the scenery like, how many grapes are in its cluster? Day after day getting watered, basking in the sun, growing, and maturing a little more every day. Then one day, either a man or a machine or both, come down it’s row and *cut it off!* ... and all its grape cluster along with it, from its vine, along with thousands of other grape clusters from the same vineyard. They are all carried together, piled on top of one another and transported to the sheds. From there they are processed and packed and shipped to market.

What a fascinating life these grapes, this one solitary grape is living! I put the grape in my mouth and bite it in half. I completely savor the sweet tangy juice that flows from its meat. I chew it thoroughly and extract the maximum amount of enjoyment from it. I do the same with the other half. It is eaten.

The Pedicel is lying in the bowl, for the first time in its existence separated from that which it gave life. No telling where the Pedicel will end up ... first in my trash receptacle, then into the larger trash bin, that a large truck will come and empty and haul away to a landfill where it will decompose and return to the earth, from whence it came.

The grape itself is inside me, now part of me. My body will extract nourishment from it. Some of it will become what we call waste and will end up in a sewer system, and possibly a waste treatment plant where it will probably become part of a fertilizer pile and it too will return to the earth. Whatever part of it that remains with me, in some capacity, will also eventually return to the earth, as my body will sometime surely decay along with whatever temporary container they put it in, when they lay me in the ground. Ashes to ashes dust to dust ...

That's the way to eat a grape!

There's nothing wrong with eating while you're reading, writing or watching TV but occasionally, at least once a day, Connect with your meal and thoroughly enjoy what you eat. I enjoy watching the restaurant shows or movies where the Food Critic comes in to sample the fare and do a review. I know you've noticed too. The Critic sits down alone at a table and his or her total focus in that moment is the food; Fully engaged and completely Connected in the present moment. This is the way we should live our lives; whatever task we are engaged in, whatever we are "doing" we should always be looking for the Gold.

Even if it's only for a few minutes, extract the most that you possibly can in the moment. We lead busy lives but we should always be checking our awareness. Make sure we're not just rushing through life and missing out on the nuggets of Gold that lie out in the open, along all of our pathways.

I'm at a place in my life where I'm not really a fan of multitasking anymore. I used to be proud of how many tasks I could juggle at once until I realized I wasn't doing any one of those tasks' true justice. Of course, we all must multitask at times, but I encourage you to make that more the exception than the rule. Better to prioritize and deal with a singular task, fully engaged until you move on to the next.

I mentioned earlier that my wife and I are the loving caretakers of a little female Yorkshire Terrier. Tinkerbelle. I get the privilege of taking Tinker out on a short walk, usually once but sometimes, twice a day. She gets a little exercise; I get a little exercise and she gets to relieve herself in the great outdoors. (which she much prefers to the piddle pads we lay down for her in the bathroom.)

The little walks we go on are very scenic with lots of trees and beautiful blue skies and white billowy clouds most of the year. I thought of myself as meeting two needs with one deed; Tinkers need to walk and relieve herself outside and my need to squeeze a little exercise into my day while taking in all the beautiful scenery. More often than not however, my exercise would get interrupted by Tinkers little stops and plops and side excursions to sniff out an interesting scent or explore a particular patch of grass.

It was actually getting to the point where I really wasn't enjoying the walk that much and I wasn't getting that much exercise with all of the stopping. If I hurried the pace to try to keep my flow going Tinkerbelle was deprived of her time to explore and spend a little time outside. I thought about my commitment to being fully Connected to the moment and decided I would no longer multitask while I was walking our little Princess. Now, when it's time for her walk, it is all about her. Her time. If she wants to trot, then she can trot. If she wants to stop and smell the roses that's ok too. These are her walks and "I AM" fully engaged for her. Now, exercise is exercise (without Tinker) and dog walking is dog walking and both pursuits are much more beneficial and enjoyable.

The other, secondary benefit of Connecting Here and Now, is it takes your focus off the past. Leaving the past behind has been a constant theme weaving its way through these pages. Dwelling in or Connecting with the past rarely yields positive fruit. As I wrote earlier, it's ok to go back, to brief periods in time, to listen to good music or watch quality television shows or movies from the past if they evoke nice feelings and EMOTIONS. The key is not to spend *too much* time Connecting with the past. The longer you dwell there the more likely you are to start hanging around there, slipping into regret, and remorse, for things you did that you shouldn't have or things you didn't do that you should have.

Generally speaking, we should focus on nice feelings and EMOTIONS, but I also have to say, Shakespeare, the great writer of Tragedy, was famous for a reason. Tragedy does play a role in our lives, in our development, in our Evolution.

It triggers our compassion, teaches us lessons, and persuades us to become better people and live better lives if we're open to learn. The story of Romeo and Juliet was so tragic, but everyone who has ever read it or seen the play or movie comes away with a sense that we need to be better people, we need to be more loving people to try to create a world where two people who are in love are allowed to love and not be destroyed by the hate and the pettiness of those who are supposed to love and support us.

More recently, the third remake of the movie, "*A Star is Born*" starring Bradley Cooper and Stephanie Germanotta (Lady Gaga) connects with us on a deep level. The compassion we feel for both characters and their tragic SITUATION during their time together, gives us an increased awareness of the struggles that people with mental health issues go through. Tragic conclusion, but a great movie. "*Schindler's List*" is another great movie about a tragic SITUATION in history; hard to watch but great lessons to learn. Learn what you need to from the past, learn what you need to from tragedy and then get back to now.

I really think it's our Creator's purpose, and in our best interests that we remember highlights, even memorialize great people and great SITUATIONS. It's good to remember good times and GOD's good favor, but you will notice that no one remembers *everything* about the past. I sometimes say,

"If GOD wanted us to remember everything, he would have given us photographic memories."

My wife will ask me at times if I remember a certain event or occasion or SITUATION from the past. More often than not, I will answer “Kind of...” or “Yeah vaguely...” Photographs are great for helping jog our memories about people and places, but even photo collecting has been waaaaay overdone. I know people who have thousands upon thousands of pictures and videos that they rarely look at. I think we’re all guilty of that to a certain extent. I myself have a collection of probably five hundred plus DVD movies and I rarely open the drawer of the huge, cherrywood, three drawer chest that houses them, to pick one out and watch ... and there are some great movies in those drawers!

Take a little pause right now to think about and Meditate on some seemingly insignificant *thing* that is part of your HERE and NOW, present moment. For instance, I can look at the program on my computer, (e.g. Microsoft Word) in the moment. I can think about its backstory; the reality that someone designed it. Many people collaborated on it, I’m sure. When it was finished, others were tasked with Marketing it. People downloaded it. They experimented with its features. Some of them even provided feedback as to how to make it better.

Who *were* these people? What were they thinking when they were working on the program? What was going on in their lives every day, as they logged on to their computers to program? What was going on in the lives of the people that were using the program? Some have written novels, great adventures, or love stories on this very program. Some have written Resumés, typing and editing in hopes of landing that great job.

Some have written letters of resignation; some have written suicide notes. It is uncanny to Meditate on how this software creation has interacted with, and crossed the paths of so many different people. We are all tied to it and Connected to it and each other in some way.

See what I mean? Connection to the HERE and NOW can take you in some crazy directions! Following down those crazy paths, those rabbit holes, can give you a whole new perspective and appreciation of our sometimes, *seemingly* boring existence. Nothing ... *Nothing*, is boring when you take the time to look for the Gold.

Wander off the path, look under the rock, find the Gold!

The past has purpose but keep it in perspective.

Connection to the HERE and NOW is where it's at!

Connect with your CREATOR

The absolute most important connection we will ever make, the most amazing relationship that we will ever experience, whether we are aware of it or not, whether we are conscious of it or not, is our connection, our relationship with our CREATOR.

Every person, every animal, every plant, every tree, every flower, every weed was created. *We* were created, *We* have a CREATOR ... and by definition, by implication, our CREATOR is sovereign over his CREATION. There is only one SUPREME CREATOR, one Giver of Life.

My wife and I participated with our CREATOR, in bringing our two children into existence. I gave my seed to my wife's' egg, but it was beyond our ability to create the spark of life that would result in the formation and gestation and creation of a fully formed human being that would grow and evolve into a fully autonomous, independent life. It is mind boggling and awe inspiring. I could give seed; she could give egg and womb ... but the CREATOR alone gives life. However far you want to go back in the creation of the Universe, the Multiverse, Time, Existence ... Somewhere at some point some entity created life ...

That life created more life, which created more life, which created more life. We will never comprehend or begin to grasp or *remotely* understand the origins of existence. I use “*existence*” as an all-encompassing term because we used to use the word “universe” to convey that thought. There is *now* talk, *now* discussion, about the very real possibility of multiverses, different dimensions, other planes of existence. We don’t have a clue. We are only scratching the surface.

What we do comprehend, what any rational person comprehends, is that, here on our own little microscopic speck of our known universe, there is a story ... Many stories in a multitude of cultures, which are very similar in many respects, about a GOD, who created this speck, and populated it with, currently, about eight billion even tinier specks. Within each one of us eight billion tiny specks, are whole other micro-universes.

The story that I Believe and trust, is that this GOD, who created all existence, stepped out of infinity, put on human flesh, assumed human nature, and became one of us.

The story is summarized eloquently in the first chapter of the Gospel of John.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might Believe. He was not that Light but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who Believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This is He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.' And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

Our CREATOR wants to have fellowship with us. He wants to walk with us in the cool of the day as he did with Adam. He wants to “bless” us.

As we learned earlier, another translation of the word blessed is “Happy”! GOD wants us to be HAPPY. He wants us to live with him eternally in his Kingdom.

He has plans for each one of us to give us hope and a future.

He doesn't want us to worry, he doesn't want us to be in strife.

The Apostle Paul, writes in a letter to the early church at Philippi:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—Meditate on these things ...”

Who would not want to experience a relationship like that with the GOD of all Creation? Most people don't experience this relationship, because they either don't understand what it is or they don't believe it's possible. There's so much that I could share right here, right now about the Love of GOD and how he longs to have relationship with each one of us. That however is another book for another time; in fact, a whole library of books. For now, I just want to give you a glimpse, of the life that is available to you, the experience that awaits you, the Love, Peace and Joy that grows in you, when you to Connect with your CREATOR.

There are there are essentially three levels and three dimensions of Connection with our CREATOR.

- Connection with GOD the Father
- Connection with GOD the Son
- Connection with GOD the Holy Spirit.

If you Believe in and Connect with a different Deity, Allah or Shiva or Buddha for instance, the three-dimension aspect of Connection may not apply ...the same for Judaism which recognizes and Connects only with YHWH, or YAHWEH.

I will first explain the three-dimensional aspect of *Christianity*, which I adhere to, and then move on to the three-level aspect of *Connection*, that all adherents of any belief system should be able to relate to apply to their life.

Most Christians Believe that GOD our CREATOR, encounters his CREATION in three distinct ways.

We believe that in Essence GOD is ONE ... but in Connection with his Creation, his Manifestation is three-fold.

- 1) As GOD the FATHER
- 2) As GOD the WORD
- 3) As GOD the SPIRIT

We encounter GOD the FATHER, as loving us, providing for our needs, guiding, and directing our growth, protecting us from harm, among other Fatherly attributes. Father is usually who we are thinking of when we use the all-encompassing name of ... GOD.

We encounter GOD the WORD, most often by his Incarnation name of Yeshua or Jesus. This is the Manifestation of GOD that is easier for us to grasp and relate to. He became one of us; he walked through this world in the same kind of earthly body that we do. He hungered like us, he thirsted like us, he was tempted like us, and he felt physical pain like us.

