

To
Be Broken Into
Freedom:
A Spiritual Journey

RENE LAFAUT, MSc.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to all those who struggle with mental illnesses in its many forms. I also dedicate this book to those mental health professionals, family members, and friends who step up to support people with mental illnesses to encourage recovery.

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1 Introduction

When I first renewed my Christian walk, I came to believe that I would never experience sorrow to the degree that I had previously. I was wrong! In fact I was wrong about a lot of things. Up until then I had an easy life. I knew very little about practicing faith, hope, love, and humility. During my dark and troubled journey, I would come to a deeper understanding and practice of these virtues by learning to hold onto my promise from God for me to be broken into freedom.

In this story, I have kept away from most of the problems I encountered with the unreasonableness of my former worldview, in case you are going through what I experienced. You will have enough problems of your own. The real issue – “can I trust in God’s goodness?” – I did not leave out, because it was central to me growing up in the faith. All other challenging difficulties were an outgrowth of this main issue.

In this book, when I use the words dark or darkness, I mean chaos, disorder, or confusion unless otherwise indicated. With them I mean to convey a lacking of the comforts normally associated with feeling God’s presence. This kind of darkness has to do with blind spots, or bends in the road; hence the need for faith in and commitment to the truth to navigate them. This darkness is accompanied with testing, weakness, and temptation. This kind of darkness isn’t evil in itself; instead, it’s the machinery that God uses to make souls alive to His grace when they persevere.

The journey described in this story is divided into five stages:

- The first period started in March of 1992 and lasted until December of the same year. It was my introduction to the severity of God's discipline in my life.
- The second period started in January of 1993, and lasted until August of the same year. It involves my march towards desolation and diagnosis. It was bitter sweet.
- The third period started in September of 1993 and ended in May of 2001. This period marks part of the road to recovery. It was very difficult to navigate through.
- The fourth period started on May 1, 2001 and ended around May 2009. It marks the gradual return to the land of the living. It involves leaving behind some major bends in the road that had tested my faith.
- The last period began around late May 2009 and continues (well past the twentieth anniversary of having mental illness). Just like Abraham the father of faith, I had to search out my promised Land. By January, 2018 God had dislodged the BIGGEST blocks I had towards loving others. Most of the negative symptoms from my MAJOR mental illness had become manageable. I am glad I waited for God to gradually move in my life. I am glad I never gave up!

It has been commented that in the early going this book gets

a bit heavy. This is true; when suffering takes place it is not a light subject. Yet, I hope that the reader will persevere. Some might think that suffering of any kind cannot be justified for any reason, and that the reasons I provide to motivate my suffering in the opening chapters are insufficient. Reading my other books one may be inclined to think differently.

It has also been commented that I appear to be too hard on myself through most of the events that are recorded in this book. I admit that I was very hard on myself before my Dark Night or journey and for a long time in it, but as God continues to purify me I find this attitude becoming less and less of an issue. I am celebrating grace more deeply as time goes by.

A word of caution before you begin to read: Many of the events, circumstances, and abstract symptoms described in this book, can be viewed in a myriad of ways. It is my hope that you will be patient and slow to close your mind to the explanations I give for them. Looking along a ray of light in a dark tool shed is different than looking at the same ray sideways when it reflects off the dust in the same tool shed. During my dark journey, I questioned whether the hand of God, the demons, my illness, my environment, my medication, my body, my spirit, or some combination of these caused certain events that I witnessed. Many times I was mystified as to what caused what.

It may appear while reading this book that I point to a reality or unreality but do not fully describe it to the satisfaction of

some. Describing color to a blind person, or sound to a deaf person is just as difficult.

Note: I use the words “spirit” or “soul” interchangeably when it comes to the non-physical part of a human’s makeup. With them I mean that which exists as consciousness, thought, feeling, and will, and is distinct from the human body.

All the events written about in this Manuscript are true to the best of my knowledge. I have written down my experiences as accurately as I can remember them. Since my memory can play tricks on me, there may be some errors. I might also be off on some of the dates by a few weeks or months here and there. As far as my theology is concerned: if I contradict a healthy interpretation of the Bible anywhere within this manuscript, I am wrong. I am most grateful for the gift of the Bible and the encouragement found in it.

Finally the reason I have written down my experiences is to inspire others going through difficult times to draw courage from them, and therefore persevere. If I can make it through deep and humbling waters with God’s grace, so can you. My prayer is, “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.”¹

¹ Ephesians 1:18

2 Snapshots From The Early Years

As a small child I grew up in what was then Apartheid South Africa, and eventually immigrated to Canada in 1976 with my family. There are many memories from which I could choose to share. One will see that I was willing to do both good and bad to fit in and belong. Here are some that I'd like to share with you.

My First Communion:

On the day that I was to participate in my First Communion, all dressed in white, I remember the Priest asking us children some questions about the faith in front of the whole congregation. I eagerly raised my hands and on two occasions was asked to give answers to certain questions. The only question I now remember being asked was: Where is God? I of course answered correctly. But when it was time for me to receive my First Communion, there had been a mix up in the paper work, and so I could not participate in it like the other children until a little while later. I would later see this event as God's way of saying that I wasn't ready for relationship with Him then, but that He knew I would later be ready for a friendship with Him (many years down the road).

A Would Be Peace Maker:

I started out as a happy boy for the most part, but also a loner on the play field at recess. At the end of each recess a bell

rang, and we were all expected to line up in front of our home classrooms. One warm day, the bell rang, and most of the kids started to line up except a few who were wrestling on the lawn nearby. As I watched I saw the principal far off walking towards the kids that were wrestling. Wanting to spare my playmates from getting into trouble, I decided to break up the fight and proceeded to divide and warn the combatants. We all quickly got into the line up as the principle was upon us. But the principal had seen me break up the wrestling match, and so got a hold of me by one of my legs, and held me upside down as he slapped me a number of times to discipline me. I definitely did not like what he was doing, thinking that I had done a good deed in breaking up the fight.

After the incident, I remember thinking to myself that if only I had of had a knife in my pocket when the principal was slapping me. My desire was that he would stab himself upon the knife while he spanked me. I know that I was very unrealistic back then, and I do see things differently now. I would not want the principal to stab himself on a knife in my pocket for such a small thing such as a spanking that may or may not have been deserved on my part.

A Would Be Curser:

As a child we used to live on a dead end street in a town called Springs in South Africa. Most of the families on our short street had children about my age. Most were English speaking and went to the same school. One day as I found

myself at the entrance of our street I came across two groups of kids – one English (British Descendants), and the other Afrikaans (Dutch descendants). They were calling each other names. One of the English kids invited me to call the Afrikaans kids names too. Even though my mother was of Dutch origin, I did so loudly, loyally and with much zeal. I used the African word for “f—k you” which is “footsack” and said to them “Afrikaners that are bad bananas” in Afrikaans. As you can see the swear words have similarities. As I participated the Afrikaans kids left...and I felt very disappointed that the fun was coming to an end so quickly. But there would be many other opportunities.

A Second Attempt At Being A Curser:

As a part of our school activities, the best athletes from all the surrounding schools would compete in races at a local stadium somewhere in the district that we lived in. Those kids that did not participate (like myself) sat up in the stands and cheered their respective school teams on. Only problem was that I saw this as an opportunity to continue the cursing and swearing at the Afrikaners like I did above. I started shouting out (as loud as I could) all the foul things I could think of at the Afrikaners. A very short while later an adult came over and sternly told me to stop it. This never to the best of my memory re-occurred as we left for Canada not long afterwards.

On Having My Bubble Of Pride Burst:

This was my day. Ever since I tasted leadership in Cubs as a

section leader I had begun to hunger for more. When I knew that the next step was Scouts I knew that I wanted the challenge. After winning the Cub of the year trophy I felt really good about myself. Imagine, "I-WAS-VOTED-CUB-OF-THE-YEAR." It started going to my head. My pride was visible here, but I had a much deeper problem with pride than just this that I was not aware of for the longest time.

"Can I please join the Scouts next year Dad?" I had pleaded many times that year. At the end of the Cub year I had even proudly told the adult Cub leaders my plans and they had seemed to rejoice with me.

And this was the day.

This was my day.

Years later, I couldn't remember anything else about that day except the events that transpired that night at the Scout meeting my parents took me to.

I was full of happiness and excitement as my Dad dropped me off at the King's Men Hall in the town of Devon that we lived in near Edmonton, Alberta.

I felt this was my day, smiling to myself and thinking, "I made it to the Scouts! Yes...oh boy! Only good things can happen from here onwards." I took big confident steps into the old hall, and almost ran to where the adult Scout leaders stood talking amongst themselves. Even before I had the attention of the closest adult my mouth was open with a confident look of glee.

“Hi, my name is RENÉ, and I spent SEVEN YEARS in Cubs.”

That wasn’t really true. I had only spent about three years in Cubs. But to my mind it sounded better to say, “I spent SEVEN YEARS in Cubs.”

They all looked at me and nodded to show that they understood. They welcomed me, and then seemed to ignore me. None of them looked upon my credentials the way I wanted or expected them to. So, thinking that they had not heard and understood, I tried to clear away the confusion and repeated the last part of my last sentence with more emphasis: “I SPENT SEVEN YEARS IN CUBS!” I looked with hope into the faces that stared at me.

But all they did was nod and softly tell me to join the other boys scattered about. I almost began to pout as I realized that they weren’t as nearly impressed with my credentials as I was. Didn’t they see that I was SCOUT OF THE YEAR MATERIAL? Shouldn’t I tell them I was CUB OF THE YEAR? I was confused, but decided to make the best of it and introduce myself to the other boy Scouts. Maybe they would see me in a better light. Clearly I thought without any doubt that they would naturally, sooner or later, begin to see my LEADERSHIP abilities.

As the night progressed we were divided into groups or sections that were asked to choose leaders and assistant leaders. I tried to become the leader but a more popular kid got voted in instead. I started to pout, but one of the boys tried to cheer me up with the possibility of being an assistant.

I brightened up, put my name forward, but another boy was chosen instead of me. I was heart broken. I went home that night sobbing and pouting about how unfair life could be.

On the way home, I met an older boy named Perry, and I naturally sought consolation from him. But he gave me none. Instead he sinisterly asked me: "Do you believe in God?" I said that I did. He then tried to argue me into seeing that God was unfair and not worthy of being loyal to. I did not like where this kid was coming from and declared even more loudly that I believed in my God and went on my way nursing my hurt pride.

After awhile it did not matter to me that I was not section leader and I enjoyed my years as a scout anyways.

A Would Be Backslider:

Years later in my teens, I remember putting forth an argument to my Dad that His God was not necessarily my god, and basically concluding that I did not need to go to church with the family anymore. My Dad wisely said that I could have my way, but instead of going to church, he would give me garden work to complete while the rest of the family was at church. I hurriedly changed my mind wanting to avoid the work, and once again participated in Mass like I used to.

The Passing Passions of My Late Teens And Early Twenties:

As a young person I was caught up in the concerns of the popular culture of my day. I worshipped the opposite sex to the point of idolatry. I loved the free and righteous West,

especially the Americans and hated those godless communists. I loved the weapons of war (especially those from the West). I loved Michael Jackson's music. I loved the Edmonton Oilers Hockey team to the point of worship and equally hated the Calgary Flames and the Montreal Canadians because I saw them as threats. In the summer I loved to play tennis and watch professionals like John McEnroe and Evan Lendl play on TV. I was loyal to the Coke Classic soft drink and hated Pepsi Cola (and loved asking others what their opinions were on this very important matter). I loved mathematics and wanted to become either a math teacher in the school system or a professor in a college or university. These are the things that were important to me for some time. As you can see they were really serious.

Part I: The Promise

By faith Abraham, when called to go to the place
he would later receive as his inheritance,
obeyed and went, even though he did not know where
he was going. (Hebrews 11:8)

My child, if you aspire to serve the Lord,
prepare yourself for an ordeal.
(Ben Sira 2:1, Jerusalem Bible)

3 Pride Goes Before The Fall

I was born into nominal Christian family. My Dad believed, my Mother wanted to go to church but only found Jesus later in life. As I grew up I believed the Scriptures with childlike faith, but I did not have a connection with God, or what some describe as a personal relationship with God through Jesus. With the onset of puberty, I became like the prodigal son, dead in my trespasses, and separated from God in my sins. I never outright rejected or disowned Jesus with words, but my life was not orientated towards Him.

Later on in the summer of 1989, just before I started a MSc. program in mathematics at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, I discovered Jesus because of the prayers my mother and father said for me. It was a life-changing encounter with the Most High God, and it filled me with joy and anticipation of good things to come. It was the most important emotional high point in my life.

Shortly after deciding to follow Jesus, someone gave me a little red book to read called: *The Greatest Thing In The World*.² Although I came to God because of His love for me, my motives for seeking God out had more to do with me wanting to love others than with me wanting to be loved. This little book inspired me to love, and so I began to dig down into my little heart to love people with my kind of love.

² Henry Drummond, *The Greatest thing in the World*, World Bible Publishers, Inc.,

Having very little character (the ability, knowledge and willingness to love), my efforts to love did not last too long. At first, I tried reading the chapter on love in the Bible called 1 Corinthians 13 every day, but that got too difficult because I tried to force things. I approached love the same way I pursued other interests at the time: I pursued it with pressure, hardness, anger, ignorance, hatred, and being hard on myself. So, I gave up quickly and opted for a shallow love life. Instead, I decided to read the rest of the Bible. Unfortunately my motives to love slowly gave way to an empty desire to have a reputation of being knowledgeable about spiritual matters including the Bible.

I may have been a new creation because God touched my heart, but years of living life on my own terms had wreaked havoc on my spiritual state. The emotional high point surrounding my conversion did motivate me for a while, but I could not sustain it – my heart was far too shallow.

At the end of the summer of 1991, I moved to Vancouver, BC to begin a Ph.D. program in mathematics at UBC. I was to study Optimization and Non-smooth Analysis with Dr. Philip Loewen. I lived on Campus at a residence called VST, and met two special people, Michelle and Fran, who were to become good friends. I joined a Christian club on campus called University Christian Ministries (UCM), and started to attend an Evangelical church called University Chapel. All were good influences.

I was not happy in Vancouver, even if I did not admit it to

myself at the time. I did not like Vancouver, and this contributed towards my desire for something new. The something 'new' did not appear until February in 1992 when I went to an *Overflowing Grace Conference*, put on by my church, University Chapel.

I saw the message from the conference as something new. It was not! Essentially, the message was that God's grace (His empowering presence) was available to the humble. But the problem was that my understanding and practice of humility and pride were altogether unbiblical, besides I didn't know it at the time but I had a lot of pride. I also wrongly believed that God's grace would make life easier, but with God's grace, more responsibilities and heavier crosses are inevitable with spiritual growth. So, I started to have even more pride because of my slant on the new ideas I encountered. So much so, that Jesus had to do something drastic about my situation. Otherwise He would have to spit me out of His mouth because of my pride.³

My pride showed up in me judging people and having a lack of compassion and active love for people because tolerance and love spring from humility. I don't want to give a full account of what my pride was like during this time, because I didn't see it in myself until later on when God opened my eyes to it (For a detailed look at what my pride looked like before and after my dark journey see my self-help book called *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil So Love*

³ Cf. Revelation 3:16

Can Thrive as it gives many personal examples).

The person who avoids challenges and problems that can bring spiritual growth is losing out on what life has to offer. Moreover, we can't solve all our problems on earth here at once. Yet, this is what I wanted to do with what I learned at the *Overflowing Grace Conference*. I thought that all my struggling would disappear with God's grace – how foolish! We ought not to delight so much with increasing our knowledge, but rather in doing God's will which is to love. We think that the more knowledge we have the easier life will get. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."⁴ If there are no struggles or efforts then chances are there is no love because one is seeking gratification instead of facing relational challenges.

One of my favorite passages at the time was the following:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.⁵

Unfortunately, I was unaware of the true condition my heart was in at the time. Humility finds joy in the truth; truth joined to grace. It was so easy for me to bring a Bible verse like this to mind often, to find joy in it, to think that all was well. If you have never seen your own pride for what it is, like me, you will also fall into the danger of being a hypocrite. You will

⁴ 1 Corinthians 8:1

⁵ Philippians 4:8

think that you are doing one thing when in reality you are doing the opposite. “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”⁶

I remember dismissing life in the ordinary sense of it. I wanted more – I still remember praying to God that I might become a martyr. I was really out to lunch; life is difficult enough as it is. I also wanted to be a modern day apostle. But my motives were wrong – I wanted to be recognized as an authority when it came to interpreting Scripture. If I had studied the lives of the New Testament apostles, I would have learned that they had the hardest of lives. They were made out of stronger stuff than I. Where I was soft they were hard; where they were soft I was hard. They were much more passionate, more loving, more wise, and more humble than I was at that time.⁷

In this brief span of time I remember going to a basketball game, and while there, I looked at the people who surrounded me and judged them to be proud without evidence. I started walking more and more in the flesh as opposed to the Spirit thinking I was more special than others.

Being cautiously aware that one can sabotage God’s will for one’s life should not be overlooked, or disregarded. I thought I could do no wrong, but landed up hurting people, pushing people away, and I sabotaged my future because my pride was growing with leaps and bounds.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:12

⁷ Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23-27

Yes, it is true that Satan and his kingdom are our real enemies. But we can participate in there cruel plots to hurt, limit, restrain, and curse what God wants to bless. But it is Satan who leads us into folly, temptation, and sin in order to lead us away from God. Satan is our true enemy. Satan's best weapon is lying to us. He wields power over us to the degree that we believe him. Anything done out of pride will bear bad fruit and that is what I did here. If we think we are invincible which is what I really believed (which is a lie from the pit of Hell) then I am sabotaging God's will for my life, giving Satan a foothold in my life... and in that sense I am an enemy of myself.

Adam the first man was created in the image of God and therefore good, but he fell into sin along with his wife Eve. Consequently, all of humanity has inherited these two attributes – the capacity to do good deeds, but also attracted towards doing evil.

God warned me one day while I was sitting, semi-interested, in a math class at UBC. The Holy Spirit put a “foreign writing” into my mind. It was not like anything I'd ever experienced before and it said for me to feed God's sheep.

Much can be said about these words in relation to Saint Peter, but what did they mean to me at the time? I merely shrugged them off with a very complacent and insensitive attitude saying that I already did enough. At this point in my walk, if I chose to obey the command, in all likelihood I would not have had to go through the discipline of a Dark Night (or

journey) like Saint John of the Cross described in his writings.

Jesus requests this from His sheep that think that their crosses are too small for them. That they have mastered the basics in Christian living, that they are too good for the world, and are bored with what they think God has asked them to do:

You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.⁸

I thought I was rich – and that I was knowledgeable, but my theologizing had become rigid and legalistic because I lacked the willingness to grow in loving people. I majored on minor points, and minored on major issues. I was also jealous of my friend Fran because she was doing God's will by witnessing to others. I suspected unfairness from God on His part, but that was not the problem. I was simply getting delusional and more lazy!

Looking back on the *Overflowing Grace Conference*, I now realize that there was a lot of good in the seminars.