He likely endured as much physical pain as any man ever has. He was beaten and scourged by Roman soldiers within an inch of his life; beaten so badly that the scriptures tell us:

“... his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness ...”

What is so amazing about his ordeal is, he endured it so that he might Connect and have relationship with us.

We encounter GOD the SPIRIT, through his *infilling* of us, and constant *presence* with us. Although this chapter is about us Connecting with GOD; the truth is GOD wants to Connect with us! He *initiated* the Connection; he chose us, and he drew us to himself by and through the third person of his manifestation; his HOLY SPIRIT.

Prior to the earthly Incarnation of GOD, (the WORD made Flesh) his Spirit could only temporarily “come upon” mortal men to inspire and empower.

Through some kind of miracle, after Jesus death and resurrection, his SPIRIT was able to be with and in us all; at the same time.

Jesus explained it like this:

- “... I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”
- “... I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”
- “... the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”
- “... when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.”

- “... now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you”
- “...when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.”

FATHER, WORD, SPIRIT ...

Three *dimensions* of Divine character and manifestation

Now let’s examine the Three different *levels* in which we *Connect* with our CREATOR.

- 1) Communication
- 2) Meditation
- 3) Adoration and Exaltation.

The First level is:

1) Communication.

Communication with GOD is simply praying or talking. This level of Connection can take many forms. Generally, when Christians are *asking* something of GOD, making our requests known to him, we are mindful of the Father.

It is the Father who cares for and takes care of his children. These requests can be as routine and low key in nature as say, asking for some help with one of life's everyday challenges or they can be serious and urgent.

The key to conscious, compelling, Connection in Communication is to never take our privilege for granted. We have the ear of the CREATOR of all things. We must develop the habit of preparing our hearts and minds, for Communication with GOD.

If we were going to appear before, say, a loan officer to get a home or auto loan approved, or an HR team for a job we really wanted, I *guarantee* we would be well prepared, well dressed, and well-rehearsed. We would be mindful and respectful of the position, power and authority those decision makers hold and wield.

How much *more* should we be mindful and respectful and in *awe* of our Father GOD and the position and power and authority that "*he*" holds and wields?

Jesus taught us, when we open up Communication to Connect with our Father GOD, before we start asking, before we start petitioning, we should begin with this humble attitude;

“Our Father who art in Heaven,

Hallowed be,

Hallowed **be**,

Hallowed be ... thy NAME.

This is not a picture of slave bowing before master, rather it is grateful, humble child giving honor to gracious, loving Father. In the same way that earthly parents desire that their children come to them and talk to them and tell them when they need something or are going through a tough time, so our Father wants us to come to him. He wants to be our all in all. It is his good pleasure to give us the kingdom. It is his good pleasure to give us the desires of our hearts, give us access to him, to come humbly and at the same time, boldly, before his throne of Grace ...

The access that we have with our Father is because of the work that was done and finished at Calvary by his WORD, his only begotten, Jesus the Christ. When we Communicate with GOD on a friend or confidant level we are usually thinking about Jesus. As explained above, He became one of us, he became like us.

During Jesus life among us, he never sought to bring glory and honor to himself. Of course, there were times when he just went with the flow and allowed people to give him that which he was certainly worthy of; Glory and Honor and Power. One example is when he allowed Mary to anoint his feet with oil in an act of humility and worship.

For the most part, though, he always pointed *to* and gave glory *to* his Father ...our Father. In making himself to be like one of us he became like our brother, and in that capacity, by remaining true and faithful to his Father, and living a life victorious over temptation he was also able to become our High Priest. Jesus walked among us for 33 years.

For the first 30 years of his life, though it is not specifically written of or detailed, I think we can safely assume that he dealt with family issues. He had an earthly father and mother, he grew up in a household with brothers and sisters, close friends, acquaintances. He can certainly relate to us when we come to him as a friend seeking someone to listen to us without judging us.

He validates our EMOTIONS, and our struggles. He wants us to be open and honest and transparent with him. In the last three years of his life, he developed relationships with a group of followers who he spent every waking hour with. He walked with them and talked with them and broke bread with them. He wants to do the same with us.

I've lived a long life up to this moment. So far, I have had only three really good friends that I felt I could trust with my transparency. Of those three, only one that I could really, really trust. Even that friend, I wouldn't trust with total transparency;

all of my THOUGHTS ... all of my doubts, all of my fears, all of my insecurities, all of my sins, all of my shortcomings ... all of my shame.

I think the closest we get in this life to having that kind of relationship is with our wife or husband. It is no coincidence that the Church is referred to as the "Bride" of Christ. Our brother, our bridegroom, our friend ... I've talked to Jesus about things I have never told anyone; why not? He *knows* my heart and my mind anyway. Indeed, *what a friend...* we have in Jesus.

He said,

*“Greater love hath no man ...
than he lay down his life for a friend.”*

Jesus loved us to the point that he laid down his life for us. He promised to send us a comforter after he was gone ... which brings us to the Holy Spirit; perhaps the most abstract of the person and manifestation of GOD.

For some, the SPIRIT of GOD is hardest to relate to and thereby the *seemingly* hardest to Communicate with. I say seemingly because in truth he is really the easiest to Communicate with because he dwells *in* us. At the creation of the earth, the second verse of Genesis says

“... the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”

Again, in the first chapter of Luke;

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”

And again, in the first chapter of the book of Acts;

“ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you ...”

And from the 2nd chapter of the same book;

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

So, we see in various places, the Spirit of GOD described as a force, a mover, a presence; compared to wind and water and fire; a comforter, a teacher, a helper.

The way we Communicate with GODs Spirit is internal ... an inward Communication; by and through inward experience. We experience his comfort; we experience his teaching and inspiration; we experience his guidance and his ever-present help in time of need.

During these encounters, these times of Communication with GODs Spirit, the best way to optimize our experience, is to raise our *awareness* and *realize* that we are sealed with, filled with, and immersed in the presence, of the SPIRIT of GOD. It is amazingly awesome when you think about it; and that is exactly what we need to do;

...think about it; think on it; Meditate upon it.

The *Second level* of Connection with GOD is:

2) Meditation

We need to Meditate on GOD. I'm sure there are some Christians right now thinking or saying,

“Wait a minute now, that Meditation stuff is evil.”

Nothing could be further from the truth.

There are so many instances in the Hebrew scriptures encouraging Meditation.

“I Meditate on your precepts ...”

“I Meditate on your promises ...”

“I Meditate on your decrees ...”

“I Meditate on your Law ...”

“I Meditate on your statutes ...”

“I Meditate on all of your works...”

“I Meditate on your wonderful works ...”

“I Meditate on all your mighty deeds ...”

“I Meditate on your unfailing love...”

“I Meditate on your Goodness ...”

The above are all taken from portions of Scripture. Meditation is not something we need to be wary or fearful of, rather we should seek to thoughtfully consider, fully understand and whole heartedly embrace it.

The dictionary definition of “Meditate” is generally

“to think deeply or focus one's mind for a period of time, in silence or with the aid of chanting, for religious or spiritual purposes ... to think deeply or carefully about (something).”

This secular definition combines elements of the Ancient Hebrew definition as well. The two Hebrew words translated most often as “*Meditate*” are “Siach & Hagah, which mean accordingly: consider, muse, sigh, sing, speak, talk, growl, utter ... it can even mean to complain or moan. In any case, the meaning seems to convey a sense of deep contemplation. It could be in silence. It could be facilitated with singing, speaking, uttering or (gasp!) chanting!

I make the point because so many Christians today are so horrified by the thought of Meditating, let alone chanting. It seems however that this practice is very similar to the Meditation that was being practiced in the time of the Psalmist, David. I think I can safely say that whether silent or singing, musing, or moaning, the goal of Meditation is to get us centered in and focused on GOD. Father, Son or Holy Spirit. Rarely am I entering into Meditation with my Creator because I want something. As I explained before, my requests, I make known to GOD on the Communication level. In my Meditation experience I am seeking Communion. There's really nothing secret or magic or complicated about it. It's simply a matter of getting alone with GOD, minimizing distractions, focusing, getting still, and getting intimate with your CREATOR and experiencing and knowing his GOD-ness.

If you've never experienced this intimate time with GOD and are wondering how to get started or how to begin a Meditation session with GOD, you can start simply with the list above.

Meditate on his precepts, decrees, laws and statutes ...

Though expressed in different words these four are basically the same. For instance, one of GODs commandments (precepts, decrees, laws, or statutes) is,

“Thou shalt not commit Adultery”

On its surface some people might think,

“What's the problem? If two people want to have sex with each other they should be able to. Hey if our partners aren't fulfilling our needs, we should be able to do what we please. The Bible is so outdated.”

Upon deeper reflection, upon giving this precept careful thought and consideration, something begins to happen. We ask GOD to give us understanding ... we begin to comprehend how deep GOD's love is and how much he cares for us and what this precept is really all about.

The consequences of adultery are so hurtful and so destructive that to violate this precept for our own selfish desires almost always ends in disaster; families are broken up; children's lives are severely disrupted.

Men and women alike are sometimes murdered by those they have betrayed ... I know this firsthand. My father was murdered by his wife for committing adultery. The 6th chapter of Proverbs has this to say about the consequences of Adultery:

“My son, keep your father’s command, and do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart; Tie them around your neck. When you roam, they will lead you; When you sleep, they will keep you; when you awake, they will speak with you. For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life, to keep you from the evil woman, From the flattering tongue of a seductress. Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids. For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread; An adulteress will prey upon his precious life. Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? So, is he who goes into his neighbor’s wife; Whoever touches her shall not be innocent. People do not despise a thief If he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving. Yet when he is found, he must restore sevenfold; He may have to give up all the substance of his house. Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; He who does so destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonor, he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away. Jealousy is a husband’s fury. He will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will Accept no recompense...”

This admonition happens to be from a father to a son, but it could just as easily be given from a father or a mother to a daughter regarding a male adulterer.

The takeaway here is that the intent of GODs heart in giving this commandment is to protect his children and keep them from harm; to lead them in a way, that life may go well for them. Rather than a tyrant trying to control us, Meditation on this precept gives us insight into the loving heart of a caring Father. The same applies to the rest of the list above.

“I Meditate on your precepts ...”

“I Meditate on your promises ...”

“I Meditate on your decrees ...”

“I Meditate on your Law ...”

“I Meditate on your statutes ...”

“I Meditate on all of your works...”

“I Meditate on your wonderful works ...”

“I Meditate on all your mighty deeds ...”

“I Meditate on your unfailing love...”

“I Meditate on your Goodness ...”

Connection with and Meditation on GOD always leads to Communion with GOD. Communion with GOD, with our CREATOR should be the desire of every human on the planet. There is nothing like being in the presence and at one with the one who formed all of us inside our mothers’ wombs. Even more amazing is the fact that our CREATOR *wants* us in his presence; he *wants* to be intimate with those he has given life to.

The *Third level* of Connection with GOD is:

3) Adoration and Exaltation

The *Third level* of Connection with GOD is almost exclusively and completely, Communion with GOD. That level is Adoration and Exaltation. I have learned that nothing brings Communion with GOD like Adoration and Exaltation, Worship and Praise. The bible says that GOD inhabits or sits in or dwells in the praises of his people. I have seen some commentaries that question whether this is the literal meaning of the verse. The overwhelming majority of translators agree that that is *exactly* what it means. I agree with this conclusion because of the picture that we get of the throne room of Heaven, in the Revelation of Jesus to the Apostle John:

“After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.

In front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night, they never stop saying:

*“Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.”*

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

*“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being.”*

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”

But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and it's seven seals."

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God, persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they said

*“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth
and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”*

*Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and
under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:*

*“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!”*

*The four living creatures said,
“Amen!”
and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

I realize this was a long excerpt to read; the entire chapters four and five of the book of Revelation. I’m sure if you have never read that portion of scripture, that it was absolutely fascinating. I have read it many times and it is still fascinating to me. John, (actually Jesus) allows us to look into heaven, to the throne room of GOD where he sits in the midst of his Sevenfold Spirit, with the four living creatures and twenty-four elders. The scene inspires Adoration, Exaltation, Worship and Praise.

There is nothing else I have experienced in all of my life that compares with being fully engaged, fully Connected, fully immersed in the Worship of GOD. The form that it takes, the musical genre doesn’t really matter.

As long as the motives are pure, and the heart is worship.

I want to make a distinction here between,

Entertainment and Worship

When I first became a Christian, in the midst of the Jesus Movement in 1972, Calvary Chapel and Maranatha Music were just getting started. Our worship was in the form of simple melodies and lyrics like, “*Father I Adore you*” “*Seek Ye First*” and “*Thy Loving Kindness.*” The music was simple, but the worship was powerful.

At the same time, came the rise of Contemporary Christian Music. (CCM) “*Christian Entertainment.*” There were many Christian Artists that I would listen to back then. Love Song, The Way, Randy Stonehill, Barry McGuire, The Second Chapter of Acts ... One well known early CCM Artist, Larry Norman would write and sing,

“Why should the Devil have all the Good Music “?”

I would be driving around in my car and pop out my Doobie Brothers cassette, and pop in Darrell Mansfield or Daniel Amos. Some of the music that these Entertainment type bands would perform would often crossover into worship. The Second Chapter of Acts comes immediately to mind. So, while much of CCM would move me and evoke powerful EMOTIONS in me, it still was not the same as the presence of GOD during worship.

Recently I *re-discovered* the ability of Adoration, Exaltation, Worship and Praise to usher in Communion with GOD. My wife was telling me she had heard a part of a song on one of the streaming services that was singing about GOD's blessing on your children, and their children, and their children ... and that the part she heard was really good.

A few days later we were both going out the door on some errand. I wrote earlier about our little Yorkie Terrier. When we leave, and can't take her with us, we give Tinkerbelle a snack, and play Worship music in the background to keep her company while we're gone. So, she had to stay home, this day, due to Covid and as we we're getting ready to leave, I say out loud,

"Alexa, play Christian music."

She answers me

"Alright ... shuffling songs from Christian Music on Amazon."

A few seconds later I hear this male voice sing out softly,

*"The LORD bless you
And keep you
Make His face shine upon you
And be gracious to you
The Lord turn His
Face toward you
And give you peace"*

I called to my wife,

“Hey honey, is this the song you were talking about?”

“No” she answered, “It was a female singing.”

“OK” I said as I walked out the door ... and forgot about it.

A few days later, I was doing some work around the house and had YouTube Christian music on in the background. Then I heard it again:

*“The LORD bless you
And keep you
Make His face shine upon you
And be gracious to you
The Lord turn His
Face toward you
And give you peace*

*Amen, amen, amen
Amen, amen, amen
Amen, amen ,amen*

*The Lord bless you
And keep you
Make His face shine upon you
And be gracious to you
The Lord turn His
Face toward you
And give you peace*

Amen, amen, amen
Amen, amen, amen
Amen, amen, amen”

Then a female voice came in soft and slow at first ...

“May His favor be upon you
And a thousand generations
Your family and your children
And their children, and their children... ”

Then stronger, and more passionate.

“May His favor be upon you
And a thousand generations
Your family and your children
And their children, and their children... ”

Of course, those of you who follow Christian Worship Music recognized this immediately as the song “*The Blessing*” sung by Cody Carnes and Kari Jobe and the Elevation Church worship team.

Later that day, as soon as I had an opportunity, I told my wife to come in the living room and watch this on YouTube, on our TV’s large screen. We were blown away. Both of us were moved to tears, not saying a word just lifting our hands towards Heaven in worship. As we entered into Communion with GOD and with the Believers on our screen singing that song.

It made us yearn to be back together with other Believers united in worship. Dwelling in unity, with GOD our CREATOR in the midst, inhabiting the praises of his people.

Over the centuries the Church has endured “many dangers, toils and snares” ... but as all Believers know,

*“... the CREATOR of the Universe will always work
“SITUATIONS and things” out for our good...”*

In the midst of crisis, in the midst of trial, in the midst of *that* SITUATION, *that* song went viral, around the world like nothing I had ever seen. In discovering *that* song, I’ve also discovered many amazing songs that transcended their beginnings and spread all over the world. Songs like “*Way-maker,*” “*Oceans,*” “*What a Beautiful Name,*” and “*The Goodness of GOD.*” These songs have been recorded and re-recorded and re-recorded and streamed by millions upon millions upon millions all over the Globe in a fresh, new call, to Worship.

Our great commandment is to love GOD with all our heart, with all our mind and with all our strength and to love our neighbor as our selves. Our obedience to, and honor towards GOD, begins with Loving GOD first and then Loving our-selves.

Our Connection with a Happy Life also begins with first Connecting with GOD and then Connecting with Our-selves. We can’t love and Connect with others until we learn to Love and Connect with GOD and then, Our-selves.

Connection and Communion with God ...

The finish work of Happiness begins with our CREATOR.

As I stated earlier if you have a different faith, a different belief system regarding who our CREATOR is and how he manifests to us, I understand.

That doesn't change the foundations, the basic principles, of how we Connect.

1. Communication
2. Meditation
3. Adoration and Exaltation.

Whatever you believe, the important first step is that you recognize and acknowledge that there is a CREATOR; and once you recognize and understand that,

... Since we have a CREATOR, it logically follows, it is in our best interest to Seek to know and Connect with that Deity, that Wisdom, that Knowledge, behind everything that is.

Seeking is the Key. Never stop Seeking and Searching. This principle takes all the way back to the very first chapter which I concluded with these thoughts.

*“Become a Seeker. In becoming a Seeker
Success is a foregone conclusion.”*

Connect with your-Self

In the last chapter, we learned that to have *optimal* Connection, leading to *ultimate* Communion with GOD, we need to Connect with GOD in his three manifestations;

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

and on three different levels.

Communication ✠ Meditation ✠ Adoration & Exaltation

This “Connection” commitment brings to mind Jesus and the Great Commandment.

Matthew Chapter 22 records several instances of the religious leaders of the day trying to trap Jesus with his own words; trying to make him look foolish, thereby losing credibility with the crowds that had been following him. It’s so amazing the way the Son of God handles these negative attacks, that I am just going to share the entire chapter:

“When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying:

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. Then he sent more servants and said,

‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So, go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’

So, the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You are not swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"

Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said;

"You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax."

They brought him a denarius, and he asked them,

"Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"

"Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them,

"So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

When they heard this, they were amazed. So, they left him and went away. That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question...

"Teacher Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died.

Since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. At the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

Jesus replied,

"You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what God said to you; I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching. Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as your-self.'

*All the Law and the Prophets
hang on these two commandments."*

*While the Pharisees were gathered together,
Jesus asked them,*

*“What do you think about the Messiah?
Whose son, is he?”*

*"The son of David," they replied.
He said to them,*

*“How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him
‘Lord’? For he says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord :
“Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your
feet.” If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?”*

*No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one
dared to ask him any more questions.*

Amazing right? Such a picture of the wisdom of GOD.

The passage that I would like to focus on at this point, for the purpose of this chapter, is Jesus’ statement on the Great Commandment.

“ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as your-self.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

It occurred to me that this principle also applies to Connection. Let's explore it like this:

"You shall Connect with the Lord your GOD with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... and the second is like it: Connect with your neighbor ... as your-self."

In the same way it is impossible for us to love others until we learn to love our-selves it is also impossible to Connect with others until we learn to Connect with our-selves. How do we Connect with our-selves?

Before I answer that question, let's briefly review where we started in this journey, what we learned in Part I and Part II and where we are now.

After laying down a firm foundation, and a strong, sound, structure, we have begun to build connections that will carry us on to the Finish.

Learning to Accept reality and truth is part of the firm foundation of a Happy Life.

If we spend our time and waste our energy, pining and grieving over what is or what was or what might have been, we will never get down to the actual work of laying down the foundation for our Happy Life.

We laid down that firm foundation by learning to:

Accept our past

Accept SITUATIONS, we couldn't control

Accept SITUATIONS we could control

Accept our present SITUATION

Accept and learn to Love our self

Accept and learn to Love others

Accept responsibility for our future

We built out our strong, sound structure by learning to:

Believe in Belief

Believe in Nothing

Believe in Everything

Believe we are in the right place at the right time

Believe Everything will always work things out for our good

Believe Everything will always come back to Balance

Believe Everything will give us the desires of our hearts.

Now that we are in that place, it's time to start learning how to connect to Our-selves. The way to do that is to take every tool in our box and start observing Our-selves.

Observing our,

THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS.

What THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS make us sad?

What THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS make us happy?

What THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS cause us anguish and fear?

What THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS give us peace and comfort?

Most people, to be quite honest, live their life on the lowest level of existence; ruled by their “*physical, instinctual*” nature; Reacting and Responding to their “*immediate*” THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS about any given SITUATION.

For example, you're standing at your kitchen counter getting ready to pour out a bowl of cereal. As you turn to get the milk carton you somehow end up knocking it over. You watch helplessly as it falls to the floor and milk spills everywhere. Your immediate reaction may be to curse ... Pick your expletive. This gut level action can cascade into a whole series of negative results: someone could come into the kitchen and accidentally walk into the mess, causing you to yell or scream or curse again.

On the other hand, the same milk could be spilt and instead of crying over it you could pause for a moment and examine your THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS and make a conscious decision to “not cry over it.” Instead, you react calmly; you speak loudly to anyone within earshot,

“Hey, don’t come into the kitchen, I spilt some milk and I need to clean it up.”

You calmly go fetch a dish towel or two or maybe a handful of paper towels, and proceed to clean up the mess. It takes about five minutes. You decide,

“Oh well I can whip up some French Toast instead.”

SITUATION resolved in a positive manner, all because you are Connected to your THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS rather than just letting them run wild.

When we let anything run wild or operate in an unmonitored condition the result will ultimately be chaos and catastrophe.

This gets back to the basic principle that by observing ourselves, by examining our lives, we learn how to master our THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS rather than letting them master us.

As I related in the first chapter of this book;

“I have worked in a technical, dangerous industry most of my life. Work tasks, maintenance and repairs have to be carried out in very safe, specific, defined ways in order to protect personnel and equipment and maximize efficiency. Written procedures are in place to ensure that work is carried out in a step-by-step methodical fashion”

For the latter part of my career I worked in a Co-Generation Power Plant / Central Plant for one of the top Hospital / Trauma Centers in the country. Our Plant provided the primary power source for the hospital and exported excess power to the local Utility. We were also the source of all of the Heating, Ventilating, and Air Conditioning and most of the Domestic Hot and Cold-Water Supply for the 625-bed Teaching Hospital, Cancer Center, Ambulatory Care Facility, Children’s Hospital and multiple Research Centers and Laboratories. Our plant consisted of:

- A 28 Megawatt Gas Powered Combustion Turbine;
- An Eighty thousand lb/hr. Four hundred psi HRSG
- An Aqueous Ammonia NOx / SCR System;
- A 4-Megawatt Steam Turbine;
- Five, 2-Megawatt Emergency Diesel Generators;
- A Steam Condensate Recovery System;
- A Reverse Osmosis and Deionized Water System;
- A Natural Gas and Fuel Oil System;
- An Equipment Cooling Water System;
- Four, Cooling Towers;
- Four, Auxiliary Gas/Oil Fired Steam Boilers;

- A Heating Hot Water System
- Three Large Heat Exchangers;
- Four, Electric Centrifugal Chillers and
- Four Steam Fired Absorption Chillers ...