The conference seemingly had all of the answers to my

⁸ Revelation 3:17-19, (emphasis mine)

questions. I was very impressed with the speakers. So I bought the tapes recording the sermons given there. I started to listen to them over and over again, copying parts of them out on paper. I became obsessed with the material.

The fact that I thought I knew and understood it all after the conference. Combined with me buying into the belief that one couldn't lose one's salvation once one was saved. Made me dangerously lower my guard when it came to mortifying my own sins especially my pride. This became a volatile mix, and made me theologically and relationally unstable.

I even ventured to ask why I didn't have the main speaker at the conference as my pastor in Edmonton Alberta when I lived there. I was full of self-importance. What a mess!

I may have thought I had the answers to life's questions, but God would soon change the questions.

4 The Promise

These developments progressively grew far worse, but God is Love. During this time I was still going to a UCM Bible study, and this is where God decided to change the course of my life yet once again. One night in late March in 1992, Rod Young, a member of our group, had prophecies from God for each person there. For me the words were “to be broken into freedom”. Rod asked me if he should pray for it. I hesitated at the idea of being broken – it strongly suggested pain! I didn’t want the pain, but I consented because I wanted God’s plan for my life. God was totally fair about it. God gave me a choice – either brokenness and then freedom, or a gradual spiritual death because of my pride. I had the choice, and so I decided to choose the more difficult road to life. A short time later events began to unfold.

Abraham the father of faith was also given a promise, and after he received it, he left what was familiar and went out not knowing where he was going.⁹ In the same way, the inauguration of God’s promise to me also brought disorientation, and the emergence of a huge bend in the road. I would go from being certain about my position in life to overwhelming insecurity and uncertainty. The natural light would fade fast only to leave me walking in darkness. I would also begin to experience alarming growing pains.

Before I started my studies at UBC, I met another Christian on

⁹ Cf. Hebrews 11:8

campus. She told me about an operation on her eyes that she had undergone to restore her vision. She said that after her surgery, she was forced to lie on her back in darkness because of bandages over her eyes. And that she had to do this for a year so that her eyes could heal. She also said that she had grown in her faith because of the experience. I didn't realize it then, but I later took this meeting with her to be a prophetic Godsend.

The first sign that there was something wrong occurred in the VST cafeteria while eating supper. I was alone, and Felix, a seminary student with the gift of prophecy, came up to me, and angrily announced to me that I could lose my salvation. I replied to the effect that my relationship with God was fine. Nevertheless, his words went home to me like a bullet in my heart. I went to my room thinking that yes, something was wrong, and in my heart I knew it, even though there was as yet nothing wrong with my mental health.

A short time later I went with Felix, his fiancée, and a friend for a car ride. That night in the car my journey into darkness began – I was given an illness that would not be diagnosed for a long time to come. Later on I found out that this is common with people who get this kind of illness.

It was something that would push me into a crisis of faith. Something that would tear down my stubborn independence from God. Something that would make me into a perseverer. Something that would make me into a more patient person. Something that would challenge my selfishness, and pride.

Something that would grant me a more loving heart if that is what I chose to remain committed to. Something that would act as an instrument in separating the light from the darkness inside of me. Something that would help make me into the person I always wanted to be inside.

It happened all at once; something went wrong with the way my mind functioned. The comfortable and secure environment in my mind where my consciousness is was removed. There was an actual physical sensation (even though there are no pain sensors in the brain). Certain functions of the brain ceased and therefore my spirit - body connection was partially cut off. The brain functions would deteriorate over time. I was glad that God took that moment to plunge me into darkness – I was among friends.

Not long after this I remember being in my room at VST and deciding to listen to some music by Keith Green. Did I ever get a surprise – something applied almost finger like pressure to my throat. No other human was in the room with me. My first reaction after the initial violation was to think that somehow I was demonized. This was not a panic attack. The attack persisted, and I decided to scream. This only worsened it! I began to cry, and to feel sorry for myself. Whatever was attacking me was pleased with its business thus far, because now it stroked my chin and mouth too while all the time exerting pressure on my throat. I then decided to calm down, and when I did, the attack ceased. Thinking the worst, I promptly went and found Felix to have the demons I thought were in me exorcised out of me.

I told Felix what I thought my problem was with tears. He took the Bible and was about to search it believing that it would provide the needed guidance, when he suddenly received a word of knowledge from God for me. It was, “God loves you”. What I had experienced was a demon attack, and I was not demonized. That was the first and last demon attack that I would have in a while. Felix gave me the assignment of going through the Bible and looking up all the places where it said that God was faithful and loving.

After I became ill, my moods became erratic. They went up high when I remembered the goodness of God, and way down when I saw He wasn’t doing anything to remedy my situation. I still remember going for a walk at a beach near UBC in Vancouver, and while at the seashore I became so angry with God that I swore a bunch of profanities at Him. I felt really bad about doing this afterwards, but it was too late – I couldn’t undo a single word. Would God forgive me? I thought that I had committed the unpardonable sin. Later, I phoned my father, and he assured me that I hadn’t committed that sin. I was very relieved.

On a Friday night, about a month or so before my journey into darkness began, I remember going to a church service where one of the speakers was a missionary. The missionary told a story to make a point about where our relationships with God were at the time. The story goes like this:

In a chaotic part of the world where the right of rule often lies with those bearing arms, a church was holding

a meeting when in walked a band of guerrillas. They promptly demanded all those who did not want to deny their faith to stand up and separate themselves from the others. After the guerrillas challenged the crowd with their weapons the congregation divided.

The leader of the guerrillas then lectured those who had not stood up for their supposed faith. He said that they were what was wrong with the country. The guerrillas then promptly shot those who had not stood up for their professed faith. Leaving those who had professed their faith standing. Apologizing for the interruption the guerrillas left.

Having gotten our attention with this story, the missionary then turned to us, and asked all who were willing to die for Jesus to stand up. I did along with others, just like Peter the apostle claimed before he denied Jesus three times. This confidence was now being tested in an unexpected way!

Many people would willingly die for their faith out of love for God. But how many of us would suffer for our faith? When prompted by Rod Young with God's promise to be broken into freedom, I said a very reluctant "Yes" to being broken. Little did I know what I was embarking on.

I still remember being in my room at VST shortly after my journey into darkness began, with my friend Alex Pruss encouraging me onward with the promise of Heaven if I overcame my trials. I peered into my heart, felt the pain that was upon me and felt overwhelmed. I was willing, but my

pain-racked flesh wasn't – I couldn't see a way through the pain, and so I cried out loudly, "I can't, I can't go on!" We are always far more capable of suffering than we think, as I would learn.

I was in a state of shock after I was given this illness.

Because this new cross was so heavy to begin with, I needed encouragement from many sources, one of which was from pastor David Chotka. David took me to the last chapter from the Gospel of Luke that in part describes Jesus' appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

The two disciples' conceptions of who Jesus was had been shattered because of His recent crucifixion. They felt the loss of Jesus, and so David said I should be able to relate to them well. To them, the world appeared to be upside down; it seemed that darkness had appeared to forever take away the light. One week Jesus seemed to be invincible, like with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem when the crowds praised and honored Him. Yet a short while later He was crucified. What had happened? Had they seen things the right way before? How had Jesus changed before their very eyes? What kind of a Messiah was He? Or, was He the Messiah? Was this a cruel joke? These are some of the same questions that I was faced with now.

In short, the kind and tenderhearted Jesus I had known had been transformed in my mind. Was He still the same Jesus I had known? In some ways this was true, but not so in many other ways. My ideas of who He was would have to undergo

many revisions. What I found so hard to accept – the seemingly drastic discipline – I would later be thankful for, as it would teach me about weakness, and the need to be teachable.

Another question that the two disciples also had was: “Why had Jesus been taken away from them?” I felt the same way in my plight. David tried to encourage me with the idea that Jesus was in the midst of the chaos with me. I couldn’t physically see Him then, but looking back I know that He was.

I briefly tried to comfort myself with food, but when that didn’t work I began to fast regularly. I began to worry over whether or not one could lose one’s salvation. My reasoning was that if I could lose it then I most likely would because of the difficulty I already felt in this trial. I felt completely inadequate. At this time I painted the watercolor entitled “It

Was Night I”



I told myself that my faith in Jesus giving His life on the cross, which is what the picture portrayed, would get me through this trial.

As my illness progressed, things got more difficult. When I tried to think about moral issues or biblical truths and arguments, I could no longer “feel” the premises. There was no connection in the logic used from one point to the next. This was terrifying! Whenever I mentioned my symptoms to any Christians (I only trusted Christians at the time), they simply said, “We walk by faith not by sight!” This advice was practical, and I needed to do as they said, but it was frightening to me. Moreover, it did not solve my immediate

concern – how am I to get better? If I had not spiritualized it so much, I may have found help sooner. No wonder so many people with mental illnesses commit suicide because they don't know where or how to get help!

When I first re-dedicated my life to Jesus, the Good News or Gospel was very sweet to my mouth. That changed – the words from the Bible became bitter. The prophet Ezekiel and later on the apostle John reported eating scrolls given to them by God. They both found the scrolls sweet as honey in the eating, but of bitter after-taste.¹⁰ When I first became ill and searched the Scriptures for comfort, Hebrews 10:38 stood out: “but my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back I will not be pleased with him.” This did not comfort me. Instead it tasted bitter!

Exercising faith while in the bend of a road or in the darkness is entirely different than when things are going well.

My intellect was no longer anchored in the comfort, ease, and in what I used to experience as reality. Faith was required. This made me very defensive, and I started to repeat my arguments on dearly held beliefs over and over again in my head. Before long I began to find contradictions in my past thinking. I began to see how sloppy my theology was. Because of my illness, I was pushed into a crisis of faith. There are things that can be explained with reasonable premises, and then there is the realm of mystery. How could a finite mind comprehend it all? Where did faith and knowledge

¹⁰ Cf. Ezekiel 3:3-14, and Revelation 10:8-10

meet and depart? Questions, questions, and more questions slipped into my mind. God was humbling me!

One of the things I continued to do during this time was search for perspective over and over again to calm my mind and heart. I also knew many of the questions I asked myself were ill posed given the sort of premises I started with. That is, either no solution existed (because the question didn't make sense), or at least two contradictory conclusions existed (the result of having different interpretations of the same premises if the premises are consistent, or having altogether contradictory premises). Even if the questions were well posed there was no guarantee that the conclusions were logically deducible from the premises by me.

Mysteries also pestered me – questions like, “How did God do this or that recorded event in the Bible?” or, “How does God know portions of the future?” gave me no rest! Did God play something like a chess game with the forces of darkness in order to bring this or that about? Could He also tell what we would do because of the inertia created by “our desires”, “our wills”, “our personalities”, “our energies”, “our attitudes” and the predictability of “our human nature”? Or, did He know everything just because He was God? This went on, and on...

Another way to describe what was happening to my mind is to compare it to the sand and waves on a beach. Thinking a thought was comparable to writing with my finger on the sand. No sooner was it thought in my mind or written in the

sand when the doubt or waves washed over and obliterated it. I could no longer hold onto the premises in a meaningful way. I began to sweat profusely, lost more and more weight, went for longer and longer walks, and became more and more introverted. My focus turned inwards – could I solve my problems? My world was falling apart.

Because I was in shock very early on, God provided me with a faith builder on a Sunday when I went to a church called “Church on the Way” instead of University Chapel. I don’t remember the sermon anymore, but I do remember that near the end of the service there was a time of sharing. It was then that one of the pastors, David Chotka, mentioned that his wife had received a word from the Lord that morning, but she was unable to be at church that day. The word was, “You are not one of those who fall back,” an echo of Hebrews 10:39.

During this time a woman who was standing up at the front of the building asked for prayer. I rushed up and embraced her only to find out that my embrace gave her pain – she had cancer. After the prayer I went up to David in tears seeking reassurances about my predicament. He said that the words his wife had received that morning were for me – I was overjoyed!

Another sign that God gave me showing He still loved me, was the following vision given to my godmother Anita Patel and told in her own words:

I can remember... holding this blond two-year old on my

lap and feeling his preciousness as only a mother feels for her own child, and it was you [Rene]. And when I came out of the vision so to speak I was crying for the loss of it – just like a flashback memory – only even more real and with greater psychological force. Like when you wake up from a dream and it is more real than your actual reality – terribly strong.

When I was told about this vision, it brought encouragement. It also was God's way of telling me that spiritually speaking I was still a two-year old babe. Another miracle occurred when my friends Alex Pruss, and Valerie Denka, together with myself began a Bible study. It occurred just prior to one of our meetings while I was fighting and struggling inside to navigate through the darkness. Since Alex was late I went to check for him.

On my way outside I decided to stop the struggle to continue navigating through the darkness. At that time Alex was standing before me, but more importantly God sent a bird to flutter about my head (so as to say, "Don't give up, Rene"). The bird meant that I ought to continue the struggle – this I did. Birds normally keep their distance from humans. This bird actually flew back and forth in an arc about my head trying to get my attention. It was from God!

It was a new chapter in my life. Those that knew me at the time found out very soon that things had changed! I started reaching out for help to those closest to me. I even went to see a psychologist at UBC's Student Services on the advice of

Kevin the leader of UCM at the time.

I could not slow down my thought processes. My thoughts alarmed me too much – I did not like where they would take me. It was like learning to swim all over again. The one moment I would be breathing air, and then the next moment I would be under water struggling desperately to get to the top for relief. Then I would get water in my mouth and try to spit it out. Doubt from unanswered questions fueled my anxiety and my inability to stop thinking things through over and over again. When I first came to Vancouver in 1991, the Lord had given me the following verse:

In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength,¹¹

The problem was that I was very ineffective in putting it into practice. If only I had read the verses that come after this one perhaps I would have applied myself better! The remaining verses are:

but you would have none of it.
You said ‘No, we will flee on horses.’
Therefore you will flee
You said, ‘we will ride on swift horses!’
Therefore your pursuers will be swift!
A thousand will flee at the threat of one;
At the threat of five you will all flee away,

¹¹ Isaiah 30:15

till you are left like a flagstaff on a mountain top
like a banner on a hill.¹²

They describe what happened to me early on in my journey through darkness. The horses or my thoughts were indeed swift. The pursuers (doubts, questions, and alternative ideas) were swifter still. So I too could lament with the Psalmist:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.
There on the poplar we hung our harps,
for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How can we sing the songs of the LORD
while in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
may my right hand forget [its skill].¹³

The possibility of never seeing the Promised Land again was very real to me. Would I give in to temptation and forsake my God, or would I suffer and be humbled by God and in time receive the promised freedom? Seeking comfort I began to recite the Psalms. I also began to sing many spiritual songs in an attempt to recover my joy – it didn't work. I had a lot of self-pity.

Seeing the psychologist helped somewhat; he likened my

¹² Isaiah 30:16-17

¹³ Psalm 137:1-5

thinking to the ringing of a bell. The bell was supposedly gigantic, and the best way to stop it from gonging was to let it ring out, not by pulling on the rope attached to the bell as I was apparently doing. The moral of the story is that as time went on things would work themselves out – the mind would quiet itself down as I got used to where I was.

Shortly after I got a copy of a work entitled *The Dark Night* by Saint John of the Cross¹⁴, I stopped seeing the psychologist. Saint John of the Cross lived from 1542 to 1591, when there weren't any psychologists. So I thought that if people could get through back then what I was experiencing now, why bother visiting a psychologist? This was a big mistake! I still was not diagnosed.

During this time I was still regularly attending University Chapel. Faced with the puzzle of my new circumstances, I began wondering how I'd earned this suffering. God was quick to answer me. At the tail end of a church service during a time of praying and sharing, a woman near the back of the building called out in a loud but trembling voice, "Everyone in this church is forgiven." I might have doubted her, but I could see it was something she was not in the habit of doing. This made me believe that she had spoken what God had revealed to her. From this I deduced that God was not punishing me to take revenge on me for my sins – He had forgiven me, and what I was undergoing was discipline.¹⁵

¹⁴ Cf. K Kavanaugh, O.C.D, O Rodriguez, O.C.D, *The Collected Works Of St. John Of The Cross*, ICS Publications (1991), pp. 353-457

¹⁵ Cf. Hebrews 12

One Sunday, my friend Dan Huget came to visit me and we went to University Chapel together. God used the time there to remind me that He was still in me. Dan and I decided to sit on the right side of the building near the back. During the time when the community was praying and sharing, a man seated behind me began to speak out loudly, and what he had to say was directed to me. I don't remember much of what he said, but what I do remember him telling me is to look inside of myself. When I did this, the Holy Spirit made itself known to me via an "inner hug." It was very comforting!

Very early on into my illness, shortly before the end of UCM for that school year, UCM held a movie night. The movie shown that night was *Chariots Of Fire*. The spiritual food for the journey I took from this movie was from one of the runners named Eric Liddell. He compared the Christian walk to a race, and in order to win a prize in the race, one had to dig deep into the heart. One had to drive with effort towards the finish line despite the ache and fatigue of the body.

Because I became ill in March of 1992, and because the UCM Bible study finished, I promptly joined three others; one with Kevin, one with Felix, and one with David. I was frantic for help. So soon after my journey through darkness began, I thought that I already had gone through my share of brokenness. I initially put my hope in earnest prayer to God. I would pray with those whom I respected for God to grant me the promised freedom. But nothing happened after a few months of pleading with God. God was not into instant gratification like I was. It would take a long while for the shock

to wear off. Later I would begin the process of accepting my lot.

I lost confidence in my own opinions and began to give more and more credence to what others said. God was humbling me! Saint John of the Cross said:

To reach a new and unknown land and journey along unknown roads, travelers cannot be guided by their knowledge and seek guidance from others. Obviously they cannot reach new territory or attain this added knowledge if they do not take these new and unknown roads and abandon those familiar ones. Similarly, people learning new details about their art or trade must work in darkness and not with what they already know. If they refuse to lay aside their former knowledge, they will never make any further progress. The soul, too, when it advances, walks in darkness and unknowing.¹⁶

Abandoning the well-trodden ruts of my diseased world-view or theology in which I had formerly taken pride, and trading it in for more mystery, humility, faith, hope, and love is what I was embarking on. Certainly guidance of some sort ought to be sought, preferably from the mature in Christ – those who have gone through similar trials.

Whenever we tackle something new, and there are some failures, or things get difficult, we generally begin to believe that we have made a mistake in pursuing that something new

¹⁶ K Kavanaugh, O.C.D, O Rodriguez, O.C.D, *The Collected Works Of St. John Of The Cross*, ICS Publications (1991), p. 433, or N. 2. 16. 7.

unless we have sturdy hope. Even God felt the same way when He grieved that He had made human beings as the book of Genesis records. And this is the way I felt early on in my journey through darkness. In my desperation I passionately told people that I didn't want to change, but instead I wanted things to be the way they had been. I said this for two reasons: (1) because I was afraid of the changes that the future might bring, and (2) because deep down inside I thought I was okay the way I was. I was hesitant to accept the truth that we humans are always changing in healthy or sick ways. The mind might be stagnant but what is in the heart grows like beliefs, loyalties, commitments, attitudes, and energies either good or bad.