I could keep going but most of you probably have no idea what I'm talking about.

The bottom line is that this is a very powerful, very complex system that is critical to the health, well-being and safe efficient operation of the hospital, its patients and its staff. This plant, this system runs as a well-oiled synchronous machine monitoring thousands of data points 24/7, 365 days per year, via feedback loops that require constant care, constant observation and oversight, and constant tweaks and adjustments.

Every person who signs on to the shift and assumes Control Room Operator duties, agrees to Connect with and Accept responsibility for, everything that goes on in the plant and its safe, reliable and efficient operation. In the hands of negligent, dis-Connected Operators a plant left to run on its own will eventually crash and burn; with devastating consequences. A machine designed to operate so powerfully and efficiently, without human interface and oversight is not worth operating ...

What a metaphor for life. If we go to that much effort and care to constantly monitor an Industrial, Mechanical creation, how much more should we be monitoring our own miraculous, complex creations ... our own minds?

As amazingly made, as our Industrial - Mechanical plant is, our own amazingly made minds are even more so.

The great Greek Philosopher once said;

“The unexamined life is not worth living ...”

What does he mean?

I like this definition I found on the website, *Civils Daily*.

“Through this statement, Socrates means that an unexamined human life is deprived of the meaning and purpose of existence.

To become fully human means to use our highly developed faculty of thought to raise our existence above that of mere beasts. For if we don't think, we are no more than animals, simply eating, sleeping, working and procreating.

Just like a seed needs soil, sunlight, and water for its germination, human life needs introspection and examination for its growth. An understanding of the experiences gained in life at any particular time, enriches one's engagement with the self and the universe.

The fast-changing societies and consumerist cultures in the contemporary world, leave less time for human beings to examine and think about the changes. Adaptation to changes has become automatic and unquestionable. The quotation has strong relevance in the present times.

Human beings are burdened with the histories of war, colonization, nationalization, erosion of morality in the scientific and technological advancements and the sense of spiritual up rootedness. It is in these times that one needs to delve deeper into the conscience to find the purpose of existence and engage (Connect) in a more meaningful manner with society. ” www.civildaily.com ²⁴

So just like my amazing Central Plant, I am a powerful, complex organism. I’m designed to operate powerfully and efficiently ... but in order for that to happen, I require;

- *Constant care*
- *Constant observation and oversight*
- *Constant tweaks and adjustments*

I need to be examining my life, Connecting with my-Self on a regular basis. Let’s create a little scenario and apply these principles to it.

Lately I find that I seem to be getting a little down, a little melancholy.

I could, try to ignore the feeling; not think about it and just kind of *hang out* in the negative ... but inevitably I start thinking negative THOUGHTS

... thoughts about past failures, failed relationships, etc. I could pour myself a cold beer or a glass of wine and that would numb it for a while.

I could go flop on the couch and zone out with the TV for a couple of hours... not a big deal if it only happens once in a while, but definitely not conducive to positive mental health, going forward. The better way would be to pause and take some time to Connect with my-self.

“What’s going on? Why am I feeling this way?”

After some “Examination” after some “Observation” I realize that a TV show I recently watched, triggered THOUGHTS of opportunities I’ve missed in life; things I’ve done, mistakes I’ve made. I would be so much better off if I had done this rather than that.

I make the decision to Connect deeper and Realistically Examine Reality. (RER) The teaching comes back to me that *Realistically*, there is nothing I can do about the past. In *Reality*, Everything that occurred in my past, has brought me to this moment, and the opportunity to move onward and upward.

I feel the pain, I acknowledge the pain, but I *Believe* that *all things* work together for my good ...I love the LORD and “I AM” called; it *is* according to his purpose. I spend some time meditating and Connecting and communing with GOD. I say a prayer, I worship softly. I know that GOD will take care of all things and that despite how I feel and despite the way things appear, I know I am exactly where I’m supposed to be, I know that Everything will work out for my benefit and I know Everything will come back to Balance. I walk by Faith and not by sight.

I make a cognitive choice; I *choose* to not give much head space to the negative. I don't want to go there. I've properly processed my negative EMOTIONS and I *choose* to move on. Therefore,

"... forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press on towards the mark for the prize; the high calling of GOD in Christ."

It may be helpful to go back again to the STAR Session Interview technique, and apply it to the previous scenario.

Expanding on what we learned in a previous chapter, *the SSI technique* is simply applying a type of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy/Analysis, as a guide or a method to Connecting on a deeper or more cognitive level. I like the Miriam Webster definition for Cognitive which says this:

"Cognitive: of, relating to, being, or involving conscious intellectual activity (thinking, reasoning, or remembering)"

This technique is used by virtually every therapist, psychologist, life coach etc. around.

Different people, different Organizations even, give it different names to fit their system, but it is essentially the same.

The "STAR SESSION INTERVIEW"

S: SITUATION

T: THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS

A: ACTIONS

R: RESULTS

Applied to our Scenario the process would go like this:

SITUATION:

A scene in a television program triggered a memory

THOUGHTS & EMOTIONS:

The memory generated *THOUGHTS* of previous “failures”

The *THOUGHTS* generated *EMOTIONS* of hurt, heaviness

ACTIONS:

The *EMOTIONS* generate the *ACTION* of using alcohol and TV to buffer

RESULT:

The *ACTION* effectively numbed the *EMOTIONS* in the moment.

The problem with this scenario is that even though the SITUATION was diffused in the moment, self-medicating doesn't deal with the issue and can many times lead to more negative THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS, more self-medicating, overeating, anorexia / bulimia, cutting, pornography, acting out, fits of rage etc. All these behaviors can contribute to a descent into serious mental disorders.

Approaching the Scenario in a more Connected, Cognitive manner could look like this:

SITUATION:

A scene in a television program triggers a memory

THOUGHTS & EMOTIONS:

The memory generated *THOUGHTS* of previous “failures”
The THOUGHTS generated *EMOTIONS* of hurt, and heaviness

ACTIONS:

The EMOTIONS generated the ACTION of accessing the cognitive tool of RER (Realistically Examining Reality)
The Reality is, the past cannot be changed.
In light of this reality, I can exercise and apply my “Core Beliefs” to the “*SITUATION*”

1) *the firm knowledge and belief that I AM exactly where I'm supposed to be in space-time*

2) *the Universe, and the CREATOR of the Universe will always work "SITUATIONS" out for my good*

3) *The CREATOR of "Everything" will always bring any extreme SITUATION back to Balance in my life*

RESULT:

The ACTION effectively dealt with and processed the THOUGHTS in a way that facilitates growth and deals with the SITUATION in a healthy, positive manner. An ACTION that resolved the issue "*in the moment*" as well as for the long term.

I can't stress enough that Connecting with your-self, really Connecting, is essential to Having a Happy Life.

It's been so sad to me, over my many years, to watch people get knocked down, and knocked around in life, to the point where they give up. They succumb to their SITUATIONS and give in to negative THOUGHTS and EMOTIONS, which give birth to negative destructive ACTIONS.

I've been there myself and I know what it's like. One of the reasons I'm writing this book, is the hope that I might help someone who is struggling with addictions and self-loathing and persuade them that life is worth living.

We can change the course of our lives,
no matter how far gone we *think* we are .

It's worth repeating again, this excerpt from the 12th Chapter of this book, the Apostle Paul at Mars Hill.

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all, life, breath, and all things. He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings ... so that they should seek the Lord; in the hope that they might grope for Him ... and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being ...”

Everything GOD has, or is allowing, in our life, is simply the universe trying to help us find our way back to center.

Let me assure you, you can change, you can turn your life around, and GOD can still give you a life that you can appreciate and cherish and find Rest in.

As you learned to Connect with the Here and Now and everything around you, so also, find time to sit, clear your mind, meditate on everything within you.

Focus on your-self through the eyes of your CREATOR

Insight and Answers will come.

Jesus says in Matthew Chapter 28:

*“Come to me, all you who are weary
who carry heavy burdens ...
I will give you rest.”*

Doesn't that sound appealing? Rest ... Sweet Surrender, and Rest. I know *so* many people, who are *so* tired of the struggle, that they mistakenly confuse drunken stupor and self-medication for Rest. That isn't rest, its attempted escape. The deception is, that it isn't escape at all; just more self-loathing, more self-condemnation, more bondage and eventually, taken to it's ultimate conclusion, death and destruction.

I'll be discussing in the last chapter of this book how to find real Freedom and true Rest. However, if you are in a SITUATION where you are close to losing all hope, I would invite you to go there now and read the final chapter.

For everyone else if you think you have a good idea of how to Connect with your-Self, let's move on to the next Chapter and learn how to connect with the most important person in your life!

Connect with your Agapaō

Connection. Connection with everything around us ...
Connection with our Self ... is the foundation of life. It's
how life began; in the Garden.

The story goes, that GOD formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed life into him. At some point, GOD came to the understanding, whether in an instant or over the course of time, we do not know, but GOD came to the understanding that:

“It is not good for man to be alone ...”

So, GOD, out of Man, made a “helper” suitable for MAN. Over the centuries much has been made about the thought that a “helper” is one who is subservient to another. Quite the opposite is true. The Hebrew word for “Helper” is “Ezer.” The word “Ezer” used here is the same word that is used in many verses in the Bible, One Psalm in particular, which says, *“My Help” comes from the LORD.*” The principle being that one who helps another is *in a position*, to be able to help another. One man was not meant to be over another “man” or “wo-man” We are all created to help and support each other. We’re all GOD’s children. We know and realize that at times in our history different societies have placed women in “culturally” subservient positions.

This has also been true of men. All races, colors and creeds of “Men,” have been, at one time or another, subdued in war and made slaves, subservient to other “Men.” With GOD however, this is not so.

Paul’s letter to the Christians who lived in Galatia, a Roman province inhabited by Celtic people who were Connected to the Greeks, said this:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

It’s *not* good for Man to be “alone.” We all need “Helpers.” At various times in our lives, *we* will need *some-one*; at various times in our lives *some-one* will need *us*.

How then, should we Connect with “Others?” Similar to our Connection with our CREATOR, we Connect with Others in a three-fold fashion. Three different manifestations of people in our lives.

Connection on Three different levels;

- 1) Our Agapaō
- 2) Our Friends and Family
- 3) Our Acquaintances, Enemies and Everyone else.

The first type of person that we will be Connecting with is what I call our Agapaō. Agapaō is a Greek verb which means:

*“... to love unconditionally and sacrificially
as God Himself loves sinful men.”*

In his commentary on 1st Peter, J MacArthur says it this way;

"Agapaō" expresses the ideal kind of love, that which is exercised by the will rather than emotion, not determined by the beauty or desirability of the object, but by the noble intention of the one who loves."

(<https://www.preceptaustin.org/love>)²⁵

As you read, “Agapaō” is a verb. For the purposes of this book and this precept, I am making it into a noun ... a person. Of course, GOD is our all in all, but GOD does want us to Connect with others. We all need an Agapaō; a confidant, a trusted friend, an “Ezer.” *Some-one* in our lives who lives out this kind of love with us. I realize that no other human will be able to *completely* live out this kind of love with another, only GOD can always love us like this, all the time. I wrote before in the chapter on Accepting and Loving Others, (chapter 6) this is what we should strive for and seek after in an Agapaō relationship.

For most of us, this person will be our husband or wife, our soulmate, our life partner, but this isn’t always the case. Some people marry very young, some not until late in life; others somewhere in between ... some never marry at all, and that’s ok.

However, even people who aren't in a marriage relationship, still need that Agapaō in their life.

While Jesus had three very intimate disciples, I think there is strong evidence, that young John, the son of Zebedee was his earthly Agapaō. John refers to himself as the beloved disciple. He is identified as the one who was reclining at Jesus side at the last supper and he is the only disciple who was at the feet of Jesus as he was crucified.

We also have a picture of Agapaō Connection in the relationship between a young King David and his friend Johnathan who was the son of King Saul. After the death of Johnathan, David lamented;

*“How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle!
Jonathan was slain in your high places.
I am distressed for you my brother Johnathan
You have been very pleasant to me;
Your love to me was wonderful,
Surpassing the love of women.
How the mighty have fallen,
And the weapons of war perished”*

David had other Agapaō's after Johnathan and we too, most likely will not have the same Agapaō throughout our entire lives.

After the death of her husband, Ruth, of the Old Testament book of the same name, bonded to her late husband's mother.

They became each other's Agapaō, for a time, while they both healed over the death of Ruth's husband, who was also Naomi's son. Then when Ruth met Boaz and he proved his love for her, he became her Agapaō.

I've had three Agapaō's in my life; the first one in my preadolescence, then in my teen years, then in my early twenties. The first was my cousin, the second my high school best friend. When I was twenty years old, I met my third Agapaō, my wife, my soulmate.

I've been blessed to call her my Agapaō for almost fifty years now. Our relationship has not always been perfect. We've weathered many storms, experienced many seasons of life, persevered and thrived by GOD's grace.

I'm more in love with her now than I have ever been. I wish I had known long ago how to Connect with her on the kind of level that I'm just now learning. A level of Connection that is based on the kind of love and trust that allows me to be as open, honest, and vulnerable as a person can be with another human being, and providing that same safe space for her.

When I am with my Agapaō I owe it to her to be fully engaged, not distracted, but completely focused on her. I need to be in the moment and not thinking about other things unless *we're* thinking about other things *together* ... as in the following example:

Together, doing separate things ... but focused on common goals.

“Hey while I’m going over this utility bill would you mind checking out this letter from the insurance company? It says there were some changes to our annual premium and I haven’t had time to get into it yet. Thanks Babe!”

If you don’t have an Agapaō in your life right now, you need to find one. If you are in a marriage or a committed relationship and that relationship is not a safe space for you, not a relationship of openness and honesty and vulnerability you have some decisions to make.

- 1) Stay in the relationship and repair it
- 2) Stay in the relationship, Accept it for what it is, for whatever reason, and find a way to be Happy in the SITUATION
- 3) Make peace with your-self, move out of the relationship, move on, move forward and make plans for your future.

Remember, the whole theme of this book is how to have a Happy Life. If you are in any type of relationship other than a marriage, and you’re not Happy, I would look very seriously at option three. No matter how committed a relationship you are currently in, there are no vows that bind you to another person.

You have to ask your-self, “Why am I still in this relationship, if it’s not adding to my life and moving me forward? Why am I still here when I’m clearly not happy and Why am I not happy?”

We're *all* meant to be Happy. As you move forward and make plans for your future, determine to make thoughtful, considered decisions and to be wise about anyone you're considering sharing your life with. Pray for discernment and take some time to get to know a person before you lay your soul bare before them. Whether you are a Christian or not, the kind of qualities you look for in an Agapaō should be those that you see in someone who exhibits the Fruit of the Holy SPIRIT of our CREATOR:

From Galatians 5:22

*“Love, Joy, Peace,
Patience, Kindness, Gentleness
Self-Control.”*

Again, from 1st Corinthians 13

*Love is patient, love is kind, does not envy
Does not boast, is not proud, does not dishonor others
Not self-seeking, not easily angered, keeps no record of
wrongs. Delights not in evil but rejoices with the truth
Always protects, always trusts, always hopes, perseveres.”*

Of course, no one can *always* exhibit *all* those qualities, *all* of the time but we should seek out those who on the most part, try to live their lives and walk in this manner. During our lifetime we will encounter every manner of individual across the whole spectrum of humanity. All of them, all of us are playing out, our parts in humanity's story ... GOD's story.

We have all lived, and are alive, by the will of GOD. Everyone exists on different planes of personal evolution. For those of us who are consciously seeking to evolve higher, we must have some kind of blueprint, some kind of guideline as to how we Connect with all of the different types of people we will encounter. When it comes to our Agapaō, it is essential that we Connect with someone who will nurture us, build us up and vice versa.

Concerning the marriage relationship, I would always advocate as mentioned above:

- 1) *Stay in the relationship and repair it*
- 2) *Stay in the relationship, Accept it for what it is, and find a way to be Happy*

I don't care how old you are, it's never too late to straighten out your relationships, and live life to the fullest every day.

Life is a journey ... I know it's not always possible to live it and experience it with the same person for an entire lifetime, but let me tell you it is well worth the effort. Well worth the sacrifice.

My Agapaō and I met when we were both twenty years old. We knew each other for a few months, and we were married. Met in May, married in November, conceived in January and nine months later we welcomed our baby daughter into our home. A little over two years later we welcomed our son. I can't even fathom that today. We were just babies, having babies.

Almost fifty years later and we are still together. Through the seasons of life, we have had plenty of opportunities, plenty of reasons to give up, to call it quits. My Agapaō had many more reasons to quit than I, but she honored her vows to stay with me;

- *to have and to hold,*
- *for better, for worse,*
- *for richer, for poorer,*
- *in sickness and health,*
- *to love and to cherish,*
- *till death do us part.*

I stayed too; in spite of all my mistakes, missteps and misfortunes, something inside me held on.

Over the course of an almost fifty year relationship a lot of seasons come and go ... a lot of highs and lows, peaks and valleys, agony and ecstasy. There is a deep satisfaction in coming out a better person on the other side ... and that is what starting and finishing this journey with my Agapaō has made me ...better.

Whether you have a few Agapaō 's over the course of your life or whether you have many, have only one at a time. There's no room for two.

The Agapaō relationship deserves full, undivided attention and Complete Committed Connection. That is the way to maximize and fully experience your Agapaō.

An Agapaō relationship isn't possible without complete trust and complete vulnerability. Will we make mistakes? Sure. Will we fall short? Undoubtedly. Will we get hurt? We will ... but don't forget what I wrote earlier in the introduction to this book;

*“there is no depth without height,
no length without breadth,
no ecstasy without agony.”*

I'm reminded of the terms of GOD's covenant, cut with his chosen people, in the wilderness after bringing them out of bondage in a foreign land.

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for your-self a carved image; any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them.

I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.

There is only room for one GOD and one Agapaō. If you are in an Agapaō relationship and you are not *Jealous*, over your Agapaō, in the GOD sense, then something is lacking. GOD is *Passionate* over his people! He has poured himself into us, loves us in a manner that we can't even fathom and won't realize until we get to Heaven. We need to love our Agapaō as GOD loves us. Passionately and in a sense, Recklessly; doing whatever it takes to keep our relationship together and to keep it pure and holy and set apart. I was going to insert a lyric from a well-known Christian worship song here, but instead I'm going to share the whole song , by Cory Asbury. It's a great description of GODs overwhelming, never ending, *Reckless Love* for us.

*Before I spoke a word, You were singing over me
You have been so, so good to me
Before I took a breath, You breathed Your life in me
You have been so, so kind to me*

*Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the 99
And I couldn't earn it
I don't deserve it, still You give your-self away
Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending,
Reckless Love of God*

*When I was Your foe, still Your love fought for me
You have been so, so good to me
When I felt no worth, You paid it all for me
You have been so, so kind to me*

*Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending reckless love of God
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the 99
And I couldn't earn it
I don't deserve it, still You give your-self away
Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending reckless love of God*

*There's no shadow You won't light up
Mountain You won't climb up
Coming after me
There's no wall You won't kick down
Lie You won't tear down
Coming after me*

*There's no shadow You won't light up
Mountain You won't climb up
Coming after me
There's no wall You won't kick down
Lie You won't tear down
Coming after me*

*There's no shadow You won't light up
Mountain You won't climb up
Coming after me*

*There's no wall You won't kick down
Lie You won't tear down
Coming after me*

*Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending reckless love of God
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the 99
I couldn't earn it,
I don't deserve it, still You give your-self away
Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending reckless love of God!*

If you don't feel in some degree about your Agapaō the way GOD feels about us, you haven't completely committed, you haven't completely trusted, you haven't made your-self completely vulnerable.

If you are currently in what you *thought* was an Agapaō relationship, and are realizing as you read these words that it is not, you have some real soul searching to do. Find out *why* you haven't completely committed. Go back to the ABC's (Accept, Believe, Connect) and review them again until you get to the point where you can say either;

I'm out ...or ...I'm all in!

If you decide that you're *all in*, your Agapaō relationship will begin to improve immediately.

If you're *out*, take some *time* out ... to rest, reflect and renew... When you're ready, start looking for a true Agapaō.

If you do not currently have an Agapaō in your life, start seeking ... you *will* find.

Start praying for your CREATOR to lead you to the right person and lead the right person to you. A word of wisdom here though, don't rush the process. This is someone who you are going to be making a big commitment to. Talk to GOD about it. Seek his Counsel, Seek his guidance through Connection and Communication with his SPIRIT.

Your Agapaō Connection should always be the most important Connection (aside from your-self and GOD) that you make. We do still need to Connect with others also. Man is a social being. We need to be making Social Connections with the rest of “the world” the rest of GOD’s creation.

The next group, the next Connection Manifestation we’ll be exploring is our “Friends and Family.”

Right on?

Read on!

Connect with

Friends and Family

After our Agapaō relationship, Friends and Family are the next most important and, in my humble opinion, Friends are slightly higher in the hierarchy than Family.

I mentioned in the last chapter, how the case could be made that John was an Agapaō to Jesus. John followed Jesus to his trial, through the streets of Jerusalem and ultimately to the foot of the cross. Jesus spoke to John from the cross, as he hung dying and entrusted to him the care of his mother. In its scope John's Gospel was a more intimate portrait than those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The other two members of Jesus' inner circle were Peter and James. These two I consider to be Jesus' Best Friends. The other remaining Apostles were also his Friends, but Peter and James were his "Best Friends;" and though as we know, they weren't perfect, they were fiercely loyal to him. They were with him from the beginning, were with him on the mount of Transfiguration and accompanied him through the highs and lows of his ministry. James shows up in the book of Acts, as the first Apostle to be Martyred.

The Martyrdom of James took place at the same time Peter was imprisoned. These two, and many others after, were *all in* with Jesus. They were with him through his ministry, his death, and his Risen Glory ... loyal to their friend to the point of death.

The New Testament Greek Defines a friend in this way:

“philos – a friend; someone dearly loved (prized) in a personal, intimate way; a trusted confidant, held dear in a close bond of personal affection.”

A friend is someone you should expect loyalty from, someone you can trust and someone you enjoy spending time with. In Jesus case I'm sure this would also apply to *all* his 12 disciples, except of course Judas, who betrayed Jesus and gave him over to be crucified.

Though he walked with them for three years, Judas was never actually one of them. Matthew describes his betrayal like this:

“Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.”

Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him,

"Friend, why have you come?"