Another event that took place early on while I was grappling and struggling to hold onto my faith was at one of the Bible studies that I attended. During the time of closing prayer in which we were seated in a circle, Tim Townshed, who sat beside me, prophesied – it was as though he went through a personality change. He became bold and powerful; he lurched forward and lovingly blurted out: “Hold onto My promise.”

Tim knew very little about my situation, and certainly he knew nothing about my promise from God to be broken into freedom. It was Jesus commanding me to hold onto the promise. With renewed effort I walked forth into desolation and pain.

I felt hollow like bamboo; like a gutted fish, or an empty bag. I

felt like a faltering wick. Things grew darker as the storm continued to brew. My faith was erratic.

Part II: To Be Broken

Do not give the devil a foothold
(Cf. Ephesians 4:27)

In your struggle against sin,
you have not yet resisted to the point
of shedding your blood. (Hebrews 12:4)

A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.' (Luke 13:6-9 NRSV)

5 A Devil's Foothold

Although initially God had kindly told me through Felix that I was not demonized; somehow afterwards I did become inhabited by a demon through not wearing the full armor of God.¹⁷

Because I saw myself as having so little faith, I wanted a certain spiritual gift from God that would help build me up in the faith. The only problem was that I had more faith in Satan giving me a counterfeit gift, than in God giving me a perfect gift. I didn't want a gift (or rather a curse) from the devil, but I did grant him a foothold in my life and he took it.¹⁸

Christians wear spiritual armor for good reasons. Briefly believing that Satan had more power than God did in granting me a spiritual gift was the flaw or weakness in my spiritual armor. I did this while someone prayed with me. Because of what I said, the demons knew I was an easy target. I doubted the love and protection of God. I truly believed that somehow the devil could sneak into my life even though he wasn't wanted. I know that God didn't punish me by giving me a demon because of my lack of faith, but He couldn't do for me

¹⁷ Demonization of Christians is possible and a historic fact -- consider John and Paula Sandford who are modern day counselors/ spiritual directors, and who have witnessed demonization of some Christians as they record in their book: John and Paula Sandford, *Healing The Wounded Spirit*, Victory House, Inc. (1985), p. 328. Or, for another different, yet honest and helpful look into this subject, see Chapter 11: The Danger Of Losing Control, by Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, Harvest House Publishers (1990), pp.171-181.

¹⁸ Cf. Ephesians 4:27

what I was supposed to do for myself. That is, to believe in His saving power. He did give me the grace to believe, but the decision was mine whether to act on it.

When the demon entered my body I was conscious that a change had occurred but I was unaware of what because I was so confused about what was happening.

I don't want to scare anyone away from asking God for the gifts of the Spirit. Seek for those good gifts from God, but don't give power to the demons that they wouldn't otherwise have. Wear the full armor of God.

Afterwards I became even more disoriented and confused – things happened so quickly. As the darkness increased so did the stress I felt. I didn't know how to view things properly, and so at first I didn't recognize things for what they were. This included the way I viewed the symptoms of demonization that I experienced. Being used to the light, the darkness temporarily blinded me. I was walking along new paths, and so the maps (or world-view) I had depended on up until now gave very little direction here.

The first symptom I had that I later attributed to demonization was the following. I remember going to one of the beaches of English Bay in Vancouver, and while I was there my senses became flooded with a energy that seemed to have the property of lust for every evil thing. It bathed or surrounded my consciousness, and was like a torrent, a dark river flowing through my body, a magnetic force. It was imposed upon my senses; it did not come from my spirit,

soul, or body. It was foreign. This was not the only symptom but it is the first.

About that time I began to have a real fear of hell because of the first symptom of “imposed energy-lust.” It was like a tug-a-war, like sitting on a fence – on one side was a sea of lust, and on the other despair and the fear of hell. The problem was that I could not remain seated or balanced on the fence for long because both forces were at work trying to overwhelm me. It took a real effort to fight off both of these states for any length of time, but gradually through the grace of God I persevered to the point where this construct diminished to zero.

It was around June of 1992 when my mom and dad came to visit me in Vancouver in response to their son’s darkened phone calls and letters. When they saw that the situation was not favorable they decided to take me home with them to Devon, Alberta. I was grateful.

When we got to Devon, they immediately made me useful by letting me do chores. This was helpful in creating a diversion in my mind so I could rest from my messy theological constructs for brief periods. One moment I would have a solution to a problem, and the next moment I would be in despair because there was some flaw in my solution or I just didn’t have the courage and faith to believe the solution. When my thoughts became too oppressive my Mom told me to praise Jesus. Surprisingly it worked; praising God drove away the need to solve the mysteries that bothered me.

Another symptom of me being demonized were the attacks I experienced around my throat, although I had them before and after while not demonized. The only difference was that now I felt the demon reach up and out of my chest for my throat. I tried to fight this off with the Name of Jesus, but every time I did this, a power struggle would start. The attacks were repeated regularly in this way while I was demonized.

As I adjusted to my situation, nearly two months passed and it was decided that I should go back to Vancouver to continue in my doctorate program. I had not applied early enough for re-admission to the VST residence on campus, so there was no place for me to stay. However, Dad knew some people in BC who might be able to help and phoned them. Thankfully they knew Hugh and Mildred Dempster who lived close to UBC, and who were willing to take me in.

It was about this time that I lost partial control over my facial muscles. They simply just tightened up and felt hard and unresponsive – it was also a symptom of demonization.

The following is a prayer I wrote to God during this time.

Chase me as You did when I was young
Come quickly, really quick please,
see I am waiting for you,
keeping myself clean as a virgin
as best as I can
O be Thou my Light
Be Thou my wind

Be Thou my foundation
O Father, grant me Your shelter, Your rest
I long for you day and night
Nothing else satisfies me like you do
O Father come, come quickly
Grant me oil for my lamp...

The first line laments the fact that God pursued me early on, but now He was hiding Himself from me. The middle lines show my poverty without God. The last line shows my dependence on God to nourish my commitment to Him and my faith in Him.

The only highlight at school was that I managed to pass two of my comprehensive exams.

Shortly before Christmas I had a vision. One morning I woke up and sat up in my bed. I proceeded to look towards the door on my left, and in walked a large lion that climbed up onto my bed and came right up to me, face to face. I looked at it and reached my hand out to touch its forehead with the tip of my finger. After I withdrew my finger the lion vanished.

The meaning of this vision became apparent to me later on that day. It happened like this: A question popped into my mind, "How do you know that God is good?" I had always believed that He was good, but the question had not entered my mind in this way before, so direct, so pressing, and so urgent. It filled me with dread. Now I wanted absolute proof to cure my fears in this trial.

I wanted to know why I believed that God is absolutely good. How do you prove God is good? It takes faith to know anything. Courage to believe in harsh circumstances proves elusive to the proud, and that's the rub! The lion was symbolic of Satan, and the question that had popped into my mind was his. Through my pains, sufferings, and disappointments, one of Satan's minions would be there to remind me of this question hoping to convince me of his master's lies.

The next sign of demonization occurred while I was painting *Blessed Are Those Who Wait On The Lord*:



As the painting of the picture drew to completion, the picture began to glow brilliantly, as if it were powered by a gigantic

flashlight, and not because of my skill as a painter. This could have puffed up my pride, but I rejected it as a hallucination from demons. How this distortion in my mind happened to me I did not ponder, I had enough questions I couldn't answer.

I viewed myself as a pilgrim wandering in the wilderness but not lost to God's sight. What I wanted were roots that reach down deeply into God, and which are always growing into Him.

Another strange experience occurred to me in the Dempsters' back yard. As I walked up the path towards the house, my mind was preoccupied with finding out what was wrong with me. All of a sudden, my mouth opened by itself, and out of it came this beastly and loud roar of anger. It was so unexpected, because I was not angry at the time. It was not the suppressed anger of my childhood finally being released. It was the manifestation of a demon still hiding within me because of my own foolishness and ignorance.

The next manifestation of demonization was the loss of feeling in my chest. However, if I tried to massage the chest or somehow tighten my muscles by breathing in, there was a constricting sensation about the nerves in the center of the chest.

As Christmas approached, the question: "How do I know that God is good?" began to grow in power as though life and death were at stake. My world-view was in crisis; my innermost being was on the verge of being torn down. A new

person was to emerge with a new world-view founded on a surer foundation, although I could not see this at the time.

For my birthday I received a card from my mother. On the outside of the card was a needlepoint picture of a man jumping in the air for joy. In the background was the sun rising above the horizon. On the inside of the card were the words, "My saving power will rise on you like the sun."¹⁹ This gave me hope, and later proved to be prophetic!

That December I flew to Alberta to be with my family. While there, I felt the hostility of the demon in me towards Mom and Dad. The demon also began to oppress my spirit or consciousness by inflicting pain on it. The demon forced or pushed my consciousness or spirit down my head towards my throat. But each time it did this, it promptly gave up, and my spirit returned to where my brain was located. I don't know for absolute certainty, but perhaps the demon wanted to take over the rest of my body to do some serious harm to those I loved. I believe that God prevented this from happening.

Thankfully God knew I was demonized, and led Mom to perform an exorcism on me. She used the book called *The Bondage Breaker* as a guide through the exorcism. It has a lot of helpful truth on the subject. It is helpful to those who are confused about reality, and are struggling to fight off lies from the devil about God's goodness. When one is grounded in the truth of God's goodness the journey becomes more bearable and God is able to guide one better through the darkness.

¹⁹ Malachi 4:2

The book was helpful to me and gave me hope and direction.

It took some practice, but Mom did get the demon to respond. She bound the demon through the power of Jesus and commanded it to reveal its name to me. It communicated its name through a “foreign writing” in the mind. The name was long and I don’t remember it. My mother then proceeded to cast the demon out of me. Something definitely left me – what a relief. Thanks to God! However, this did not take away my still undiagnosed illness.

After the exorcism, I stood like a warrior on the edge of an abyss thinking I was nearly free. I tried to turn from the demon telling it that it had to flee from me, but it dragged me into the darkness of my broken mind trying to exploit my confusion together with much that was important but unknown to me and used it to attack me through my illness. It dragged me into an intense power struggle deep within the dark abyss of my mind. Seeing that the demon had left the temple of my body, I had a more accurate view of the disconnection between my spirit and body. I began to have symptoms normally attributable to a known illness, which I unfortunately still did not know anything about. The interactions I had with the demons in my mind were part of the illness.

I lacked the ability to describe my symptoms, because they were in the head where no one else could see or experience them as I did. Therefore, I was gripped with plenty of fear. The environment in which my consciousness was submerged

in my brain was harsh, and therefore hostile to faith in a loving God. Paradoxically, that's where faith and love can take root and blossom the most – they have to or else they die. My intellect was still dislodged from the affections of my heart, but was gradually embracing and warming up to my faith in God. The attacks around the throat ceased until August of 1993 when they began to reoccur again.

The following Sunday, I went with Mom and Dad to their church called Saint Maria Goretti in Devon. I don't remember the sermon given, but I do remember going up for communion, swallowing the flesh and blood of Jesus, walking towards the back, and suddenly seeing darkness all about me with white light shining into it. I was looking into the spiritual realm, and the light was coming from God. As Bible says: "God is light and in Him there is no darkness," and further, "the Blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light."²⁰

It was a glorious light, whiter than any snow or bleached linen, although I could not see the source. This radiant beauty, this brightness, and this magnificent splendor captured my heart. It was like nothing I'd ever seen before up until this moment!

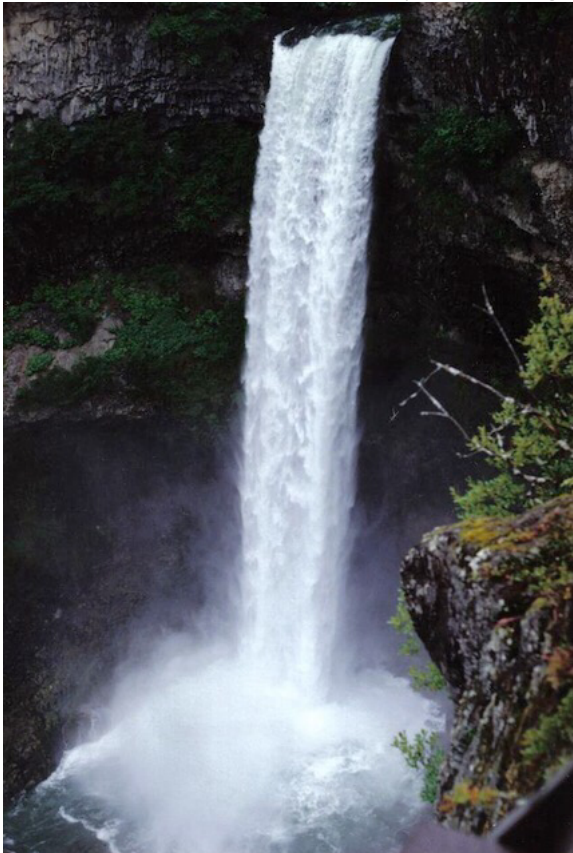
Then I saw a yellowish lightning-shaped light reach towards me from the source, and it extended all the way to my head and into my mind. It made my thought process go backwards

²⁰ 1 John 1:5, and 1 Timothy 6:15-16

and forwards (it felt like God was playing with my mind). Then the yellowish light disappeared.

The white radiance (that was substance like) that was still shining in front of me diminished and then flared up briefly. My brain began to work completely, but as quickly as it began to function to full capacity it too began to diminish. I was left struggling in the darkness of my immediate circumstances with an illness that I didn't know the name to.

The closest likeness to this Heavenly light in the natural universe that I've come across thus far was when I visited certain waterfalls. One example of the glory seen is the



"Brandywine" falls just outside

Vancouver, BC, when I visited it while I was with my friends Dan, and Kent shortly after the above incident took place. I've been many times to this waterfall, but this is the best photo I've taken of it.

The waterfall was really spectacular, so rich in soft white mist. It reflected, or captured a small portion of the gloriously infinite light of the one true God – our Father, our Brother, and our Sanctifier. I can wholeheartedly relate to what the Psalmist said to God below, because of my experience above:

Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers have swept over me.²¹

²¹ Psalm 42:7

6 Further Humbling Experiences

From January of 1993 to July of the same year was the next period of being humbled by God. After the brief mountain top experience, I was in the valley again. I returned to Vancouver to renew my studies at UBC. I did not know what was wrong with me, that I had a treatable illness through medications. This meant suffering in unknowing and darkness until I knew what was wrong with me. I did not know what to do about my illness, yet it felt extremely urgent to me to do something about it. So, I got onto my knees in my room, and prayed to God that He would restore the joy of His salvation to my heart.

Later on I found out from Mom that she had a dream of me that very evening. In the dream she saw me pray my prayer to God on my knees. She also saw Mary the mother of Jesus there, and was told by her that I first had to go through whatever was in store for me before God would restore me. God had heard my prayer!

Because I was in such a mess, my godmother Anita suggested that I go and see someone professionally such as either a psychologist, or a psychiatrist. Since I had a bias against the latter, I chose Alex Angioli, a doctoral candidate in psychology at the time, as well as a committed Christian. He would help guide me both practically and theologically.

Here's an example of how God began to purify my faith with the help of Alex a few weeks into counseling.

I was going for plenty of walks while struggling to find a foothold in my heart and mind as the waters of testing flowed over my inner foundations. It wasn't long before I became troubled by the idea of there being a dark force, all powerful like God, but not God, that was out to get me. It felt very real. So, I told Alex about it at one of our sessions. Guided by the Holy Spirit he pinpointed where it was coming from.

It came from guilt I had stored up when I was a teenager still living with my parents. During that time I always felt like there was something I hadn't done or wasn't doing in order to please my Dad. The moment this was brought to light something lifted off my head physically. Instantly, both the Phantom and the fear it induced disappeared.

Because of this I was left struggling without the guilt. It took some getting used to – in some dark way up until this point I had been dependent on this guilt to motivate me to do good. I was appeasing the darkness instead of loving out of thankfulness. I was not motivated by love, as much as I thought I was.

Strangely enough, I felt weaker after this cleansing took place. This was because I did not know how to abide in Jesus so that I could let love flow out of me more fully.

While the above experiences made me feel like I was making some progress. I still did not feel too comfortable with God because of my dark and painful circumstances. My faith was still like that of an infant. I felt tempted to distrust God because of certain Bible passages that were difficult to

interpret. I really did not know God like I thought I had.

Should I continue to accept the good things in life as God's gifts, and accept the pain He had given me as discipline for my own good? Or, should I disown God and believe instead that I didn't deserve my suffering? After all God may be good, but would He continue to be good to me? Or, should I believe that my circumstances would never get any better? Just what could I expect from God? Could He be trusted? Which path should I take? I was at the crossroads in my life.

My spiritual nightmare also grew because I really didn't understand the relationships and differences between "faith", "knowledge", "trust", "certainty", "absolute truth", and "reasonable doubt" that well.

I needed to work through all of these issues in order to find my footing again. On both practical and philosophical levels, these questions would need some major eye opening on my part.

All these questions made me feel what Saint Paul spoke about in his letter to the Corinthian Church:

Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.²²

Because of my doubts, I started to think if God is "absolutely good" then it would take infinite knowledge to prove it,

²² 2 Corinthians 1:9

something we don't possess. I would later see this differently. Faith and knowledge can be tricky things to measure. Thinking that we know certain people because of the way we've perceived them to behave towards others and us after so many years can be tricky and dangerous. The same is true with our relationships with God.

Could I see the goodness of God as revealed to me in (1) the way He created the world, (2) the way He created me, (3) our relationship together, (4) what was written in the Scriptures (especially the Gospel narratives), (5) the church, and (6) the teachings of a divided Christianity? Even if there is "absolute proof" of God's goodness, it is human to doubt. In the past I had naively claimed to know God absolutely; yet here I was discovering my doubt in the goodness of God!

Faith bridges our hearts and minds, (which are capable of receiving knowledge, questioning it and forgetting it) to God and His goodness. We usually say we have knowledge of something if we are certain we can see it, or infer it. We usually say we have faith in something if we are certain about it but don't see it. What one person says he knows, another might say it is only faith. When one person says he has knowledge it may only be faith or even wishful thinking. What once was faith in something might become knowledge. Also, what once was held to be knowledge might become faith, and this is the way it was for me. What I once rigidly held as truth I discarded to embrace the realm of faith and mystery. The wisdom that pain taught me, I now held to be true whether I considered it to be knowledge or faith.

My Dark Night began to feel like a road with many bends in it. Each bend, or circumstance brought into question the goodness of God. Some of the biggest bends to start with were: “Is God just and loving to all?” “In particular, will God be good to me?” and “Is God going to heal me?”

Even more bends in the road would be revealed later. When the road straightened out for a bit, and I saw a bit more light, I felt more confident in the goodness of God. The light beckoned me to depend on God in faith, and the darkness exercised that faith. The bends in the road and the darkness I felt caused suffering that was unimaginable by me before my dark journey began.

As mentioned above, this whole process of suffering and unknowing made me feel the sentence of death. It was painful, and frightening, for as Scripture states:

unless a wheat grain falls into the earth,
it remains only a single grain,
but if it dies
it yields a rich harvest.²³

This became the pathway to humility for me (becoming teachable again). It was a dreadfully narrow way, requiring courage and the desire to love.

As a prayer in the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi says, “it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.” Dying to what? To

²³ John 12:24, *Jerusalem Bible*

deadly sins. After my recommitment to God in 1989, I knew there was a lot more to love than at first glance, but I gradually lost sight of this before the promise came.

God is love, and that means mystery is involved. No matter how far one goes along the path of love here on earth there are always detours leading to sin, and always more things to learn. I'm not just talking about grasping it intellectually, but living it out in one's heart, one's community, and the world. The more we learn about a person the more there is to learn to love.

No one can define love perfectly. Their definitions will always fall short, and the moment we think we can we've limited our ability to grow in love. The Love Chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, is not a full definition of love, but a guide! The problem is that love requires pure motives and healthy mechanics and focus. When we hear the words, "love is kind" we often think that if we have been kind then we have loved. We can be kind yet still lack love. So much of what we call love is only lukewarm human sentiment.

Doubt can be good. In Christian circles it is frowned upon most of the time when it challenges traditions or dearly held beliefs. In my life and during this trial it has had both destructive and edifying reality's. Obviously, if I doubt God I am usually led into sin, but doubt has life giving qualities as well. It is good for instance, when I'm on the wrong path, and thoroughly convinced I'm not in error, when an overlooked detail might spur on doubts that change my course of action

for the better.

Therefore, doubt and faith were my constant companions. Courage is what I chiefly needed. A shallow heart, one that is ignorant about the deeper workings and practices of love has a difficult time mustering courage. Fear or cowardice is the chief attribute (next to pride) of those who doubt the goodness of God! Faith in God is the path to love. Cowards fight the wrong battles. They might do dangerous things, but are weak at love. Loving others can threaten our own interests, because love always costs us something.

I remember talking to my friend Alex Pruss over the phone in early January, in 1993, and openly telling him about my doubts. It was then that Alex got cut off the phone line, and instead I got connected to a little girl or boy who said repeatedly in a strong sweet voice, “I love you. I love you. I love you.” To me this was a miracle – God was telling me that He loved me!

The human heart can be passionately distrustful. The truly proud embrace the autonomy of calling the shots, and the passion of accusing God having guilt, whereas the humble wear confusion, doubt, darkness, and insecurity as crowns of thorns. It’s important to realize if I had been demanding any sign from God as proof of His love, my energy would have been unhealthy and I would have pushed myself away from God making myself His judge. God can’t save those who refuse to come into His presence believing that He is good and rewards those who seek Him.

My instinct for self-preservation worked over time – a God-given instinct. I felt tempted to save myself even if it meant disowning God. However, Jesus said, “Anyone who tries to save his life will lose it, but anyone who loses his life for my sake will gain it.”²⁴ Conquering fear and pride are necessary for love to manifest, but it also requires faith in God’s goodness, because all love at its foundation is cooperating with God. Demanding that I be favorably preserved is ugly because it goes against respecting God as persons along with His sovereignty. Humbly petitioning God for life on the other hand is acceptable to Him.

Before my journey through darkness, I had read very few books on spiritual matters, but my ugly spiritual pride had grown anyway. By the time my dark journey was near completion, I had read many more books. Instead of being proud because I thought I understood them, my opinions on them became nuanced and less one-dimensional.

For Christmas, Mom and Dad had given me three books that I had asked for. They were *Inside Out* by Dr. Larry Crabb, and two by Philip Yancey: *Where is God When it Hurts?*, and *Disappointment with God*. Dr. Crabb’s book talked about sin in the heart, our self-protective agendas, and the ugliness and presumption of a demanding spirit. Initially it showed me some of my hidden sinfulness. Later on God would use it to bring healing and hope to my situation. The two books by Philip Yancey, reinforced part of what I already knew – I did

²⁴ Matthew 16:25

not want hardship, pain, and disappointments to drive me away from God as others had let it.

At about this time, before the first anniversary of my illness, I had to make some heavy decisions about my future. In particular, I was tempted deep within to quit everything I was doing, retreat, and wait for my salvation – the promised freedom. I talked to my friend Dan Huget about this possible future path. He recommended that it would be unwise for me to do so. I took his advice thankfully. I benefited in character by not becoming a quitter. God often forges new character in us when we decide not to give up in difficult challenges.

The fight of faith was difficult. The illness drained immense amounts of energy out of me, besides slowly eating away at the fabric of my life. As time passed, I got weary. I got so tired, that I began to long for rest and peace. To seek rest at this time would mean spiritual suicide, I had to fight for my faith. I began to long for the good old days again. God doesn't lead us backward, only forward! The future looked dark and tasted bitter; I could not move backwards in time. Somehow, because of God's love I had enough grace to persevere through each long and exhausting day.

I still remember being at a session of counseling with Alex Angioli, and telling him that I did not know where I was going. I was desperate, because my future seemed so uncertain to me. I was also struggling to know why I believed God was good. There was a fight going on inside of my heart – I was learning to search more passionately for truth.

Just as the beloved in the Song of Songs had to get up from her bed in search of her lover, I too had to seek after the one my heart was infatuated with:

All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him. I will get up now and go about the city, through its streets and squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but did not find him [yet].²⁵

Later on I still remember giving up on the hopeless struggle to know with “absolute” certainty that God is completely good. Instead I decided to trust in Him, and in His Goodness. I turned from this hopeless search to trying to find out what was wrong with me instead. What else could I have done? I was encouraged to seek after the freedom promised me by God, and that meant in part fixing whatever was wrong with me – that which caused me so much pain, suffering, and unknowing in my soul. After all, Jesus did say for us to:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.²⁶

After I told Alex Angioli my worry that I did not know where I was going, he told me not to put so much pressure on myself. Then God gave Alex a word of knowledge for me right there as we sat on the couch in his living room. It was, “I am digging

²⁵ Song of Songs 3:1-2

²⁶ Luke 11:9-10

tunnels of love in your heart”. That caught my attention. It was also on my heart to ask God what was wrong with me, but I did not have the presence of mind to ask it.

Shortly after my journey through darkness began, I was asked by my friend Peter Dove if I could help him for a couple of days in his summer irrigation business. The work was really tough – with a spade I had to dig trenches into the dry stone hard ground. Most of the soil was so compact, and there were also so many tough tree roots to cut through, that I made progress at a snail’s pace. Later, tunnels or pipes would be installed that would bring the much needed water to the parched soil, grass, plants, and trees. This exercise later became an example of what God was doing to me during my trial – digging tunnels of love in my heart.

For a time the demons bothered me considerably. As time wore on this ceased, and I attributed this to the counseling that I received from Alex Angioli. The more I ignored the demons the less they interfered with my life. However, during this time I did not know how to describe what was going on in my mind, and so I made no progress towards a diagnosis. I thought this meant suffering in unknowing and darkness until I knew what was wrong with me. Later on I would find out that the road to recovery would involve more suffering.

The following are sayings from Saint John of the Cross:

To come to enjoy what you have not
you must go by a way in which you enjoy not.
To come to the knowledge you have not

you must go by a way in which you know not.
To come to the possession you have not
you must go by a way in which you possess not.
To come to what you are not
you must go by a way in which you are not.²⁷

I was definitely going by a way in which I “enjoyed not,” “knew not,” “possessed not,” and “was not.” It was a very humbling predicament. The path was uncomfortably narrow, and my swelled pride and too high an appraisal of my intelligence had to shrink, and supposed Knowledge had to be reassessed. I say “supposed” because in the past I had mixed up the ideas of belief and knowledge. Doubt and unknowing caused me to give up my old diseased world-view because there were so many superficial beliefs in it that were useless in this wilderness.

Through my adversity I began to purchase with my faith the desperately needed ability and willingness to love God, others, and myself, which was something that I lacked very much in the past. That doesn’t mean that I saw this reality in my life immediately as time went by, as if for every pound of suffering I went through, God granted me a pound of healthy character instantaneously. Instead, God wanted me to get intimately acquainted with the wickedness in my own heart, and at this point in time I only had vague beliefs about its corruption. Before God could grant me a new heart, He had

²⁷ K Kavanaugh, O.C.D, O Rodriguez, O.C.D, *The Collected Works Of St. John Of The Cross*, ICS Publications (1991), p. 111, or from Sketch of Mount Carmel

to show me what was wrong with the old one, and this would come later. He also would have to show me how to repent from my corruption.²⁸

Part of my early strategy to get healthy worked like this. Since I believed that my attitudes towards sin were responsible for all the pain I was going through. I tried to uncover all of my hidden sins, repent (change my mind about my position on them) and therefore act differently, and so somehow miraculously put an end to my mental suffering. I also thought it was possible that I was sexually abused as a child by someone, and that I needed to uncover the circumstances surrounding it for me to be restored to health again. These sorts of strategies can work with fixing a broken heart, but won't be of any use in fixing a mental illness. One requires different tools for such a job, and this I would find out later.

Because of the difficulty involved with my illness, I decided to turn my will over to God for Him to control. Since the situation grew worse in doing this (because I began to feel weaker), I also naturally became angry with God because I saw Him doing nothing. I told Alex Angioli about this, and he said that there was a big difference between turning over one's will and submitting one's will to God. The former is what cult members do with their leaders, whereas the latter is Freeing.

God has given us limited sovereignty because we are made in

²⁸ Cf. My book: *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive*, and *Going Deeper With The Twelve Steps* on how to do this.

His image. And that means that He has made us to be dependent on Him for many things, but not everything – a train can only be useful so long as it remains on its tracks. It is free to go to many places so long as it submits to the tracks. God does not want to control our every decision. However, He does try to inspire obedience to the law of Christ – that is, to humbly love others from one's heart. His call to us is to be found in Christ, because freedom is found in Him alone! Immediately after I took my will back I found the strength that was being siphoned off return to me, and consequently I felt a bit stronger.

My friend Alex Pruss had taken it upon himself to love/ advise/ and encourage me early on in my journey through the darkness. One of the things he would get me to do was to go swimming with him at the UBC pool. On one of these occasions I was struggling much more than usual to survive the intense darkness within my soul. It was as though God, His goodness, and His grace were totally absent from me. It seemed as though life were ebbing away in a final darkness. It was so bad that I told Alex about it.

Alex took immediate action – he suggested that we change from our swimming trunks into our clothing and make our way to the noon Mass on campus. With great effort we made it in time for communion, during which I took a piece of Christ's flesh dipped it in His blood and swallowed it. While it was still in my throat it was changed into power that I felt surge up into my brain. This "power" can rightly be described as God's "grace." It gave me life! I felt strength in infused into

my spirit and the parts of my brain that weren't functioning began to work but only briefly. It moved me out of this oppressive state, and into a more bearable darkness. As Jesus said, "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."²⁹ I felt encouraged.

Life became more manageable for a short while, and so the faith that was granted to me during my suffering began to show itself in confidence in God's goodness during this brief period. I began to realize that although I believed in the goodness of God, I still wasn't too sure He would heal me. After all, it was close to the first anniversary of God giving me the promise to be broken into freedom.

I thought that living life with all the adversity I was experiencing up until now in this story was too difficult a burden to carry for the rest of my life. Besides there was a freedom component to the promise that I still did not understand in all its ramifications. So, I spoke to my friend Alex Pruss about it in one of our many phone conversations. He did not give me a theological treatise on faith and prayer, but rather he identified himself with me by saying, "I know where you are – I've been there." That quieted my worry over the matter – I was in God's hands.

Shortly before Easter, I knew that one of the readings in the liturgy would contain the following:

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Those

²⁹ John 6:33

who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?³⁰

Yes, I did believe this, and so I went to church that Sunday really expecting a miracle. I met my friend Alex Pruss outside the church building that morning for he had gone to the earlier Mass. He half-jokingly said for me to go and have my mini resurrection during Mass.

That did it! Perhaps Alex was speaking prophetically – I became convinced that he was, and that God would literally resurrect me out of my dark journey. I was very disappointed because nothing happened. After Mass ended, I had to fight off my disappointment so that it would not turn to bitterness.

After Easter in 1993, I returned to Devon, Alberta to be with my parents and to have a time of rest from school. During that time my godmother Anita visited Mom and me, and she told us a story about her brother in England who is a musician. He became so blind he could not see his music because of black floaters in his eyes caused by stress.

So, in his intense emotional darkness he obtained recordings of the London shows so that when he got called in for a deputizing job he could handle the show without having to read the music. He also lost part of his hearing. He was put on medication. This cleared up his eyesight and part of his hearing in ten months time. The meaning of this story was

³⁰ John 11:25-26, NRSV

clear to me, I needed to be diagnosed and put on medication, but could I follow through?

Once in Vancouver, I made a trip to Student Health Services at UBC Hospital, because the illness was so pressing. The psychiatrist there gave me a sample of antidepressants after I told him that I was going to see a psychiatrist by the name of Dr. McKinstry in the near future. My belief was that I had a chemical imbalance of some sort.

My meeting with Dr. McKinstry had mixed results. After I told him a fair bit of my story, he told me that there were no such things as demons. I had to disagree.

He said that the church was wrong in destroying culture through its evangelism. This was something I needed to hear.

He told me that I ought to pursue a relationship with a woman. He said that if I ever came back to him, he would put me on tranquilizers because I was not depressed. This attempt at getting diagnosed turned out to be a failure.

Finally, he said that there is always fear in the heart of every person. He believed every person also carries with them a burden that can best be described as guilt. He did not know about the ability of God's perfect love to cast out all fear. And he had closed his mind to the forgiveness of his sins by Jesus as far as I knew.

I left his office determined in my faith, but also at a loss – what was wrong with me? I did not know! What I believed about needing medication was sharply attacked by Dr.

McKinstry. I didn't need tranquilizers in the normal sense of the word. Little did I know that the word "tranquilizer" was a name given to the types of medications used to treat the kind of illness I had. If I had known this I would have taken up Dr. McKinstry on his offer to put me on tranquilizers. Blessed are the knowledgeable.

I talked to Mom and Dad about what had happen and they advised me to stay on the anti-depressants, and to go and see another psychiatrist. This time I saw Dr. Pullmer at UBC. He did not attack me. Instead, he said two important things; first, I was not suffering from depression, but something else, and second, there was a discrepancy in the first two psychiatrists' diagnoses. He concluded that I needed to be diagnosed correctly. This was excellent advice, but did I take it?

Sadly no! I did not like the fact that Dr. Pullmer had a grin on his face for a moment when I told him my story. I confused Dr. Pullmer's sense of humor with what I wrongly perceived to be his shallowness. Based chiefly on this I decided to see him no longer. I would pursue a purely psychological/ spiritual treatment for my illness as I was doing with Alex Angioli. I really showed poor judgment here. I was confused as to what I thought a psychiatrist could do for me: Was he going to heal my spirit or my brain? The brain, yes, but not necessarily the spirit, and this I would find out later.

During late May I made the following entry in my journal:

I had a dream that I believe is from You [my God]. It was of me, in my coldness, darkness, and aloneness

surrounded within a tent, conscious or semiconscious, aware of a protector outside the tent experiencing the same dampness – shivering cold – dark in the night.

Thank you Lord Jesus!

The coldness, darkness, and aloneness spoke about my hardship and circumstances. The tent spoke about my dependence on God for everything, for I was becoming like Abraham the father of faith who also lived in tents. I did not want to establish my independence from God and build a city or an evil storehouse to mock God. My protector was Jesus, and He felt my hardship.

Let me explain this figure of speech. Establishing one's independence from God has to do with devising sinful, twisted, dark, manipulative, and depraved schemes in order to get what one desires.

Only those who consciously depend on God with faith can love supernaturally. Everyone can love naturally without being in a relationship with God. Supernatural love completes the natural loves and extends them to where they ought to be.

It takes faith in God to pass through trials, temptations, darkness, or bends ahead in the road with courage, dignity, truth, justice, and love. Those without faith or commitment to the truth and love will break easily, or get corrupted, or commit suicide if the trials they face are too strenuous.

7 The Lion

A certain darkness covers the face of the earth because of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden so very long ago. This isn't a darkness caused by a lack of sunlight, but rather it is a spiritual darkness of lies, robbery, and murder.

Believe it or not, Satan and his servants are still at work deceiving those with unguarded hearts. Having super-human intelligence and having studied humans both on the inside and outside for literally thousands of years, they prey on those not grounded in truth and love.

And so, the vision of the lion in my room at the Dempsters' home came to fulfillment again in what would be one of many encounters. Let me set the stage.

With my mind and future still in darkness because of my circumstances I was slowly making my way to being in union with God through faith, hope, and love. One step along this path meant examining how logic, intelligence, and understanding fit into my emerging world-view.

I had to ask myself if I trusted logic, intelligence, and understanding the way God had given them to me. The lion was only too eager to help. He simply attacked my faith in, and dependence on these tools by saying I could not depend on "logic" to come to the truth.

The lion knew, as did I, that if he said anything more than this by way of argument he would defeat the idea that logic

doesn't work because he himself would be using logic. No, he was sneakier than that. All he communicated to me were the words, "Logic doesn't work!" and left me to deduce the logical consequences of the lie with hope that somehow I would swallow and believe it.

Why would the idea, "Logic doesn't work" scare me so? What was behind it that gave it so much power to tempt me?

To start with the lion wanted me to believe the lie that God was out to deceive me. The lion wanted me to believe that it was he who was doing me the favor of uncovering the truth. And so, he wanted me to think that I could not trust logic to discern the truth about God because God created the logical principles that my mind uses to function. These logical principles, the lion wanted me to believe, were flawed and biased in design so as to make God look good, but in reality He was evil. In short, the lion tried to lead me into thinking that I could not trust my brain because it was unfairly programmed to favor God in any argument.

Yet, if I was to accept such a premise as: "logic doesn't work," where could I go? I would have become the lion's toy – a certifiable lunatic. I would come to believe that I couldn't use reason and understanding to come to different meaningful conclusions in nature, science, art, philosophy, spirituality, relationships, and morality. So why even be truthful?

I could sense the lion by the exertion of his limited power over my mind because of my illness.

So how would I combat this situation? With truth? Yes, truth is the light of God in a dark situation. The passage I used is the following spoken by Jesus shortly before His crucifixion:

I am the true vine,
and my Father is the vinedresser.
Every branch in me that bears no fruit
he cuts away,
and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes
to make it bear even more.
You are clean already,
by means of the word that I have spoken to you.
Remain in me, as I in you.
As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself,
unless it remains part of the vine,
neither can you unless you remain in me.
I am the Vine,
you are the branches.
Whoever remains in me with me in him,
bears fruit in plenty;
for cut off from me you can do nothing.³¹

Repeatedly the lion would entice me with the words: “Logic doesn’t work”, and I would be drawn to examine them. They sounded so plausible, so very wise while under the spell of his voice, yet they filled me with dread.

I would try to back away from his sugarcoated words, and instead recite the words recorded above by Jesus. I tried to

³¹ John 15:1-5, Jerusalem Bible

find strength and support in them, and found just enough to get by until I was tempted again. Over and over again this happened to me – I could feel the lion's presence. The words of God were my strength (together with the prayers from the saints), but with the serpent's lies in my ears, God's word was far from comforting.