The word for "Friend" in this passage is ironic because it describes just the opposite of a true friend:

"hetairos ("supposed friend") suggests someone viewed (associated) as a friend but is actually an imposter acting for self-gain."

In using the word *hetairos* to Judas instead of *philos*, he is essentially telling him,

I know what you're up to... I know your heart; I know your intentions... though you pretended to be my friend you've always been out for your-self.

We all know what it's like to have a friend betray us. No matter how good a friend we think we have, no one is absolutely above a knife in the back.

Judas, if you go along with the idea of him as "*hetairos*" was never really Jesus' friend. Peter on the other hand was "*philos*", dearly loved, trusted confidant. He cut off the ear of one of the Soldiers as they came to take his friend away. Just a few hours later he would deny his friend three times ... before the crow of the cock as foretold by scripture.

How many stories have you heard about friends betraying friends? These old sayings didn't come about for no reason ...

“Money parts the best of friends”
“Don't mix business and friendship”

Then there are the all-too-common stories, from our everyday lives, about the woman coming home and finding her best friend in bed with her husband ... or the man finding his wife in bed with the next-door neighbor ... or the work friend who stabbed his or her friend in the back for the promotion that they were both up for.

So many stories ... and they're not always about the other person. Many of *us* have betrayed a friend somewhere along our journey; and here I said that friends are *“a little higher on the hierarchy of Connection than family.”* With these kinds of *“friends”* who needs enemies, right?

All of my three *“best friends”* I mentioned earlier in this book are *completely* out of my life now. Friendships are hard to sustain over a long period of time. They change, they grow, they evolve and not always for the better. Their spouses don't like each other, one has had more *“Success”* in life than the other, etc... So how can family rank,

“... just below friends?”

Blood is supposed to be “thicker than water” so on what do I base my assertion? Let me explain.

Most define family in the following or similar terms:

1. *Family is defined as a specific group of people that may be made up of partners, children, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents.*

An example of a family is a set of parents living with their children.

2. *The definition of family is the group of people who share common ancestors.*

An example of family is all the descendants of a specific person.

3. *A group of people who are bound together by common parentage, common ancestry and common experience. The more shared common early experience, the greater should be the bond.*

Friends *do* come and go, and it's *true* our "family" will always be our family; by blood or common parentage at least.

I grew up in a home that was difficult and dysfunctional to say the least. I'm not complaining or whining at all, it was what it was. I'm sure some homes were a lot more difficult and dysfunctional than mine and some were a lot less so.

What I've learned over a lifetime is that like people, no home is perfect. We all have our own childhood traumas, our own challenges to process and overcome.

I have two older sisters and a younger brother. We will always be bonded by our common “*dysfunctional*” experience. Each one of us individually, had to deal with our common but uniquely different experience in different ways. Because I was male and because I was younger, my bond with my sisters is not the same as the bond with my younger brother. I empathize with what they went through but as I was coming into adolescence, as I was coming of age, my sisters were moving into adulthood, out of our house, and onto the next chapter of their young lives.

My brother and I would spend a few more years together, in a highly volatile environment. After I left, my brother was alone. Left to bear the brunt of the now full-blown storm; to experience the inevitable train wreck, the complete collapse and utter carnage of what was once our common home. No matter how old I get, I will always have that part of me, that instinct, to want to shield and protect my baby brother. I love all my siblings but the bond with each is different.

My wife also grew up in her own difficult, dysfunctional home. Out of respect for her privacy, I won’t go into a lot of detail about her experience. That is her story to tell.

As you’ve learned, one of my core beliefs is that part of *Living a Happy Life* is learning to let go of our past. However, when I think of what she experienced as a very young child I can’t help but be deeply saddened, deeply moved, sometimes deeply angered, by the fact that my wife, my Agapaō had to deal with her SITUATION, alone.

She had five older siblings who also had their own traumas and challenges, but were by and large out of whatever was left of the frail, fragile foundation of what was once *their* common experience, *their* common home.

My Agapaō lost her mother at the age of nine. In the tumultuous years that followed she had no one to shield her, no one to protect her, no one to bond with. It's a miracle that she came through, what she came through and came out the beautiful, compassionate, loving person that I have been privileged to share life with for almost a half a century now.

She has told me many times that JESUS was her Shield and Angels her protectors during those days of her tender innocence. She was just a child and still had the years of adolescence and youth ahead of her. Even before she would come to the full knowledge of her Great GOD and Savior, she experienced his Amazing Grace, his divine protection, on a daily basis.

Though, as I explained previously, after going through most of this time alone, there were still blood bonds between her and her siblings. Siblings with whom she shared common parentage, common ancestry, and some common experience.

Ironically, now all the siblings have passed on except for her oldest sister. The oldest and the youngest ... they have both lived pretty clean lives with GOD at the center and they still talk a couple of times a week. The ties that bind are still powerful. All that being said, man's blood bonds are still no assurance, no guarantee of familial loyalty and fidelity.

From the beginning of our creation, stories of family betrayal are many. Family betrayal knows no bounds.

These accounts appear throughout history, throughout literature in every corner of culture and society. The story of Cain and Abel is perhaps the most famous, the most notorious.

“Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said,

“With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.”

Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So, Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain,

“Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be Accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

Now Cain said to his brother Abel,

“Let’s go out to the field.”

While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain,

“Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

The Lord said,

“What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

It’s interesting that GOD said to Cain,

“Your brother’s blood cries out to me ...”

Abel was Family. Abel was blood. Cain’s jealousy, and insecurity and resentment gave birth to bitterness and anger, which gave birth in the end to betrayal and murder. Blood *is* thicker than water, but Sin and Self-Centeredness are thicker than both.

Our next story gives an account of how a mother and *her* favored son, conspired to deceive, and betray her husband and *his* favored son. This is the story of Jacob and Esau:

When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him,

“My son.”

Here I am,” he answered.

Isaac said,

“I am now an old man and don’t know the day of my death. Now then, get your equipment—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country hunt some wild game for me. Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die.”

Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, Rebekah said to her son Jacob,

“Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, “Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the Lord before I die.” Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies.”

Jacob said to Rebekah his mother,

“But my brother Esau is a hairy man while I have smooth skin. What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing.”

His mother said to him,

“My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say; go and get them.

So, he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and she prepared some tasty food, just the way his father liked it. Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house. She put them on her younger son Jacob. She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made. He went to his father and said,

“My father.”

“Yes, my son,” he answered. “Who is it?”

“I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”

“How did you find it so quickly, my son?”

“The Lord your God gave me success,” he replied.

Isaac said to Jacob,

“Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not.”

Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said,

“The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”

He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so, he proceeded to bless him.

“Are you really my son Esau?” he asked.

“I am,” he replied.

Then he said,

“My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing.”

Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank. Then his father Isaac said to him,

“Come here, my son, and kiss me.”

So, he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said,

*“Ah, the smell of my son
is like the smell of a field
that the Lord has blessed.
May God give you heaven’s dew
and earth’s richness
an abundance of grain and new wine.
May nations serve you
and peoples bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.
May those who curse you be cursed
and those who bless you be blessed.”*

After Isaac finished blessing him, and Jacob had scarcely left his father’s presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting. He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. Then he said to him,

“My father, please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.

”

His father Isaac asked him,

“Who are you?”

“I am your son,” he answered, “your firstborn, Esau.”

Isaac trembled violently and said,

“Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!”

When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father,

“Bless me—me too, my father!”

But he said,

“Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.”

Esau said,

“Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!” Then he asked, “Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?”

Isaac answered Esau,

“I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So, what can I possibly do for you, my son?”

Esau said to his father,

“Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!”

*Then Esau wept aloud.
His father Isaac answered him,*

*“Your dwelling will be
away from the earth’s richness,
away from the dew of heaven above.
You will live by the sword
and you will serve your brother.
But when you grow restless,
you will throw his yoke
from off your neck.”*

Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself,

“The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother.”

When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him,

“Your brother Esau is planning to avenge himself by killing you. Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Harran. Stay with him for a while until your brother’s fury subsides. When your brother is no longer angry, he will forget what you did to him.

I will send word for you to come back. Why should I lose both of you in one day?"

Then Rebekah said to Isaac,

"I am disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living."

So, Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him. Then he commanded him:

"Do not marry a Canaanite woman. Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for your-self there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples.

May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham."

Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau ...

Rebekah's words would come back to haunt her

“When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I will send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?”

Unfortunately, this never happened. Esau and Jacob *eventually* reconciled but it was many, many years later. Such a tragic story. Of course, everything worked out and I’m sure all are with the LORD now and everyone is Happy, but this mother and son caused themselves a lot of grief, here on earth, in this life, that I don’t think they had to go through. GOD would have accomplished his purpose no matter what, but again we see that no family is immune from the green-eyed monster of wicked envy and jealousy.

The story of Joseph and his betrayal by his brothers is another great story of triumph from tragedy, blessing from betrayal ... too long to relate here but definitely worth the read. You can find it in the last 14 chapters of the Book of Genesis. (37 - 50).

David, King of Israel was betrayed by his son Absalom. In contemporary literature John Steinbeck’s, *East of Eden*, is a modern-day retelling of the Cain and Abel story. There are many, many more examples of Family Betrayal that can be found with just a simple internet search. Suffice it to say that no relationship, Friend or Family, is perfect.

No manner of evil or betrayal is beyond the reach of the sinfulness and selfishness of man ... only JESUS will never leave us or forsake us.

In spite of this, in spite of all of our shortcomings, we can experience and enjoy fruitful and fulfilling friends and family relationships if we follow a few simple guidelines on how to Connect. The following excerpt from the Book of Matthew gives us some insight into one of the basic principles of how to have quality, Connected relationships.

“While Jesus was ... talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” He replied to him,

*“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?
Pointing to his disciples, he said,
Here are my mother and my brothers.
whoever does the will of my Father in heaven
is my brother and sister and mother.”*

Jesus spends time with;

“whoever does the will of my Father in heaven”

... and what was Jesus primary mission.? To do the will of his Father in heaven. He spent his precious, quality time, fellowshiping with people of “like mind”. Remember at the beginning of this section we laid out what it means to Connect.

“The most basic dictionary definition of Connect is to “join or fasten together ...”

In the scriptures “Connect” does not really appear much. When it does, it is associated with the idea of fastening. The word “Join” however does appear and is more associated with the idea of being united, bonded together with someone or something for an exchange or a mutually edifying purpose. The Greek word is κολλάω or kollaó, originating from the word kolla. The word literally means “to glue.” More broadly the word means: “kolláō (from kólla, “glue”) – to bond (cleave), adhere to (literally, “glued together”); to cleave, join to; (figuratively) intimately Connected in a soul-knit friendship.”

If you’re someone who loves the outdoors and biking and hiking and camping, you are less likely to make a quality Connection with someone who hates the pollen and the bugs and the snakes. Someone who is much happier spending time in a nice five-star hotel, taking in an evening with their local theatre group or philharmonic orchestra.

If you’re the kind of person who likes to party and get a little wild on Saturday night, then sleep it all off on Sunday, you are probably not going to Connect with someone who gets to bed early on Saturday and is up bright and early on Sunday morning to attend their local Church. And that’s ok. Just know that when you meet or encounter someone that you like, and think they might be “Friend Material” or “Family Material” be careful, be wise.

Don’t open your-self up, don’t make your-self vulnerable until you determine if the person you *think* you really Connect with, is someone who is of a “*like mind*” as you.