I still remember the lion's last attempt to persuade me of its lies, and the victory I had of pulling away from its enticing voice to rest in Jesus through faith – with the lion leaving.

Afterwards, I told my godmother Anita about this experience, and she knew about it before I had said anything else. She knew about the struggle because she had been carrying me in her mind as a weight during this time. She had prayed to God for me during my temptation, and demanded of Satan to release my spirit from its chains. When the lion left, she said it was as though he was spit out of her mouth.

The chains that Anita mentioned here are the lies and deceptions that the demon tried to use on me. Blessed are those who desire to love, and to live in truth and freedom; and are willing to persevere through those obstacles in their way.

Later on when my illness grew worse the demons would try other games of deception in an attempt to get me to quit following Jesus.

8 The March Towards Desolation

It is both difficult and embarrassing to relate to you the events that started around May and ended in August of 1993. Difficult, because the experience was painful, and events happened very quickly. Embarrassing, because of some of the things I did during this time. In addition to this, it was also an adventure because to me my illness was still a mystery that needed to be solved. Getting through this dilemma was a lot like me doing a difficult math problem – both required searching, knocking on a lot of doors, retracing one's steps, and praying to God for guidance.

One day in May 1993, I decided to search the Scriptures. As I turned the pages of 1 John and found what I was looking for, all of a sudden, the print came up at me off the page. The passage I was reading is:

Do not love the world
or what is in the world,
If anyone does the world,
the love of the Father finds no place in him,
because everything there is in the world –
disordered bodily desires [think lust],
disordered desires of the eyes [think pride],
pride in possession [think greed]–
is not from the Father
but from the world.
And the world with all its disordered desires

is passing away.

But whoever does the will of God
remains for ever.³²

I looked at the neighboring pages and the print on them became three dimensional – the print was granted depth. Then as suddenly as the three-dimensionality appeared, it disappeared. I believe that this was God's way of telling me that He wanted me to walk in self-control (many years later I would realize that these verses had to do with not setting up idols in our hearts and hardening one's heart towards those we are supposed to love, including God). Around this time I had not been hallucinating, nor was the demonic influencing my mind in any way.

A year and four months had passed since I became ill until it took a real turn for the worse. The silver lining in this dark cloud was that I finally started to have symptoms that I could describe to doctors, and which are normally attributable to a known illness. That doesn't mean that the demons weren't involved, they were.

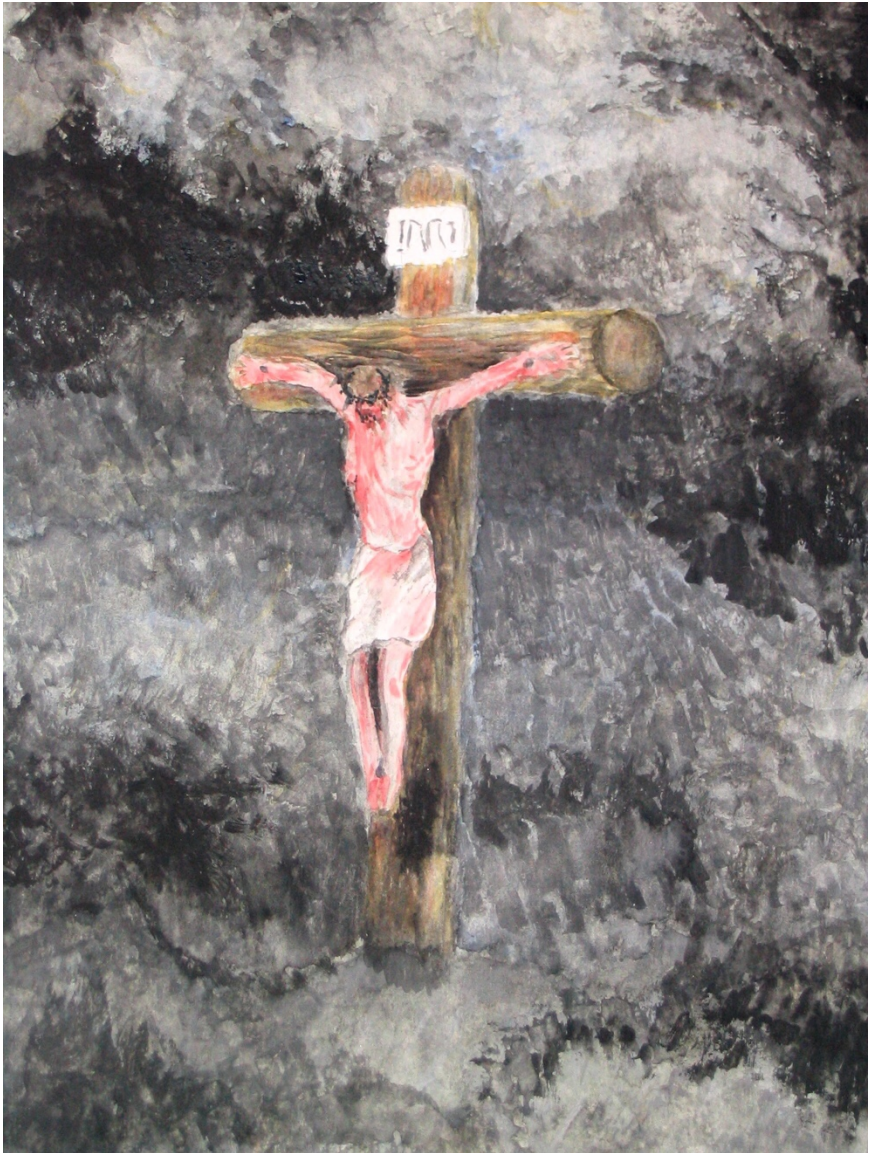
Gradually, demon spirits began to pester me again. I remember one time in particular, when I had an appointment with Alex Angioli. When I got to his place I was harassed in two ways: (1) As I greeted Alex, both he and I were aware of a grin on my face. Yet, inside I was disturbed and upset at the way the demonic was manhandling me. I knew the grin on my face was not mine. Alex even asked me why I had the grin on

³² 1 John 2:15-17, Jerusalem Bible

my face. I told him it was not me. (2) A demon was constricting the tender nerve area in my chest. Alex took action immediately – he first lit a candle and then dealt with the demon(s) with his authority in Christ. This time I was not inhabited by a demon. The demons were merely attacking me from the outside through my undiagnosed illness.

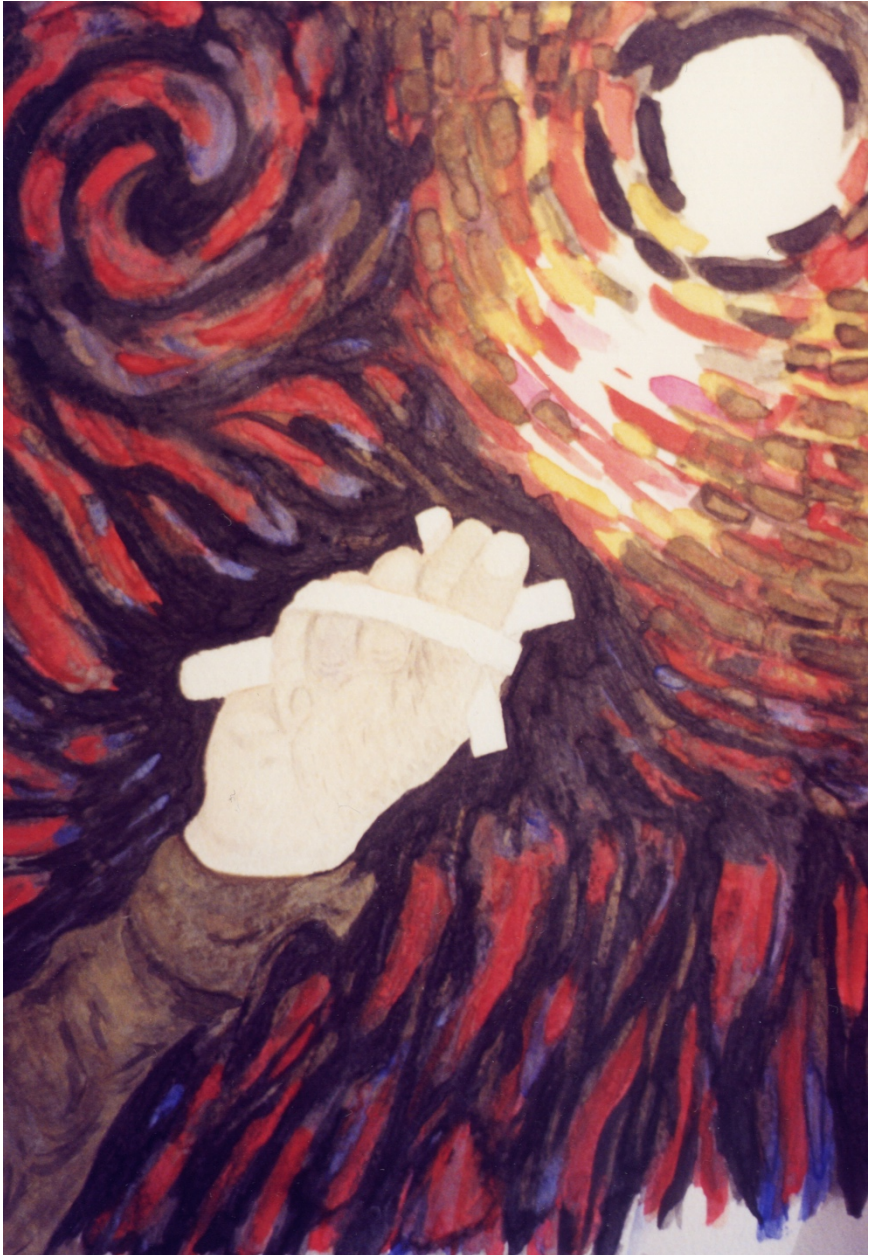
As time went by, I gradually began to hallucinate. There is one instance that I remember well. I was lying on my bed in the Dempsters' house, and when I looked at my arm, it appeared to be much larger than it normally looked to my mind. My arm was not really swollen. I mistakenly concluded that a demon was solely responsible for what I saw. I therefore did not mention it to anyone who possibly could have seen it for what it was – something wrong with how my brain processed images.

It was during this time that I completed painting two pictures. The first is *It was Night II*:



The painting *It was Night II* is the sequel to *It was Night I*. Both are portraits of the crucified Christ but seen with

different hearts. The first one depicts Jesus crucified, but without bruise, cut or scratch and reflected the shallowness of my faith at the time. The second portrait above, painted



much later, shows a more realistically crucified Christ – brutally beaten, bleeding, desolate, abandoned by us to die, in darkness – broken, yet full of grace, life and light. I had become more familiar with the suffering Christ because of my journey through the darkness. The second painting above, is called, *There is Light at the End of the Tunnel*.

Because the Lord had used birds on two separate occasions as signs to encourage me, I began to wrongly think that He would use them to warn me when something was wrong with how I was navigating my illness. I thought that the signal God was using to warn me was the awful sounds that the crows made when they congregated and came close by me. I thought this because to me these black birds symbolized wickedness (thankfully not anymore).

This combined with the fact that something (which I believe to be a demon) would come to rest on my head over and over again made it a ridiculous situation. These demons would leave every time they were told, but they kept coming back. I use to phone long distance to either Mom or Anita on a regular basis to deal with this. My life was falling apart again.

As this trouble escalated, I felt that I was approaching a climax of some sort! As I came to certain conclusions whether by the help of Alex Angioli or by going through the Scriptures by myself, things lined up in my brain. I actually felt physical sensations in the parts of the brain where this was occurring.

The last time this happened to me was when I was in my bedroom, on the floor reading my Bible. When I came to a

certain conclusion I was very surprised – my brain began to work again, although not fully. I thought: “I’m almost healthy again, tomorrow I’ll be completely healthy.”

I woke up the next morning in desolation; my spirit – body connection laid to waste.

My awareness of my surroundings was diminished. My emotions were flattened. The subtler or finer capacity for creativeness, and expression of emotion was lost. The attacks around the throat also began again. An enormous weight was added to my consciousness. Something that I would identify as a demon began to wrestle my mind and therefore my body down into darkness and inactivity. This weight would get much heavier before it began to diminish.

I had smell, taste, touch, and sight hallucinations. I didn’t hear voices as is common with most people who have this illness. I had plenty of paradigm shifts – something tinkered with my perceptions of reality regularly. I lost complete feeling in the sensitive area where the nerves are concentrated in my chest.

I was immersed into a darkness and suffering beyond my previous imagination. I had no idea that it could get this bad until I experienced it myself. I was in a land visited by few, and those who do visit it for a time are normally considered crazy in the head by society. The environment where my consciousness lived was barren, dry and dark and I only felt the presence of demons that I symbolically called scorpions, and vipers. I felt like God had abandoned me yet once again.

Saint John of the Cross describes the inner workings of my soul at this time really well:

In the substance of the soul they suffer abandonment, supreme poverty, dryness, cold, and sometimes heat. They find relief in nothing nor does any thought console them, nor can they even raise their hearts to God, so oppressed are they by this flame.³³

And again, he states more personally:

Poor, abandoned, and unsupported by any of the apprehensions of my soul (in the darkness of my intellect, the distress of my will, and the affliction and anguish of my memory), left to darkness in pure faith... [and in hope to march on to the dawn].³⁴

When St. John of the Cross says that one is “unsupported by any of the apprehensions” in one’s soul in this Night. He concludes that one is left to lean on one’s faith in order to navigate through this terrible darkness. This darkness tests one through the intellect, will, and memory. This is because the intellect does not see past the bends ahead in the road; the will is rudely being exercised to chose between love and instant gratification; and the person’s memory brings into question the goodness of God because of past hardships. All of this slowly exercises and strengthens one’s resolve to love

³³ K Kavanaugh, O.C.D, O Rodriguez, O.C.D, *The Collected Works Of St. John Of The Cross*, ICS Publications (1991), pp. 648-649, or F. 1. 20.

³⁴ K Kavanaugh, O.C.D, O Rodriguez, O.C.D, *The Collected Works Of St. John Of The Cross*, ICS Publications (1991), p. 400, or N. 2. 4. 1.

if one remains committed to following Jesus through this crisis and on into the light.

When I first became mentally ill, I related that my parents took me to their home to Alberta. During that time my Mom had a dream where she saw me having supper with Jesus by a fire. I believed that this communication was still future. I like to think of my meeting with Jesus as being on a beach, at night like Peter had with Jesus after Jesus' resurrection. We all like to navigate in open blue sky. But when that is gone we prefer the moon. And, when that is gone we rely on the stars. But when that is also gone we may like an inviting bright fire off in the distance waiting for us. But where there is a healthy fire someone must be tending it. That someone is the most sought after person to have walked the earth: Jesus. He is tending the fire.

It would appear that there is a decrease in light from blue sky to moon, from moon to stars, from stars to a fire burning in the distance, and from fire to finally Jesus. But God likes moving us to depend more on Him the true Light, and less on natural light as we mature. My circumstances may have gotten darker, but the Light within my heart was growing brighter.

On one of the occasions that I phoned home to Mom because of my perplexities, she greeted me with the good news that the Lord had given her a word of knowledge concerning me. It was:

The Lord will comfort His people; He will have

pity on their suffering.
But the people of Jerusalem said,
'The Lord has abandoned us, He has forgotten us,'
so the Lord answers,
'Can a woman forget her baby and not love the
child she bore?
Even if a mother should forget you
I will never forget you.
I can never forget you, I have written your
name on the palm of my hand.
Those who will rebuild you are coming
soon.
And those who destroyed you
will leave.'³⁵

This restored some hope and a degree of sanity to my life again! Afterwards, Mom sent me this passage. The last verse was very reassuring. It spoke of help on the way, and those entities called demons that would eventually leave me alone – they weren't a figment of my imagination. And since God gave me these words through my Mom, He was admitting to the reality of demons in my illness, because He said that those who destroyed me would leave!

³⁵ Isaiah 49:13-17, Uncertain of where the translation comes from.

Part III: Into Freedom

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. (Isaiah 42:16)

Blessed are all who wait for Him. (Isaiah 30:18d)

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36)

[A] woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on...[Jesus'] head. (Mark 14:3) [I want to be like that alabaster jar]

9 Start To Recovery

I received the following verse from my mother, and what it advises is literally what I did until I got diagnosed, and what I would continue to do on into the future.

You will be right to depend on prophecy, take it as a lamp for lighting a way through the dark until dawn comes and the morning star rises in your mind.³⁶

The morning star would also rise in my soul. By this I mean that the breath and warmth of life would slowly return to my body. I would also become familiar with a less distorted image of who God is because in my suffering I had the Holy Spirit as my companion and guide.

As I became more and more undone by my circumstances, I was on UBC campus during the week as usual, and I happen to see Dr. Pullmer on a walk. That day I phoned my godmother Anita, and one of the things I told her was that I had seen Dr. Pullmer. Anita right there asked God if I ought to make another appointment with Dr. Pullmer, and the answer was a clear and certain YES!

This time I told Dr. Pullmer my symptoms more clearly, and he immediately knew I had schizophrenia, and ordered some tests to rule out a brain tumor. I went for tests at UBC Hospital and had an EEG and a CAT scan done to me. These

³⁶ 2 Peter 1:19. (Uncertain of where the translation comes from. It probably comes from a Living With Christ booklet.)

confirmed schizophrenia. Consequently in early August of 1993, he put me on an anti-psychotic medication called Stelazine.

I went back to Alberta to visit my parents in mid August, and when I got back I reported that the Stelazine worked a little bit, but not completely. In early September there was an opening at Vancouver General Hospital (VGH), and so I was admitted to the psychiatric ward there. This allowed the doctors to try stronger doses of medication and to observe me.

As usual, my friend Alex Pruss still phoned me nearly every evening. We always had something to say, for the longest time we would pray the Lord's Prayer together, and recite Mary's song:

My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great

things for me— holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud

in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants for ever,
even as he said to our fathers.³⁷

Because I only got partial results with the Stelazine they switched me to Loxapine, Procyclodine, and Tegredol. Because the Loxapine had a tranquilizing effect on me, my symptoms became worse to the point of experiencing what I'd call Hell, so they put me on Risperdal.

The attacks around the head ceased but not the attacks around the throat. Because the medication was so expensive, the doctors decided to let me attend a Mental Health Team. The Team would pay for my medications, and help me in many more ways. I was at VGH for a total of three months.

As I learned to walk in this darkness, which was beyond description, I began to learn a lot more about the perseverance Job had. Since I now knew what was wrong with me, and because the Mental Health Team required it, I stopped seeing Alex Angioli for counseling.

It was a matter of carrying my burden or cross as best I could.

³⁷ Luke 1:46-55

The promises from God would become my hope in a deeper way! Who hopes for what they already have? For although I saw I was on my way to recovery, it came ever so slowly. It would take many more years before I would begin to see light faintly at the end of the tunnel I was in.

I would make many mistakes, have some real disappointments, and would struggle with the bitterness of my cup or circumstances for years. God used this to show me what was in my heart. And it wasn't too pretty. I would recount years later how I told God before my journey through darkness started that I only wanted to do His will. I had no idea until the storm rocked my foundations just how unpleasant doing God's will could be.

Through the encouragement and prayers from the saints, my hope would eventually grow to healthier proportions. It also grew because I interpreted my illness as having a purpose – that is, to humble and help to purify me! I would also become certain of the hope that Job had when he said:

I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him with my own eyes—I,
and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!³⁸

³⁸ Job 19:25-27

As time went on, the words “hope” and “faith” also took on new meaning for me. Hope and faith are inseparably linked – Hebrews 11:1 records that faith is being sure of what you hope for. The question then becomes: “What is hope?” A common lexicon describes hope as a feeling or expectation that something desirable will happen. There is another meaning that I naturally attribute to the word “hope”. It is a weaker definition, namely, “to wish for, long for, desire, or want.”

As the darkness increased, the hope I felt could best be described by the weaker definition. As the light increased, the hope I felt fit the stronger definition better. The difference in the two ways came from the sort of evidence my proper mind had at the time.

The amount of certainty one feels about a particular hope dictates how much faith one has in the expectation becoming reality. This is a deceptive thing to measure! It doesn’t matter how much emotion is tied up in our sureness of hope, or our faith, as the emotion can dry up depending on how dark or bad the circumstances get.

Light and good circumstances are not always the same thing. If the body, intellect, and spirit of a person are properly connected and there is no other impairments of the cognitive processes, the light and hope felt can be strong even though the circumstances are difficult. When this happens, one knows that one’s faith can weather the storm.

So, what exactly was I putting my hope or faith in? From a

position of ignorance (and not having appropriate definitions for good and evil) it is possible to be troubled about whether God is either good, or evil; or to have a mixture of these two character traits. That was my fate for many years. It takes faith to believe any one of these possibilities. For me at least, the greatest evidence of God's goodness during my journey through darkness was the mixture of good and evil found within myself. My selfishness, pride, lack of love, demandingness, and lack of self control versus the conflicting desire within to live up to what I perceived as Truth, Light, Goodness, Beauty, Life, and Love.

These good qualities I saw as being rooted in God because of His call, my friendship with Him, and His discipline in my life. Evil I saw as a perversion of these good attributes, and so could not be absolute, complete, whole or entire, perfect or pure. Only God is absolute, and therefore eternal!³⁹ With correct Biblical definitions for good and evil God's goodness is not that difficult to see; so that the fears that God might be evil in some way will evaporate. This has been my experience.

The Describable Symptoms:

As I became healthier, my illness' symptoms changed too. At first I could feel something wrestle my mind into darkness, and my body towards the ground. I felt like an old man, heavy, stiff and weak in my joints; I could only go for very short walks (This together with a side effect from my

³⁹ An in-depth argument for the existence of an Absolutely good God can be found in C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Published by Simon & Schuster New York, ©1980,

medications contributed towards me putting on a lot of weight. Exercise became a torture). This darkness grew and grew the more my brain began to work until it reached its darkest point, and then began to evaporate, but ever so slowly – it would take the duration of the active phase of my illness for this to work itself out. My perceptions of things from a physical, intellectual, and emotional standpoint were controlled continually by something trying to deceive me. I felt oppressed. For the longest time I would feel like a gutted fish or an empty bag.

Things that were true appeared false, and vice-versa! Every time this happened, I would have to tell myself to wait for the deception to pass, and not to draw any rash conclusions. Many of the deceptions didn't even make sense when I was in my proper mind. Some deceptions were heavily imprinted on my mind for years, and I decided not to accept them because of my commitment to the truth that I could remember believing when my mind had functioning healthily. This exercises one's faith and requires wisdom.

Some examples:

On one occasion something tried to persuade me that I was receiving messages (that aren't there) from a TV – this I rejected.

On another occasion, something tried to deceive me into thinking that I knew a person's thoughts before they spoke them – this I rejected. This had nothing to do with extrapolating on what was already said by the other person.

The person had said nothing for me to tell what he was thinking.

Something tried to impose a racist attitude towards Chinese people in my heart – this I rejected.

On many occasions I had to fight off the strong delusion that matter was conscious, could be considered as God because it was everywhere, and therefore was worthy of worship. This delusion made perfect sense to my impaired mind during the temptations that were repeated over many years, but I rejected it purely because of my faith in the living God.

For many years something consistently tried to delude me into thinking that the Judaeo-Christian God could not be known – this I rejected.

Something continually tried to impress on me to command the Holy Spirit within me to leave – this I rejected over and over again! This was very alarming until I got used to it. Many times the horrible thought, “Leave, Holy Spirit” would come into my mind. I knew that this could not be me, but it still unsettled me.

People’s faces including my own would be made to look extremely beautiful or ugly in my mind’s eye depending on my motives or circumstances.

Everyone’s physical proportions, including my own, would change in my mind’s eye – one moment they would look very skinny and the next moment very fat.

I could no longer trust my sense of smell – most of the time I could not smell pleasant fragrances; at times I was aware of unpleasant odor that no one else could smell. Neither could I trust my ability to taste – food became bland. My sexual desires disappeared, and then slowly came back.

My ability to listen to, appreciate and understand the beautiful and meaningful melodies and rhythms found in music precious to me was also altered, distorted, or taken away from me through my schizophrenia. Some music was beautiful, other kinds got distorted in my mind so I could not connect with them as before.

I would have to compensate for my loss of personality and life skills with brute force because many parts of my soul or brain were cut off from me. My confidence dropped in my ability to do all sorts of tasks that used to come naturally. I had loss of memory. My outlook on life was always made to be bleak, and this challenged my faith in all sorts of ways.

I also had many attacks around my throat – it got so bad that at times I could not breathe (even my doctor said they weren't panic attacks). The demons tried to confuse me into thinking that I wanted them to inhabit me by repeating the words, "Come in [you demons]" in my mind, when I was attacked around the throat by them. It disturbed me that I had these ideas in my head when this was happening, but I just had to persevere through it each time it happened. God was faithful.

I had flatness of emotions, about the only emotions I did have

were great fear, self-pity, anger, and deep sadness. Surprisingly, I could not cry. My creativeness, and mathematical intuition disappeared, and so I had to quit school. Thankfully there were times when I could paint with watercolors, but this was very rare. At first there was no feeling in my chest (it was as though the nerves were dead there), but after two years on medication sensation began to return. I felt hollow like bamboo for the longest time. Unable to take consolation in much.

Initially, because I was so oppressed, and couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. I lost my confidence in going to Heaven if I were to die. I also lost my confidence that things would work out in my life here on earth and I felt massively insecure, very incompetent with a lot of low self-esteem. I would try to sleep as much as possible because I dreaded waking up to my circumstances. It felt like God had abandoned me (but I did believe He was with me). Later on I began to fantasize about going to Heaven. I got depressed and felt little hope because of the way my lot in life was turning out, but I wasn't tempted to commit suicide. My doctor then put me on an antidepressant and this helped somewhat.

I could take no pleasure in ordinary things that some people live for. The environment in which my consciousness was submerged within my mind was a dry barren desert.⁴⁰ It was a

⁴⁰ The loss of ability to experience pleasurable emotions is the condition called Anhedonia, and is a major symptom of schizophrenia. Cf. *Schizophrenia Digest*, Magpie Publishing, Volume 8, Issue 4, October/ November 2001, p. 8

weary and burdensome journey done in utter weakness, and blindness. My instinct for survival motivated me to reaction as opposed to action. I was always exhausted and emotionally drained (with the little emotion that I did have) from being pushed to the edge moment after moment, hour after hour, day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year. My consciousness was full of discomfort, distress, hurt, suffering, agony, and torment. Something was torturing me.

Imagine a corpse tightly attached to a living person by cords of rope. This was done in ancient times to torturously kill people. The rotting flesh would eat into the flesh of the living person causing disease and making the person die a cruel, slow death. Now imagine something similar – a demon of death, and immorality attaching itself to my mind because of my schizophrenia.⁴¹ Would my spiritual life die because of the intensified deception, moral decay and perverted allurements implanted in my thought life by this messenger of Satan, or would I be humbled by the experience? That's what I faced on and off for the duration of the active phase of my illness.

I became painstakingly aware of loss – loss of my quality of life.⁴² When anyone loved me through any act of kindness (which was gladly accepted), it felt out of place given the tunnel vision imposed on my mind and my harsh

⁴¹ St. John of the Cross speaks about evil spirits being sent to some people in the Dark Night, not to destroy their faith but to try them. Cf. K Kavanaugh, O.C.D., O Rodriguez, O.C.D., *The Collected Works Of St. John Of The Cross*, ICS Publications (1991), p. 393, or N. 1. 14. 3

⁴² Cf. Matthew 10:39

circumstances.

I still remember how disturbed my soul was within me during this time – full of apprehension, uncertainty, fear and an infant’s hope. The Psalmist put it well:

Why are you so down cast, O my soul,
why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God, for I will
yet praise him, my savior and my God.⁴³

Despite the fact that the promise made sense – “to be broken into freedom” – at times it seemed “crazy” to believe that freedom would come through my brokenness. The road I was traveling on did not look like it would lead to peace and righteousness. Most of the time I felt weak, helpless, insecure and stretched out—not capable of doing even the simplest of household duties without the greatest of efforts. Because of this I cooked the simplest of meals only when I had the energy to do so. I felt deeply frustrated because I also expected that I would grow in love over time. And that didn’t seem to becoming true. I told myself that I needed to wait for more mental health to be restored to me before I would see God’s promise of freedom to love others and myself meaningfully from my heart fulfilled in my life. This would not prove exactly true...I’d have to learn how to repent the proper way from all the bad stuff that poured out of me because God was putting me in touch with it all.

⁴³ Psalm 42:5

Instead of seeing a harvest of good fruit because of my suffering I saw barren branches. I felt like Saint Paul when he said: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”⁴⁴ Because of this, on numerous occasions, I called myself “crazy” for believing God’s promises.

Because I felt such stifling demonic influences at the time, and because my brain was not working fully, I was not conscious of anything pure within me, including God.

It takes time to make a tree really good, and once it is really good then it starts to bear much good fruit.

Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.⁴⁵

We don’t make a bad tree good by picking its fruit off. We make it good by treating its roots.⁴⁶ The first part of the promise had come true – to be broken, and after all, God did initiate it, so who was I to question Him if indeed He has unfathomable understanding.

Although I could not see it at the time, beneath my immediate consciousness, hope allowing the Holy Spirit to loosen the hard soil in my heart known as the corruption in my spirit. And since it was my faith in the past that sustained

⁴⁴ Romans 7:15

⁴⁵ Matthew 12:33

⁴⁶ Cf. Luke 13:8

my hope in the future, one could say that it was faith in God's goodness that would eventually help to purify me because I was teachable, and committed to God's will.

Hope is so universal that even God hopes! We see this when we acknowledge He is love, and, as 1 Corinthians 13:7 says, "Love hopes all things."

Hope involves waiting, and waiting is always active. With some people their hope and therefore their faith perish because the wait is too long as in the parable of the ten virgins found in Matthew 25. Here is the parable:

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any [additional] oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

"Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

" 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

“Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’

“But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.⁴⁷

The word “virgin” is symbolic of purity in this parable. And so all ten virgins initially belong to God. As the virgins wait they all foolishly fall asleep and in the process waste the precious oil in their lamps. They are then rudely awakened at midnight – a time of darkness and trial. The promise then goes out that the bridegroom is on His way. The foolish virgins initially had the commitment to overcome their earlier trials and temptations since they had an initial supply of oil in their lamps. But as they progress it becomes evident that their hearts did not have the critical amount of commitment required to hold onto the promise and persevere through the darkness. The promise was that Jesus the Bridegroom is on His way. The foolish virgins had neglected to sell all of their earthly treasures in order to purchase more of the precious oil required to light their lamps that would have helped them

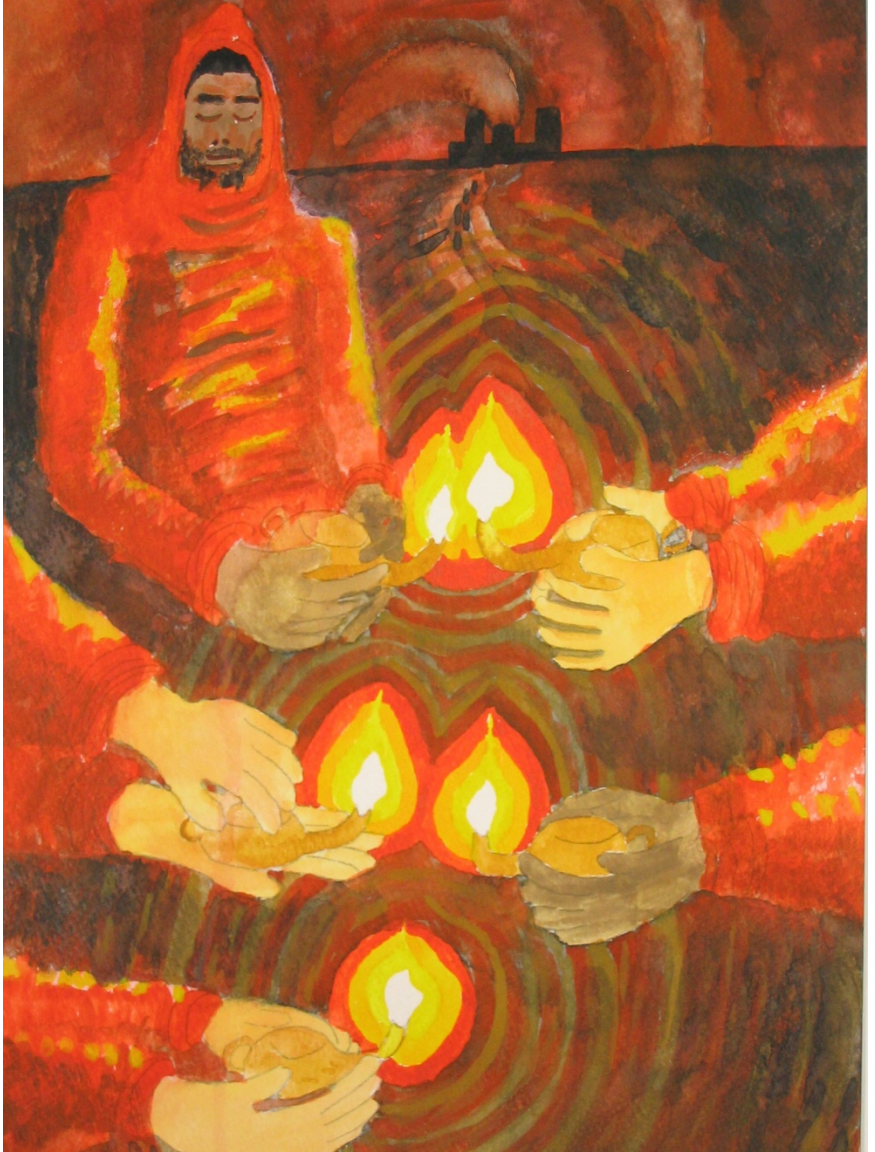
⁴⁷ Matthew 25:1-13, Note: Adding the word “additional” is contextually justified in this parable, because each virgin had an initial supply of oil. If you don’t believe me, look where the foolish virgins say, “our lamps are going out”. The lamps can’t go out unless they had some oil to begin with.

await the bridegroom on into the night. The wise virgins had extra oil, and so could await the bridegroom on into the night.

The oil in the parable represents the virgins' commitment to God. Without it they could not have braved the darkness. This oil of commitment burns together with the breath of life to make the light of the Gospel. The light of the Gospel is love. The foolish virgins gave up their commitment to God and so could no longer love or bear light during the darkest time of their lives. They couldn't summon the faith to believe that the bridegroom was on His way during the darkest time of their lives. This is realized when the call goes out at midnight that the bridegroom is on his way. Inside each one of the foolish virgins there was a part of them that wanted to continue waiting for the bridegroom since they ask the wise virgins for more oil. But a still larger part inside each of them did not want to pay the price, and so they went into the city abandoning the wait for Jesus' arrival.

Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will

be also.”⁴⁸ The foolish virgins had divided hearts and so could not patiently await the bridegroom. It takes wisdom to know how to wait. Jesus knew how to wait for His crucifixion. He did not waste a moment. He was creative, for love is always



⁴⁸ Matthew 6:21

creative and constructive. In response to me living out the parable of the ten virgins, I painted two pictures. The one above is entitled, “The Ten Virgins I”.

The second one is named: “The Ten Virgins II”:



It is said that blessings come to those who wait. A more accurate statement would be to replace the word “wait” with the word “search.” This is especially true when we talk about perfecting an aptitude whether it is in sport, music, art, philosophy, or even a trade (not to mention skills involved in building relationships). Searching indicates that our faith is active and that we aren’t lazy. Searching for how to love out of caring is wise. If one slows down and becomes stationary getting moving will be a difficulty.

One has to do something with one's time. Whatever one does one shouldn't relieve one's pain and suffering through immoral means. To top this off, very little besides eating and sleeping will give pleasure during this time. And it is not wise to spend all of one's time doing this! The state of the mind and body, combined with what one is waiting for dictates how one should wait. One needs wisdom to decide what to do for God, others, and oneself!

Practically speaking, doing one's duty is what one should aim for. Simple hobbies are what I used to pass my leisure time. I also recommend regular light exercise. And don't give up the practice of prayer. The New Testament tells us to constantly pray. Prayer is much more than making requests for people from long lists. Prayer for the Christian has to do with building a better relationship/ friendship with God. It involves listening when God talks; worshipping Him and Him alone; remaining committed to Him through periods of dryness and darkness; and searching for things to be thankful for from Him all the time. It means being committed to not partaking in the sins we are aware of if at all possible, and becoming dependent on God through trust for our needs. This can be very difficult. Don't give up even when circumstances seem to point to a God who doesn't care for you.

Don't expect any deep and profound thoughts until you are moving out of the darkness and into the light with God's Help.

Another thing hope can do is to humble us. When we hope in God we are actively expecting from Him. When we expect

from God we have to admit our own poverty, and this aids our humility if we decide God knows what is best for us, while we seek to become dependent on Him. If we start to demand from God because of our hope then we are becoming proud and unloving. It has been said that Satan builds one up so that he can tear one down. It is also said that God tears one down so that He can build one up.

One sign of pride is when you think you are humble enough. Another is when you aren't teachable any longer. Being too pleased with one's own goodness or knowledge is something that God despises. That is why He brings us through seasons of humbling, and exalting. When God has humbled someone in character, the humility gained by the person becomes a priceless gift that motivates acts of love in cooperation with God.

Our hearts are prepared in fall, stretched and broken in winter, given new life in spring, and satisfied in summer. When we humble ourselves, God is not long in lifting us up. And this is what is happening when the elders, as recorded in Revelation 4:9-11, lay their crowns before the throne of God out of humility and worship. Each time they do this, God exalts them and places their crowns back on their heads. By exalt I mean to be raised higher in rank, honor, power, understanding, character, and quality.