Proverbs 4:23 says,

“Guard your heart ... for everything you do flows from it”

Here is an excerpt from an excellent article I came across while researching this topic. Follow the link to read the entire article (which is mostly about romantic relationships, but the principles hold true in any relationship)

“Guarding your heart means protecting your-self from negative influences, toxic people, and evil behavior. It means shielding your mind and body from anything that isn’t life-giving or affirming. When you guard your heart in daily life, you choose not to listen to conversations that are critical or wrong. You avoid sinking into bouts of complaining or criticizing, and you don’t allow depression, anger, bitterness, self-pity, or self-hatred to overwhelm you.”

Guard your Heart ²⁶

The more time you spend getting to know a potential friend, the less time you will spend nursing your hurt feelings and licking your wounds. Even then, after you have forged a solid friendship or relationship, never make the mistake of thinking that person would never do anything to hurt you. Give them room to mess up and make mistakes. Be quick to forgive and willing to move forward if they are truly repentant.

Forgiveness, is one thing; always, quickly forgive. Forgiveness is more for the forgiver than forgiven.

Forgiveness keeps you from letting bitterness creep in and wreaking all kinds of havoc.

However ... *Forgiveness*, doesn't necessarily mean restoration. Restoration in a relationship can only come if both parties get back to that like-minded Connection.

Also consider that an;

“... *intimately Connected soul-knit friendship* ...”

... is a rare, precious thing and that you cannot possibly invest that kind of “*soul-knit* ” capital in *too many* relationships. Look to Jesus example;

- One - Agapaō (the apostle John)
- Two - Close Friends (Peter and James)
- Nine - Intimate Circle (the rest of the twelve)
- Jesus also had *Seventy to One hundred twenty*, followers students, disciples etc.

The Seventy to One hundred twenty Followers, are those who certainly were in Jesus sphere of influence, but probably interacted with him personally, on a very limited basis.

If you are a little un-Balanced in your relationships right now, I would recommend seeking out two people that you are like minded with who you think could develop into *Close Friends*. After that move on to build your *Intimate Circle* of friends.

I hope you understand now, why I think Friends, Close Friends at least, are more important in your life than even Family. As we learned, common parentage, common ancestry and common experience do not guarantee familial loyalty and fidelity. *True* friends in the “Jesus” sense are spiritually forged and based on like mindedness.

As the saying goes,

*“You are born into your family;
you get to choose your friends”.*

What a blessing it is when we can rise above the jealousy and treachery of even those biblical families that are the founders of our faith.

What a blessing when our family members are also our trusted friends!

So, who is left in our relationship universe? Who else is left to Connect with? I will answer that question in the next chapter entitled,

“Acquaintances, Enemies and Everyone else.

Connect with Acquaintances, Enemies and Everyone Else

You may wonder why I'm grouping these three social categories Acquaintances, Enemies and Everyone Else, into one chapter. Two reasons. First of all, the way we Connect with these three groups, is essentially the same, though not for the same reasons. Second, along with the Connections we covered in the last four chapters these pretty much cover any other human interaction you might encounter.

An Acquaintance is:

"...a person one knows slightly, but who is not a close friend."

An Enemy is:

"...a person who passively or actively is against you or opposes you."

Everyone Else is:

"... Everyone Else!"

With these groups, we always, want to be Connected, with our-Self and fully engaged. We never know what Acquaintances, Enemies and Everyone else might be bringing into our realm.

Life is more fully lived when we are fully engaged, completely Connected. I know there are times when we all want to chill out, check out, zone out and escape from the pressures of everyday life. I've spent many hours sitting in front of the Television, binge watching movies or TV shows... nothing wrong with that. I would just suggest that even when participating in this seeming waste of time, you actually fully engage and completely Connect with whatever you are watching or listening to. Granted it's a lot easier to Connect with an intricate, complex documentary, or a clever plot with lots of twists and turns ... but I have sometimes experienced extreme satisfaction and profound revelation from something as simple as a child's cartoon. There is *always* something we can glean from *any* SITUATION, experience or encounter.

In Connecting with our CREATOR, with our-selves, with our Agapaō, with our Friends and Family, we always want to give and receive maximum benefit from those positive relationships. In this next to the last chapter, in this last of the three relationship types we want to be fully engaged and completely Connected to our Creator and our-Self because of the element of the unknown.

The nature of an Acquaintance is that, they seem ok, they seem nice, they *might* be friend material ... but we never know for sure. We want to be fully aware of our environment. Every subtle hint, every tell-tell sign.

When someone makes their way into the outskirts of our realm, we always want to be on high alert. We don't yet know whether this person is friend or foe; sent to help or sent to harm; sent to encourage or sent to entrap.

This awareness is not to be negative. We can be friendly and hospitable, gracious and polite in any relatively new, seemingly neutral relationship. However, we must be mindful and aware, at all times, that any *seemingly*, neutral SITUATION can go negative in an instant.

When we are “*walking in*” the SPIRIT of our Creator GOD, sensitive to his leading, we will never be caught off guard. We will never be blindsided by the sudden random attack of an Acquaintance; someone we barely know. Our Creators word in the book of 1st Peter, chapter 5 verse 8 says;

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”

Don't be too quick to trust or embrace a recent acquaintance; whether it be a new neighbor, a new coworker, someone from the gym or someone you meet at the market. Be alert with folks from the department store, your kids' soccer game, a school function, a night class or someone you might meet on vacation.

It's so tempting to quickly embrace and Accept people we “randomly” meet who seem like the nicest couple, the greatest guy or whatever. I assure you ... *Nothing is random.*

Everything happens for a reason and ultimately Every-thing that happens is to lead us to our CREATOR.

“... He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being ...”

What we don't want to do, in exploring new relationships, is to have to take the hard road again, learn the hard lessons, the hard way.

The whole purpose of this book is to teach you how to have a “Happy Life.” We don't want to enter in to harmful, damaging relationships again; been there, done that! Jesus himself, even though he loves us and gave his life for us, was careful as to how he interacted with acquaintances. In Matthew Chapter 2 we read;

“...while he (Jesus) was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and Believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.”

I know of a couple, some years ago, who were out for a leisurely bike ride, on one of the many trails where they lived. They encountered another couple in a turn-out along the way.

The other couple, were on vacation, and inquired about other trails in the area that they might recommend. The guys began to talk, and boy did they hit it off. They were both into sports and Fantasy Football, and ended up playing in the same leagues and forging a pretty strong friendship through their mutual interest in sports. It was a long-distance friendship, as they lived several hours away, but these two “sports guys” were developing what *seemed* like a pretty good relationship. While the wives got along ok, they were nowhere near as close as their hubbies.

The four of them got together a couple of times a year. They would meet up somewhere for a weekend of biking and hiking fun, and then each go back to their respective homes and lives.

Eventually cracks began to surface in their relationship. One of the guys (the one from out of the area) felt that the other didn’t give as much to the relationship as he did. He slowly became somewhat resentful and would drop little digs to the other guy about the fact that he had “other” friends he was tighter with than the local guy. It became apparent, through his ACTIONS and through their conversations, “*Out of the Area Guy*” had some emotional issues that were not apparent in the early stages of the relationship. He felt that his “*friend*” should be as emotionally invested and attentive to the relationship as he was. In a word, he was needy.

“*Local Guy*” had a lot going on at the time. He had recently changed jobs, was dealing with some highly stressful financial issues, and was not able to give “*Out of the Area Guy*” what he needed, and in fact, what he came to demand.

Needless to say, the relationship cooled, the guys dropped out of each others fantasy leagues and sports circles, and went their separate ways. It was probably no one's fault, just two busy men, with different lives, who got a little too close, a little too fast.

This story underscores the fact that strong, quality, mutually beneficial, mutually edifying relationships, do indeed take time to build and develop. When we meet new people, we need to be engaged and completely Connected to GOD and to our-selves. We don't want to make the same mistakes again and again.

We need to be aware of and not ignorant to "Red Flags." As in the relationship described above, it can take some time and effort to discern the motives and intentions of the "acquaintances" in our lives. Definitely not true of the next relationship category we Connect with. Definitely not true of our Enemies.

We *always* know the motives and intentions of our Enemies; Intention to hurt and to harm. There are so many instances in the WORD of GOD that tell us, when we walk with HIM, he will vanquish all of our Enemies, all of those who would seek to do us harm.

On the other hand, when we don't walk with HIM, when we *rebel* against HIM and *despise* HIS love, goodness and mercy, when we get *out from beneath* HIS wings ... HE *may*, allow our enemies to overcome and vanquish us, in accordance with what Paul talked about in his Mars Hill Sermon, that we've referenced in this book numerous times.

“... He gives to all, life, breath, and all things. He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings ... so that they should seek the Lord; in the hope that they might grope for Him ... and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being ...”

It is so important then, in the presence of our enemies, to be fully engaged and completely Connected to the one who is our Rock, our Fortress, our Shield and our Buckler.

The enemies we encounter over the course of a lifetime are people we have known, people who perceive that we have hurt them, people who feel threatened by us, people who Believe differently than we do, people who for *some reason*, just don't like us.

Our enemies are also seemingly ... ordinary *people*. It's very tempting when attacked by one of these “*people*” to defend our “selves” and attack in kind.

This brings us back again to why it is so important to be fully engaged, fully aware, and completely Connected. Our Enemies do, at times plan and plot and strategize ways to do us harm. We must be prepared at all times to do battle ... of the spiritual kind.

Paul instructs us in Ephesians, what our mindset must be as it concerns our warfare.

“...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places ...”

The truth is our enemies are not flesh and blood “people”. No matter how badly we would like to, we can’t simply put a face to the evil that attacks us and give it a nice solid punch in the nose. We *are* expected to fight, to do battle with our enemies, just not in the way that appeals to most our flesh ... our lower, instinctual natures.

Paul says again in the tenth chapter of II Corinthians:

“...though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ ...”

Referring back to Ephesians we are told:

“...take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

*Above all, taking the shield of faith with which, you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, **being watchful to this end** with all perseverance...*”

Note the term in bold

“... being watchful to this end”

This is another way of saying:

“... be fully engaged and Completely Connected”

When we are fully engaged and Completely Connected with “our-Selves” and with our CREATOR, walking in HIS SPIRIT, we can get our “selves” out of the way and let GOD take care of our Enemies. HE *is* our Rock, our Fortress, our Shield and our Buckler. When we inject our “selves” into a SITUATION that GOD has told us repeatedly, in HIS WORD that HE will handle, we effectively tie his hands ... it’s like he says,

“Look, do you want to fight this battle, or do you want me to? Oh, you’ll handle it? Let me know how that works out for you. Give me a shout when you come to the end of your “Self.”

Remember GOD isn’t just concerned about *us*, He so loved the **world**, that he gave his only begotten son to die in our place ...

GOD is working in eight billion people's lives at the same time. Before you get all fired up and want to take out some "person," who has wronged you, think about the principalities, the powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places ... *you* put on the full Armor of GOD. Do *your* part and let HIM do HIS part.

*Vengeance is mine; I will repay.
In due time their foot will slip;
their day of disaster is near
and their doom rushes upon them."*

What then *is* our part? How do we Connect properly with our GOD and our-selves as it concerns our Enemies? It may be tough to swallow; it is completely counterintuitive to our human natures but when you get your-self out of the way you have no choice but to be obedient to CHRIST who said, if you love me, you will obey me.

"...Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. If you love those who love you, what credit is it to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?

For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore, be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.”

Paul reiterates this command in the 12th chapter of his letter to the Believers in Rome.

“...Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse ... Repay no one evil for evil ...If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge your-selves. Rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord ...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Learning to have a “Happy Life” is all about throwing all human wisdom and knowledge out the window and surrendering completely to the ways and the will of our CREATOR.