I've spoken about my struggles with hope and faith in God's promises, but very little about my seemingly stunted love. That's because at this point in time, I still considered myself

to be a beginner when it came to love. One verse I took a liking to during my dark journey is the following:

Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by
the gazelles, and the does of the field:
Do not arouse or awaken love
until it so desires.⁴⁹

It brought hope and faith to me that one day I would love others maturely. This is because it did not appear that I was growing in the art or skill of love as time went by. I seemed to be going backwards instead. The reason is I learned to do many behaviors that became habits through this trial that were destructive.

I felt a sense of powerlessness over them and my circumstances. I was unable to feel any kindness or compassion towards others, but I tried to be kind to them whenever I met them. I isolated myself, not feeling comfortable around others. I just wasn't ready, or confident enough to come out of myself.

Yes, I did go to church, and Bible studies regularly; and I even went to a Twelve Step group for a while. Others had smiles on their faces because of pleasant emotions created by community. I felt little good about myself, and hungered for what others had. I lacked confidence in my ability to interact and connect with others in a caring, responsive, loving, and in-depth way. I had to interact with brute clumsiness,

⁴⁹ Song of Songs 2:7

mechanically, and without flow.

Although this got slowly better after many years on medication, there was still a great deficiency in me when loving others deeply from the heart. I felt like a piano player trying to play beautiful music while having extra thick rubber gloves on my hands. I felt weak, restricted, burdened, heavy, clumsy, and unskilled. These rubber gloves would later be removed in a process God would show me (see my book called *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive* for the details). When God gives a great gift, He does so in a way that we recognize His glory. He does so in a way that exercises our faith, so that we will not discard His gifts for something else because of our immaturity and lack of wisdom. Maturity is acquired through testing or suffering and rarely is given without pain as a gift. I could not force or fast track this process. Nor could I force, awaken or arouse the love that God said He was digging tunnels of in my heart.

This called for patience, one of the few observable characteristics of love in me at the time. “Love is patient.” It also calls for endurance. “Love always perseveres.” Love carries on even when there is no joy or delight in doing so – remember Jesus crucified. Love is prompted by hope, because it sees into the future enabling us to sacrifice now for the joy later on. Not all loving is distasteful, especially if there is joy fueling it.

Since love carries on even when there is no joy or delight in it

any more, it explains why in my early Christian walk I did not persevere. Learning to love is difficult. There are always new things to learn and do.

How to form a healthy desire to love that prompts or motivates us to do good deeds was a puzzle to me for a long time. If one wants to no longer do particular compulsive sins with more freedom, then one will have to learn how repent. This was not obvious to me for the longest time.

10 Anticipating Freedom

Imagine being in a foreign country where your daily wages are, “the bread of adversity and the water of affliction.”⁵⁰ For the most part you are absorbed by your sufferings, yet lurking back in your memory is the Promised Land. News then comes to you that you will return to it because God in His mercy and compassion has decided to release you from your captivity. Your time of exile is done! This is the way it was for me, at least on the surface.

The journey from exile to the Promised Land was more difficult than the exile, and longer in duration too. There were many dangers on this journey, and I always felt this deep sadness resting over my soul. The healthier I became, the more personality traits re-surfaced, and sometimes I had moments of happiness. I became more assertive, and could laugh at jokes as time went on, but even this did not lift the sadness clouding my mind. I had lost the joy of God’s salvation. Only the Lord could restore this. Along with this I had lost the sense of God’s presence that surrounded me before the dark journey ensued. I lost the joy of God’s salvation because I let Satan steal it. My limited view on God’s love, provision, and riches led me to worry, struggle, and fret over the future I might have, and robbed me of the joy God had given me before.

There is a slight difference for me in the use of the two

⁵⁰ Cf. Isaiah 30:20

words: “happy” and “joy.” Happiness has something to do with one’s circumstances. “Joy on the other hand is rooted in the heart. Happiness is in the mind. Pleasure is in the body.”⁵¹ One can be joyful even if one’s circumstances are bad. Joy comes from the meaning and purpose that God gives us. Joy also comes from a clean conscience. All of these things can be difficult to judge or measure. As Christians there can be at least two major disrupters of joy: they are a crisis in faith, and not turning away from sins of omission, or commission.

At first I thought that it would take almost no time to recover from my illness. As I grew impatient I mentioned this to Dr. Duke at VGH. She told me it normally took a year or so to recover from the illness, but since I wasn’t diagnosed early enough, it would take longer. This was sad news. It took much longer than a year; it took at least nine years after diagnosis, before I considered myself to have escaped from the worst parts from my dark journey. But there would be other challenges just as difficult to master after the nine-years.

Since this was a dark and arduous journey, I was tempted to fall into despair, self-pity, and bitterness many times because circumstances often appeared upside down in my life.

After the Scriptures stopped being so bitter, the Bible once again began to soothe my stretching soul. I would use Scripture as a rampart from which to fight off the darkness and despair, and therefore advance to freedom.

⁵¹ Peter Herbeck, used with permission

“What would freedom be like?” I would ask myself over and over again. I knew that freedom involved majoring on the important sayings of Jesus. And later on I would come to realize that it did not mean majoring on endless and for the most part useless disputes between different Christian denominations. If we focus only on what separates us, we will always be divided, and never accomplish what God intends us to do.

The forces of darkness, those that tried to destroy me, would leave according to Isaiah 49:17 which says: “And those who destroyed you will leave”, as God had indicated to my mother. As far as freedom from sin is concerned, I knew that I would never be absolutely free from it in this life. It was a matter of degree.

Freedom to love comes from a process that involves confession, repentance, renewing the mind, embracing grace, and submission. God is the one who initiates it by granting us faith in His goodness, and because of our faith in Him He can separate the light from the darkness in our hearts. He purifies us through faith in Him, making us stronger, and confident of His goodness. We can overcome all obstacles through perseverance prompted by hope, faith sustained by courage, and love supported by willingness.

One of the most freeing biblical statements is the following written by the apostle Paul:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were

dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.⁵²

This is what I cry out for – to love people freely, conquer my challenges, and to achieve meaningful goals while resting in God’s peace within! Indeed at the bottom of every heart there exists this yearning for freedom. The problem is we are so often deceived about how to get there and to walk in it.

During my dark journey, an incident occurred to me while on UBC campus having coffee with the leader (at the time) from UCM, Kevin. As we were talking to each other, I noticed a pigeon making its way towards us on the ground. People kept walking by, and one person walked by in such a direction as to drive the bird away from us. But it was a persistent bird. It came right up to us, and the instant I said the word freedom in a sentence to Kevin, the pigeon flapped its powerful wings and burst noisily into the air. It was quite the sight. The bird became an expression of freedom for me.

We have all come across the irreversibility of death.

⁵² Ephesians 2:4-10

Something dies, and nothing we do can bring it back to life again – the doors seemingly close. When I first became ill I had a difficult time summoning the courage to believe all that the word freedom conveyed in the promise God had given me. But like all things that grow, my faith went through the many stages as outlined in this book.

As the Night grew darker, and my cross grew heavier, death of plans, loss of friends, and waste of potential seemed to multiply. The lion could easily explain these things – “Death, death, and more death are your wages!” Desolation for a while I thought. But I had nowhere else to go, so I hoped against hope. Gradually, the thing that most realistically came to depict my hope and faith in this promised freedom was my hope and faith in the Resurrection of Jesus.

There were times during my dark journey when I read the Resurrection narratives, and they filled me with such hope and anticipation of being joyously resurrected into freedom like Jesus was. Despite all the darkness, pain, and suffering I went through, nothing compares to the emotions surrounding the longing created by it. This longing and expectation grew in me just as surely as spring follows winter, or growth follows rain. Because there was so much darkness, the light shone the brighter!

As I got healthier, I kept on asking myself what freedom would look like, and as a result I composed the following poem in anticipation of it:

Freedom

Freedom is like an Eagle soaring in the heavens
Or a horse galloping in the meadows
I am Freedom dispensing grace to a world in need
I am your God and have set you Free to more deeply
love me
Through storms and tribulations you have come
You became blind so that you could see
I became deaf so that you could hear
In sorrow and grief you reached out to me –
freedom indeed
I am Freedom, I am Life
And I am the one who set you Free to more deeply
love me

This is the essence of why God broke me. I was still blind to my pride, intolerance, misguided loyalties, envy, selfishness, hatred, insensitivity, impatience, gullibility, ambition, lust, jealousy, greed, gluttony, and laziness among other sins that were in my heart hindering me from loving my God, my neighbor, and myself. These sinful attitudes are what God wanted to dismantle or break in me so that I could more deeply love Him in Himself, and in His most distressing disguise! And by saying that Jesus appears in a distressing disguise, I mean that He appears to us as those most in need of love.

Given the length of years that I landed up having to suffer before I was set free (in part because the medication I was on worked ever so slowly) one person stated that after I became ill, God could not heal me because I stayed proud. He said

that if I had of humbled myself right after I became ill, then God would have healed me instantly. In other words, he said that there was no reason for me to wait year after year before I was restored. Here is my response to this critique.

Yes, theoretically if we could learn how to practice humility over night, then God could restore us just like that. But a two-year old babe is less likely to practice humility the way a six-year old would. Training can't be rushed. In Hebrews 11, there are many biblical characters who waited life times on God to receive what was promised. God is in no rush, He isn't clumsy, unwise, or foolish. Real, healthy change, lasting change takes time. You can't age a good wine over night. We are complex creatures, so much needs to be in place, God can do anything, but He prefers to use people in community to help each other out. Growing patience takes time. Without patience lessons are easily wasted.

Consider the following analogy. Imagine a Hockey team with a roster of 22 players. But with one of the players not up to par as far as strength, stamina, and skill level are concerned. Instead of being an asset to the team, this player will actually weaken the team considerably. The player will get in the way of plays that need speed, quick passing, and good play making ability. If the coach is one that wants his team to improve and win games, then he will have to cut the weaker player off the team until he or she is up to snuff. If the weaker player has potential, then the coach (like God) will send the weaker player through a grueling camp meant to improve his or her conditioning and skill level. It won't be an over night success.

It might take many months or years before the camp has a chance of paying off. And in many ways the weaker player will have a say in whether or not he or she will want to submit to these terms and make it through the camp and onto the team again. It will depend on just how hungry or motivated the weaker player is if he or she is to play on the team again.

In the same way, God who is wise and loving, is not just interested in short term success. He is much more interested in the long-term success for all of His children. God's desire for holiness in myself, meant that I needed to go through a grueling spiritual camp, that would improve my spiritual conditioning, and eventually through acquiring certain skills make me useful in His plans for good.

Gradual change is healthier, helps keep one humble, and is less likely to be squandered.

11 From Darkness Into The Light

This chapter could also easily be called: “Cleaning The Inside Of The Cup” because as God cleaned me up I moved from darkness into the light.

The following New Testament command (or promise) sums up my hopes, expectations and longings during my dark journey, and after it.

As the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience.⁵³

My reasoning was that when God commands us to do something He always provides a way to do it either now, or when ready, in the future. We might now do imperfectly, but when God is done with us, perfectly. This is part of what sustained me in my time of trial – the promise to be clothed as God Himself is clothed in Christ Jesus.

Many religions see enduring suffering and pain as something noble and to be rewarded. Hindus believe in karma. Jews an eye for an eye. But here in the West, we have medications, treatments, and surgery to help cure and ward off diseases. The belief is slowly dying that suffering here on earth will be rewarded in the after life. Suffering seems to be slowly losing its purpose. What about my dark journey, was it all for

⁵³ Colossians 3:12, Jerusalem Bible

nothing? Although it took a long time to see any changes in me that God had promised (and at times I wondered if the only changes in me would be those in my theology) there are changes to report (note, good theology does not necessarily mean a healthy spirituality).

To illustrate this I would like to share with you two poems, the first written in 1984 before Jesus befriended me, and the second written in December of 1998, long before the completion of my dark journey:

Wind

Unseen you rush around me
You touch me, yet I can't touch you
Gentle you are when you cool me
When angry, and violent you grow,
I curse you
No mind of your own, you blindly
move in whatever direction you may go
Unleashed you are Free
Yet you remind me of how life can be
Rushing off to do something,
And not knowing what it is.

Breath

Unseen like the air you surround me
You touch me in my inner most parts
Gentle you are in my weakness

Nothing overlooks you
Every movement of yours is done with authority
Your promise is freedom
The freedom I cry out for to love
The love that gives meaning
The meaning that gives breath
The breath that gives life

The first poem was written five years before I discovered Jesus, yet it was still an accurate predictor of my attitudes before my dark journey began. One comment I received about these two poems when I shared them with others is that the first one describes a struggle for power, whereas the second one talks about love. This shows that God can use suffering to teach us what is important in life.

Being hungry for power is not the only attitude that I claim God was working at changing in me through my dark journey. God also wanted to uproot all of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within me as I describe in another book I’ve written. There were many hidden attitudes in my heart that God began to reveal to me as I continued to suffer. He did this so that I would have a more sober view of my spiritual condition. That doesn’t mean I knew how to repent from my many sins. I didn’t know how to for the longest time. But God would later show me how.

In older versions of this book I had included more than 350 entries dealing with different sins I wanted to repent from. To read them would be draining for the reader. These entries

had to do with God showing me the sickness in my soul, and being aware of His diagnosis of my spiritual state.

Early on and for many years God did heal little things, and less frequently BIGGER things, but God needed to put in place many healthy truths and attitudes needed to set the stage for when He would move in healing the worst stuff in my heart and mind. Part of why it took so long was because my mind was over run by demons, was blind in many areas, and lacked wisdom, and I had a poor understanding and practice of the Christian basics.

We don't usually fight the war against hypocrisy and pride all at once; it is fought one battle at a time. The inner battle is just as important as the outer battle. Getting into the battle is the first step to victory. The second step is getting up each time we fall down. If we do this, then we are doing the will of God. Seeking to care enough to love is essential to start winning the spiritual battles.

The Long Wait:

Before I landed up in the hospital, I still had dreams. After all I was in university and things still looked hopeful there. I thought that I'd been through the worst of it and the promise was FREEDOM!

Then when Dr. Pullmer accurately diagnosed me with schizophrenia, I anticipated that the way to freedom would open up because of medications. But events did not work out that way, they became much more difficult. Because I was

plunged into such a deep darkness where my personality, and aptitudes were devoured by the illness, school became a deep disappointment. I couldn't function at the level that was expected from me. A year later, I had to quit graduate school. This added to the sense of powerlessness and hopelessness in my small world that was consumed with my suffering.

I then began, unsuccessfully, to look for work, not realizing that I was disabled. I felt small, and abandoned, as my task to make a living for myself looked overwhelming. I felt incompetent and unprofitable. I wish I could say that a giant-sized miracle occurred overnight, such as when David overcame his enemy Goliath with a slingshot and one stone, but it didn't. Instead, I had to brace myself for the worst, and walk with the light I had, one step at a time through the darkness.

Because of this, things got progressively bleaker. My hope grew vapor-thin at times, and so I started giving up on some of my dreams one after another, to the point that I questioned whether or not I should go on dreaming at all. That's how little hope I had. It took the gentle words from my mother, to encourage me not to give up. After all, without hope there is no dreaming, and without dreaming there is despair, self-pity, anger and bitterness that nudges one towards independently seeking pleasure or supposedly putting an end to suffering through suicide.

At this point in time any dream that I tried to dream seemed impossible, including the ones that sprung from God's call on

my life, and the promise He made me before my dark journey began. Namely, the call for me to feed His sheep, and the promise to be broken into freedom.

I knew that my call from God had to do with being a fisherman for the souls of people. But at the time it seemed to me that I was much more an example of God's wrath than His love. I felt so unattractive and dysfunctional, hardly a specimen meant to proclaim the Good News of God's love. As for the promise, it didn't seem to becoming true as I walked through the darkness – except the brokenness. How God would work the details out I had no idea. For the longest time it looked as though unemployment, poverty, and destitution were in the cards for the rest of my life. I tried to console myself with the fact that Jesus didn't have a place to lay his head.⁵⁴ Just like in Old Testament times during king Hezekiah's reign when Sennacherib, Israel's enemy, threatened Jerusalem's future. The threat of having a wasted life seemed very real to me.⁵⁵

During this depressing time I could not think of one obvious reason that would show why things could possibly change for the better, and God was silent. I don't know how Abraham felt about God and all His promises when year after year the natural progression of things seemed to indicate that God would not come through. My friend Dan told me that I would play a role in just how strong I would become as God rebuilt me. Looking at my addictions at the time I felt like I had

⁵⁴ Cf. Matthew 8:20

⁵⁵ Cf. 2 Kings 18:1-19:37

screwed up God's plans. Looking at the natural it seemed crazy to believe. But I believed any way.

My decidedly dark pessimistic paradigm woven by demons of despair stole all the joy from my soul as I journeyed through this period of my life. All I could do, no matter how silly it felt, was hold onto the light I already had, which was my call from God and His promise. I waited as patiently for more light as I could. I put my hope in Psalm 46, which says that God helps His people at break of day.⁵⁶

My waiting for a change in circumstances was stretched out for many years because the medication I was on worked ever so slowly.

My Early Strategy in Seeking Healthy Change:

The healthier I got the more I began to investigate my motives and desires in the things I did or coveted, because I wanted to change for the better. Once I saw (with God's light) how they were at work within me, I confessed them to God, and made up my mind to do better in the future. But this is only the first step in the process of Inner Transformation. I really did not know how to complete the repentance process for most of my sins, or how to renew my mind, and how to abide in Jesus so I could bear much good fruit. All the discoveries I made of my sinful attitudes were more about diagnosing and mapping out what was wrong, and not that

⁵⁶ Cf. Psalm 46:6

much to do with actual repenting.⁵⁷

Some Realizations:

As my passion and love began to evaporate after I started following Jesus in 1989, and before my dark journey began, my theology became more and more of a hindrance towards loving others the way God expected me to.

For instance, the idea that formed a basis for most of my spiritual thinking back then was that we are saved through grace by faith, and that it is not earned through works otherwise we would all boast, and that would mean we would have unhealthy pride. Now there is nothing wrong with this in itself, but it is subject to abuses, and doesn't cover all aspects of salvation.

Being only focused on this idea, I used it as a means to rationalize my weak efforts when it came to performing works of love. Put another way, I was very lazy and so naturally and wrongfully used the idea of not having to do good works to earn my salvation as an excuse for not doing many at all. This delusion of darkness is exactly what Satan wants each of us to believe, and ultimately act out. I was coming dangerously close to ignoring the epistle of James when it says that faith without works is dead.

Legalism, And Hypocrisy:

⁵⁷ Much later, God would show me how to repent more thoroughly, how to renew the mind and abide in Jesus. I share the details in my book called *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive*

In my earlier Christian walk when I said something that wasn't completely true or even down right false to someone. I would quickly attempt to find a favorable interpretation of what I had just said. If I found one, then I would not feel guilty, or try to correct my misleading statements. I later would come to realize that this was wrong. If anything, love finds joy in the truth, and not in something that appears to be true, but was intended in another way.

As I regressed in my Christian walk, I would get my theology more and more confused with the actual state or condition that my soul was in at the time; this meant unhealthy growths of hypocrisy and legalism in my behaviors and attitudes at the time. At the time I thought that what I believed theologically in many cases had become a part of my character – a definite fallacy.