GOD is not going to deliver you to abuse and humiliation at the hands of your enemies ... not if you fully engage, Completely Connect, give your whole heart and place all of your faith and your trust *to* him and *in* him. Live and Move and BE in HIM, and *Everything* will work out just fine ... You won't have to worry about your Enemies because GOD will either save and sanctify them or rout and remove them from your life.

Now, the question of how to Connect with “Everyone else”?

The answer is simple. We Connect in LOVE ... whatever that means and however it manifests itself.

“... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as your-self.’”

If you are at the place in your life where you truly want to be done with the cares and the burdens of the life you’ve been living, and you truly desire to have a “Happy Life” the answer is LOVE. It serves us so much more to be optimistic and positive and loving in our daily encounters than to be angry and ornery and ill tempered.

The secret to Happiness in *all* our relationships,
is to love, learn and *be* completely Connected ...
in every inch, in every area of our life!

... and that brings us to the next and final chapter of this story

Connect with Eternity!

Connect with Eternity

As I begin to bring this volume to a close, allow me to sum up the good news I've brought to you.

The Good News, that you *can* have a “Happy Life” in the midst of *any* SITUATION or, *any* “thing” that might happen to you. Not fleeting, temporary Happiness, but the kind of Happiness I defined in the very beginning of this book:

A state of mental and spiritual well-being that is not affected by SITUATIONS or things but is anchored in the firm knowledge and belief that:

- *I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be, right here, right now.*
- *The CREATOR of the Universe, will always work all “Situations and Things” out for my good.*
- *The CREATOR of the Universe, will always bring any extreme situation back to Balance in my life.”*

If you have any doubts or misunderstandings about any of the ABC's in this book go back, review until you have them solid in your mind; then let me introduce you to Connecting with Eternity!

It's such a blessing, observing how our CREATOR is always so timely and relevant. I'm finishing this book, this last chapter, on a quiet Saturday morning after having a cup of coffee and enjoying some precious time and conversation with my wife, my soulmate, my Agapaō of almost Fifty years. As I wrote in the dedication of this book in the beginning, none of what you've read over these many chapters would have made it from mind, to pen, to page, to publication without her great unfailing love and support. She's fallen back to sleep now and is catching up on some much-needed rest. She's the hardest working woman I've ever known. Before she dozed off, she asked me,

“Do you ever think about dying? What's going to happen in these last years of our lives and what's to become of us?”

We talked about the subject for a bit, she went back to bed, and the LORD led me to come sit down at our kitchen table, get out my laptop and talk to you about eternity.

My question to you is the same one that she posed to me. Do you ever think about dying? Of course, we all do at times, but when I was a young man, I barely thought about it at all. Who thinks about dying when you're just beginning to live? Who thinks about mortality when at 18, you think you're immortal?

I was more concerned with making enough money for my next tank of gas ... about buying a new cassette for my car stereo, saving up for some new tires and US Indy rims ... All you baby boomer guys know what I'm talking about, right?

Sure, there were times when someone close to me, or someone famous would die and I would consider the fragility and the fleeting nature of our short time on this tiny planet. For the most part, however, I have to admit, I didn't give it at a great deal of thought. I knew the end of the road was out there somewhere, but I thought it was a long way off. Now the years behind me are just shadows ... and the reality of my departure is just up the road, and around the next bend. I'm reminded of the Apostle Paul's words to his protege Timothy.

Paul was sitting alone, not on a pleasant fall morning at his kitchen table with his great love, in the next room. Not with his loving, loyal pet lying warm and cuddled up in the chair next to him. Paul sat alone in the solitary silence of a damp, dark, Roman prison cell. He was writing, as I am this morning, a letter to be passed on through his faithful friend, to people that he loved and cared about.

As I read, and think about his words, I am overcome with tears. I'm next to him as he sits in his lonely prison cell pouring out his heart to the one who would carry on his work. These were Paul's words to young Timothy that morning.

"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

Paul was ready for Eternity. He knew, however, that he did not deserve eternity. He had been a very bitter, angry, violent, man. He was a very “religious” man, who *thought* himself very righteous. He hated the new Jewish cult that had sprung up around some dead False Prophet. This group of uneducated fisherman, farmers, tax collectors, zealots ... they believed that this itinerant preacher from a small town in Galilee was their Messiah. Their promised for, awaited Savior, their Anointed One, their deliverer.

The religious leaders of Paul’s time, his teachers, his mentors, had put this Jesus of Nazareth on trial, found him guilty of Blasphemy, (profaning GOD) and handed him over to the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, to be judged and executed. Not by stoning, as was the Jewish custom, but by Crucifixion. After enduring beating and whipping and scourging by Roman soldiers, he was condemned to die.

His executioners led him to a small hill outside of town where his earthly life ended, hanging from a cross between two thieves. Only his mother and a few close friends at his feet. Astonishingly the man’s followers, a rag tag band of ignorant deplorables, were now saying that that this Jesus, had risen from the dead and ascended to GOD! They were spreading their heresy throughout the province. Their blasphemies were beginning to make their way beyond Judea and even into the Empire.

We first learn about Saul (Paul) at the stoning of the young Jesus follower, Stephen, in the book of Acts. Stephen was delivering this new teaching to his fellow Jews:

“When the members of the Sanhedrin (Paul’s mentors and contemporaries) heard this, (their claims of Jesus resurrection) they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.”

Saul made it his mission to hunt these heretics down, arrest them and have them put to death; but the GOD that he thought he so zealously served, had a different plan for his life. Here is his story: (with a little backstory first)

“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, (one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus) “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So, he started out, and on his way, he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the “Kan-da-ke” the “Queen of the Ethiopians”.

This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home, was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip,

“Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet.

“Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?”

So, he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

*“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so, he did not open his mouth ...*

*In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”*

The eunuch asked Philip,

“Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or another?”

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said,

“Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”

He gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away—the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him,

“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

So, he, trembling and astonished, said,

“Lord, what do You want me to do?”

“Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus.

For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision.

“Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

The Lord told him,

“Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

But the Lord said to Ananias,

“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said,

“Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked,

“Is this not the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And has he not come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?”

Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night, they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

So, Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the Believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.”

What an amazing story! How GOD turned a Hardened Murderer into a Humble Minister. Paul, while he wasn't a man to live in the past, did make reference occasionally to his former life.

“If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage... worthless, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead ...Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on ... to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But this one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward towards those things which are ahead.

*I press on toward the mark for the prize ...
The high calling of God, in Christ.”*

Here again, as to how he felt about being included, in spite of his background, as an Apostle of Christ:

“Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word, I preached to you. Otherwise, you have Believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as one born out of due time - a lifeless abortion as it were. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

By the grace of God, I am what I am ...”

And finally, once again in an intimate conversation with his young student, Timothy. This letter had been written four years earlier than the one I referenced at the beginning of this discourse. In this letter he exhorts Timothy to “fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience...” Four years later as he awaited the pouring out of the offering of his life, he told Timothy ...” I have fought the good fight...”

Here however he opens up to Timothy, exhibiting his humility, regarding the Grace of God towards a man such as he.

“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The Grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full Acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst! But for that very reason I was shown mercy ... so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would Believe in him and receive eternal life ...”

So ... back to the question my beloved Bride asked me this morning,

“Do you ever think about dying? What’s going to happen in these last years of our lives and what’s to become of us?”

Of course, I do ... but I look forward to it with awe, anticipation and expectation.

I know, the moment I leave this life, in the next instant I will be absent from *this* body but present with Christ.

I look forward to Eternity because I am Connected with and to Eternity. I *will* live Forever ... in Communion with my CREATOR.

I mentioned earlier that as I was reading this account of Paul's life, and his letter to Timothy from the solitary silence of that damp, dark, Roman prison cell, I was overcome with tears. Overcome with tears because even though I look forward to Eternity, even though I am ready for Eternity,

Like Paul I know,

"... I don't deserve it."

Like Paul I know,

"... The Grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly..."

The tears that I wept with Paul,
were not just tears of regret and repentance ,
but also tears of,

"Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory..,"

And though I don't deserve it, my Creator, my Abba, my Daddy wants me to live forever, In Eternity with him ... And so I will, and I eagerly await and look forward to that moment when this corruptible body puts on incorruption and I am changed forever in the twinkling of an eye.

If you've ever wondered about, or would like to know ... how *you* can live forever, how *you* can be Connected to Eternity, you are not alone.

During the time when Jesus walked the Earth, a highly intelligent, highly esteemed teacher of the Law wondered the same thing. He was part of a key, influential religious sect known as the Pharisees. While most of the Pharisees thought of Jesus as a blasphemer, this man was a seeker; he was curious. He was so curious about Eternity and Eternal things, he came to Jesus, one evening in the cover of night, away from the peer pressure of his fellow Pharisees, to talk to him about such things. Here is the account of that meeting ...

“There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him,

“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

Jesus answered and said to him,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus asked,

“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

Jesus answered,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus said to Him,

“How can these things be?”

Jesus answered and said to him,

“Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, we speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not Believe, how will you Believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever Believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever Believes in Him should not perish but have eternal, everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved ...”

If after reading this book, you would like to Connect with Eternity and have a “Happy Life”, then, like Nicodemus, like me, you must be Born Again. As you just read,

“... whoever Believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

That’s all you have to do.

That’s where Connecting with Eternity starts.

Now that you’ve learned how to Accept, Believe, and Connect ...

IF

... after all you have learned about how to have a “Happy Life”, you would like to Connect with Eternity ...

THEN

... wherever you are simply open your heart, open your mouth, and say these words:

“Jesus, I Believe that GOD loves me so much that he gave me ... you;

... his only begotten son, to die ... to die for me

... to Connect with me, and give me ... Eternity.

*Come into my heart Jesus, come into my life and save me...
forgive me of all unrighteousness, all selfishness, all sin.
Through your sacrificial death and bodily resurrection, give me
a new birth, make me a new creation, Born Again, by the
SPIRIT of my CREATOR.*

*Give me Everlasting Life ...
Give me Eternity!”*

*That’s it ... It’s that simple. You have just made the ultimate
Connection with **the** GOD and CREATOR of the Universe!
With **your** GOD and CREATOR. You have opened the door to a
whole new world ... there is so much more to learn, but don’t
worry, that’s what GOD’s HOLY SPIRIT is for ... to lead you
into all truth! For now, just soak it all in, meditate on all you
have already learned and go forward; in Love, Peace and Joy.*

This is just the beginning of your new ... “Happy Life!

Epilogue

Congratulations on finishing
the ABCs to a Happy Life.

I had no idea when I first started writing that it would be as lengthy as it turned out. In hindsight though, How could it not be? This topic is probably the most important you will ever have to deal with in your Life. Every Situation you will ever encounter from now on will be framed in the context of the question,

“What will I do to properly process this Situation, park it in a positive place and maintain the balance of my Happy Life?”

I’ve given you the tools to do exactly that. I realize however, it may take you some time to start living this Happy Life out in reality, on a day to day basis. It might take some time to get familiar with, start using and eventually master the tools. I want to encourage you to visit our website:

www.kyleandbeca.com

There are many resources there that you can take advantage of to learn and master the tools that much quicker. One of the best resources is the STAR Session Self Interview tool that I made

reference to and utilized in the book that will be immediately useful in helping you learn how to process any difficult Situation you may encounter going forward from here. While visiting, you can also plug into our Blog, Podcast and Video Channels as well. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

May GOD bless you, and keep you
May God make his face to shine upon you
And be gracious unto you
And give you Peace



Now go, and Live your Happy Life!



In this world you will have Tribulation ...
but be of Good Cheer!
For I have overcome the world!

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