Also, I came to think that broadening one's understanding and knowledge on spiritual issues was the goal of my Christianity. I did this after I started to abandon my commitment to loving others. And because I thought I understood certain spiritual truths, I unnaturally believed that meant I had the virtue of humility. I falsely believed that I was a mature Christian because I thought I understood so much. Humility understands the more one knows, the less one feels that one actually knows much at all.

When I witnessed to others shortly after I discovered Jesus in 1989, I felt that others should imitate me. I felt this way because I had such a distorted view of my supposed piety.

After my dark journey began, and when I started to think about sharing Jesus again, I knew that I needed to point to Jesus as the example for people to follow, because I began to see just how far short I fell from the example He had shown us (even after God began to grant me more freedom).

Insensitivity (The Tip Of The Iceberg):

Before my dark journey began I used to, when meditating on the passion of Jesus, try to minimize all other human suffering in order to maximize Jesus' suffering. There was one other exception – my own sufferings. Looking back at this I now see just how wrong this was. Jesus became one with us in our humanity, and that means He took on our sufferings as well. I personally felt so little for these people in their suffering, I naturally thought that God felt the same way because I did not see Him doing anything to help them. This would further dry up the compassion in my heart for these people, the exact opposite of what God calls us to do, which is to mourn with those who mourn, and to rejoice with those who rejoice.⁵⁸

Because Jesus suffered in His death, He is able to sympathize with each of our sufferings perfectly. This is not what I was doing. What I was doing was breaking my solidarity with the human family. I was distancing myself from their miseries and becoming less Christ-like in the process.

After my condition of schizophrenia began to improve, I

⁵⁸ Cf. Romans 12:15

recognized this flaw in my behavior and through the grace of God started to desire the oppositely corresponding virtue, and began to search for ways to be more sensitive towards others. It would take many more years before I knew how to become a more compassionate person.

It's amazing how certain beliefs and thinking can cut off one's compassion for, and solidarity with one's neighbors. In this case one can see the connection between my beliefs and my love. My unhealthy beliefs in the past limited my ability to love. Having a greater revelation of who Jesus or God is helps us to search for how to love ever more deeply from our hearts.

My insensitivity went much deeper than I thought. God would later on have me deal with a shit load of insensitivity through repentance (a change of mind) that leads to a change of heart that leads to a change in my actions, and so advance to a greater portion of the promised freedom.

From Rigidity To Relationship:

After I began to follow the Lord again in 1989, and began to read the Bible, my one complaint was that it was awfully silent on so many issues, and this bothered me. I used to say to myself, "If only God would tell me what to do, then I would do it!" Talk about pride. I wanted a list of things to do, a book that would explain in exhaustive detail my most pressing question: "What should I do if "this or that" happened in the complexities of my life?"

Ironically, if I were given such a book, pride, fear, and doubt would almost certainly prevent me from doing as it said. Little did I know at that time, that God had given me something better – Himself. He wouldn't always tell me what to do in every situation, since after all; I'm neither a robot nor a computer. What He had called me to is a living relationship with Himself!

That doesn't mean I no longer wish to know what the right thing to do is in many situations. I do. Instead of choosing the path of least resistance as I normally did in the past, I grew dependent on God in prayer through my dark journey. I began to ask Him to fill my heart with good desires, so that my aim in acting out my call would not go astray.

About Practicing Pride And Humility:

Many of us like to think about ourselves as loving, kind and generous if we are honest. But sometimes these ideas can be unfounded. When they are unfounded then we have pride and hypocrisy. I had unhealthy strongholds that swallowed up being kind, loving, and generous before I entered my dark journey and for a long time into it.

Here are some of those flaws. When I began to pray before my dark journey began. I was motivated out of concern for others in my prayer life, but after starting out in the spirit for nearly two years, my prayer life became more and more earthly. When this occurred, and I participated in community prayer, I found myself thinking more about how to impress others than reaching for the heart of God.

In private prayer I also began to take my eyes off Jesus. I began to look at what I saw my riches to be and gloated over them. The ironic thing is I really did not have much to say “I’m rich” about! I became enamored with my own understanding, creativeness, theological slants, and insights in and out of prayer.

I would also borrow ideas and insights from others and pass them off as if I had come up with them myself. In short, I became proud.

Sincere prayer returned to me the day my dark journey began. I persevered at prayer even when it began to hurt, to the point where I was deceived into thinking I could not pray the Lord’s Prayer any longer. Even though I didn’t pray the Lord’s Prayer, I still prayed other prayers. These I persisted at for some time until my prayer life became dull, dry, and boring. There was no sweetness in it at all. This period lasted for many years.

Most of the time all I could pray was, “Lord, please save me from my sins,” or, “Please humble me, Lord.” This later changed into, “Lord, please help me to practice humility” when I began to see evidence of my pride. After saying these prayers for many years, I was surprised to hear an eloquent prayer from my lips. The Lord was humbling me! I was getting down to the bare necessities in my spiritual walk. It was a real treat when the dryness left in my prayer life. I had learned my lesson!

Even More Pride:

I now know what pride is; I can see it in myself. Reading *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis and some of Saint John of the Cross' writings also helped me to see it more clearly.⁵⁹ But, I still did not see the mother load of pride within me. I remember getting to the point before my dark journey began where my hunger and thirst for knowledge died. It died because I thought that I understood everything worth understanding. What put the nail in the coffin was getting a key insight into Scripture. Surprisingly the insight had to do with how humility and grace were linked to each other.

At the time I thought that I was humble because I had become a Christian, and because I saw myself as humble, and that humility was something to be prized, I naturally lost most of the humility I had been given up until that point in my life. My knowledge on what pride and humility meant back then was virtually non-existent. There was a very big discrepancy between ideal theory and my practice. In short, I was blind to my pride and did not know it, my theory was also hugely wrong.

Before I started following Jesus, I was a drifter with no clear direction in life. Afterwards, I slowly began to see the possibility of Christian Ministry as a vocation. I wanted to utter eloquent and convicting truths to scores of people. I wanted to be a leader. I wanted people to hang on my words. I wanted people to think that I was wise and had understanding. I wanted glory. My heart was not servant like,

⁵⁹ Cf. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Published by Simon & Schuster New York, ©1980, pp. 109-114

I was in the wrong place.

It took my dark journey for me to discern that I am not cut out to be a pastor of a church. Instead, I now want to be a servant of a different kind. There can be good motives involved in becoming a preacher. I just didn't have good motives, healthy energy, and the correct skill set. My motives were ugly. Another problem was that I just wasn't called to be a preacher or pastor. I was called to be a fisherman for souls of people. There is a difference.

The last thing I needed was a position over others. Scripture warns against recent converts taking on positions of authority in case they become proud.⁶⁰

Understanding humility means one is practicing it. Humility should not be one's primary focus. Love ought to be the focus. If we have genuine love we have some humility in that context. But we can get proud about our love and lose it if we don't have a friendship with God to whom we can give true credit for authoring the little humility and love we do have.

I am no longer a recent convert and I still find practicing humility to be a challenge.

During my University days I was very competitive. So much so that I hardened my heart towards others and consequently could not feel compassion for those who needed it. I was a very proud person back then. I always had to have a more than respectable mark if not the highest on assignments or

⁶⁰ Cf. 1 Timothy 3:6

exams.

This all changed during my dark journey, and became apparent when I took my first of two English courses at UBC in the summer of 1999. Again I was faced with the question: “Should I compete, dispute, battle, fight, strive, and struggle for supremacy with my classmates, or should I have some friendly solidarity with them?”

Before my dark journey began I knew that there was a problem with me not being able to feel love and compassion for other students. I managed to say “No” to it in 1999 and it did not significantly impact the way I behaved towards my classmates, but it was still within me, not dealt with properly. One of the last fruits from my dark journey would be to get down to the root of this evil and actually repent (have a change my mind) in this area and therefore find more freedom to be compassionate. But I would have to wait many more years before God would deal a deathblow to the attitudes in my heart that gave rise to this form of pride.

What Is Needed To Persevere Without Joy?

As you have already read, I had lost the joy of God’s salvation quite early on in my dark journey. It was because of the overwhelming burden of my cross, my worries about the future, my self-pity, and the angry pressure within me. My cup was bitter. So if, “the joy of the LORD is your strength” as Nehemiah 8:10 says, what becomes your strength when the joy is gone? One’s hunger and thirst for righteousness becomes one’s strength.

This became my hope – to eat at the King’s table (no wonder communion became so important. The special graces it affords in regard to living in this world are imparted to us when we participate in this meal). This hope then became my strength. Jesus said, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied,”⁶¹ if not in the short term, then the long run.

Not all acts of love are joyous in the doing. Many acts of love can be boring in the doing, but they make people happy in the end. Infants do small acts of love, whereas adults do larger acts of love. Infants can’t go without gratification for long, but adults usually can.

None of the above revelations put an end to my lack of joy. None of the above realizations changed significantly the insensitivity, and pride within my heart. I had to persevere until May 2001 before God to my surprise would give me a taste of true repentance.

A Major Insight From God & Therefore A Major Step Forward To Freedom:

“[Weeping] may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”⁶²

The road that led to Joy involved me re-examining my relationship with a dear person.

Despite my commitment to loving others as myself when I

⁶¹ Matthew 5:6, *New American Bible*

⁶² Psalm 30:5b

renewed my walk with the Lord in 1989, I overlooked the brokenness in many of my relationships. Instead of examining my poor attitudes and resentments towards those I claimed to love, and repenting by sharing in forgiveness with them. I ignored my insensitivity and buried the resentments I had in my heart. This meant that I would continue in shallow disconnected, and lukewarm relationships until I became conscious of my sins and repented. (For a long time I saw repentance as changing my actions, but the Biblical definition is: “to change one’s mind in a way that our actions also become healthy”. But how does this work? I really didn’t know much about it, except that truth was involved. There was so much I didn’t know, that God would eventually show me.

My dark journey slowly changed how I related to others for the better. But despite coming so far there were still major and significant things blocking me from loving deeply those I knew. One of the keys to unlocking them was in giving up hidden resentments that I had held against so many people.

My relationships suffered primarily because of what I did, and not because of what others had done or were doing. This callousness could not be undone in one step. I would have to deal with each broken relationship one at a time.

The first relationship that God wanted to restore was a surprise to me, because I thought that the relationship had dramatically improved over time despite the past. And it didn’t matter how good we were to each other, there was

always something missing. I won't say who this person was in order to protect their identity because they really are a good person. When speaking about this person below, I will use female pronouns although that may or may not be the case.

The fact that I still held onto resentments towards others without being consciously aware about them for so long should not be surprising. We all have blind spots. God decided to start changing things by answering a related prayer request I made at a retreat on a course called Alpha in my church. I had asked God for self-control, and three days later got it after I read something by Dr. Larry Crabb that opened my eyes.⁶³

As my relationship with this certain person developed for many years before I became a Christian, I gradually began to dislike the way that she confronted me with the truth. I thought it lacked sensitivity. On top of this there was a fight that happened between us where I let the sun go down on a lot of very intense and heated anger. I found her relating style ugly and resented it, and over time the resentments got buried in the darkness within my heart, especially the major one coming from the fight thus leaving an awkward silence, a disconnect, or lack of communication between us when we tried to talk.

Just as impurities rise to the surface when gold is refined in the fire, these hidden resentments towards her remained until it was brought to the surface through this trial. On the

⁶³ Cf. Larry Crabb, *Inside Out*, NAVPRESS (1992), pp. 116-119

first day of May 2001, I repented in faith, forgave her, and was healed by God in this area.

After I did this I found some of my hardness of heart replaced with an overwhelming joy. Also a new measure of peace, and freedom was granted to me. This did not completely restore my relationship with this person; I would need to change my attitudes towards her in more ways before the relationship could really grow again. But on that day a significant obstacle was removed because of the mercy and grace coming from God.

Immediately after this inner healing took place two things happened. First, I started to praise Almighty God, and in the past when I did this out loud and enthusiastically, I was bogged down with curse words entering into my mind, and I always wondered why. For the first time they were gone. Secondly, a few minutes later, I felt like a bus had hit me. This resentment was like a root or sucker that had drained my meager resources for the longest time.

Pornography was not a problem after I renewed my walk with Jesus in 1989 but I had been addicted to lust in my imagination after the fight with this person. A second fruit that became immediately apparent after this healing is that I was granted the gift of chastity. Somehow before this, I had sought to comfort myself with sexual fantasies because of the hurt, negativity, buried anger, discomfort, discord, and emptiness created by this hidden resentment against that certain person.

Chastity is a priceless gift. As time elapsed, and I grew less demonized I became aware that my perceptions of females had radically changed too. Most of my ideas on how I viewed and wanted to approach sex changed. I no longer had a dirty mind. I no longer looked at the female body the same way. I started to feel clean. Before I used to see sex as only physical – I only paid lip service to the spiritual aspects. I also didn't pay attention to the reality that each living female body is endowed with a soul, a personality and has needs and feelings. The female human body is beautiful... but so is the inner personality.

I now see women more than ever as persons. I used to see them as purely sex objects when I was interested in sex. Sure I'm still sexually attracted to women. But it is not the same as before. Before I used to focus on a woman's body and not on her whole person when it came to sex. I was a very shallow person.

I would then practice chastity with nearly no temptation for about three straight years only to act like a dog and go back to eat my vomit there after. God would then show me that other things weren't so well with my spiritual (heart/ mind) condition.

I also had a definition of forgiveness I came up with that wasn't completely valid and which was responsible for me becoming very judgmental towards others. I also had a lot more repenting to do in other areas of my life that I was

unaware of for the longest time.⁶⁴

Insight:

Forgiving oneself for letting others cross one's boundaries might first be required before it will be easier to forgive those who crossed our boundaries. Giving up our judgments, and conceit will also help in the forgiving process.

Insight:

True spirituality always puts God first – there is no promotion of self in God's Kingdom.

Moving from depending more on my own resources to depending on God's resources to make things happen is where it is at. Moving from being concerned more about my inadequacy for situations at hand to whether or not I actually love others is also where things are at.⁶⁵

Seeing That More Change Is Needed:

I started praying early during my dark journey that God would save me from my sins. I later added to this by asking God to humble me and enable me to practice humility. Then, I prayed for the Holy Spirit to convince me of my hidden sins. Lastly, I began to pray for sensitivity of heart. I wanted to be able to have mercy on those in need. I wanted to be able to show heartfelt compassion to those who are suffering. I really

⁶⁴ Cf. My book: *Going Deeper With The Twelve Steps* on how to tackle forgiveness. Also, see my book: *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive* for more on how to clean the inside of the cup so the outside will be clean too

⁶⁵ Cf. Larry Crabb, *Connecting*, Word Publishing (1997), pp. 103-115

wanted to be able to love my neighbor as myself. After all, God had said to me that He was digging tunnels of love in my heart earlier in my dark journey!

Removing More Insensitivity:

In the past, when people spoke to me about serious things, I would do the opposite of what I wanted to do – I would smile instead of show a sorrowful countenance. Something was terribly wrong with my heart/ mind/ attitude. I wanted to show empathy, or sympathy to whoever was in need, to shed tears with those who mourn, but I could not do it. The smiling was always embarrassing, and I always struggled to get rid of it in front of people. Again, this just got worse and worse. But God would later show me how to deal with this spiritual malady.⁶⁶

Seeking power:

I finally understood that I'm unworthy of more knowledge, memory, power, intelligence, creativeness, and imagination than what I already have. These are things I used to hunger after, pray for, and try to wrestle God into giving me. Many writers have developed characters in their books that show the futility of pursuing pleasure, power, and pride. I also used to envy others who were more gifted than I was. I now thank God that He never gave me the aptitudes I had previously set my heart on. I would have become a monster with greed, jealousy, and pride eating up the little humanity I possessed. I

⁶⁶ Cf. My book called: *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive*

would have become a mess literally consumed by my coveting of power. I now praise Almighty God for this realization and acceptance.

Changes In How I Read The Bible:

When I began to walk with Jesus in 1989, I found certain parts exciting, and certain parts boring. I felt convinced about sin in some passages, misunderstood other passages, had legalistic interpretations of still other passages, and became proud because I thought that I understood the remaining passages.

And when I read the Scriptures, I was always looking to see if they were consistent. True, I had some faith, but deep down inside my heart I questioned or doubted the Scripture's consistency, and accuracy whenever I read it. And I rarely read Scripture so that I could apply it to my life. I read Scripture sort of like I read Math books at the time. I read them in order to broaden my knowledge and understanding on a few favorite issues. Because I was blind to so much of the sin in my life, I saw the truth in the Bible as something I needed to fit into my theological system of understanding. And not as something that had meaning and applicability to the way I lived my life.

After I entered my dark journey, I found myself trying to capture the same emotions when reading Scripture that I had after I started following Jesus in 1989. But as I entered the darkness, I began to see that I understood very little about what I had so much emotion tied up in to. I think that I appreciated the beauty in the words from Jesus, but

understood so very little of what He had to communicate to me. I was still eating spiritual Pabulum.

Since having the illness of schizophrenia, and for many years afterwards, Scripture seemed lifeless to me. A cloud hung over it, and my understanding of it when I read it at times seemed contradictory. I also did not trust certain portions of certain Bible translations (both Protestant and Catholic) on controversial topics. Then slowly out of the vocabulary I learnt from my suffering, and the guidance from the Holy Spirit, I began to piece together little bits of understanding that began to form a basis spiritually for the way I conducted myself in life. Meditation on the Scriptures also became very rich, and profitable.

In my meditations, I have become more interested in having the same attitudes of compassion, empathy, sympathy for, and solidarity with those whose sufferings are recorded in the Bible like Jesus did and does. I want this because I want to do in my own small way the same things that Jesus did back then, and still does today. I also became more interested in whether or not I was living according to the Spirit as opposed to the flesh. Simply put the question became: "Am I obeying Jesus out of His grace and truth?"

I later realized that when I interpreted Scripture, my attitude was one that was proud, as if by my own cleverness I understood it. So, I decided to repent, and found God speaking to me through the Scriptures more intimately.

Later, in early 2008 I became aware that my attitude towards

the book of Psalms was not right. I realized that I expected very little good from reading it; indeed, I expected less than nothing from it. I always felt it a dreadful duty to read the Psalm passages in my daily devotional time. Sure I had some affection for a few of the Psalms that caught my fancy in the past, and that I attempted to memorize at different times. But I did not expect to receive from God when He spoke through the Psalms, and so I missed the blessings He wanted to impart to me through them. Man lives on every word that proceeds from God's mouth. So, with God's help I changed my attitude from being closed minded to being open minded. I no longer put the book of Psalms into a box. What a relief!

I later realized that when I am reading Scripture it is a good thing to pay attention to my emotions, my thoughts, my motives, my attitudes, and my goals and to what gets triggered. This way I can let the Holy Spirit speak to me and lead me into greener pastures through my confession of my sins together with repenting from them, renewing the mind, and submitting to God in dependence.

I am seeing today (Saturday, September 21, 2013) that the way I tried to interpret the Holy Scriptures in the past was minimalist, mathematical, philosophical and devoid of human warmth, unable to see beyond the letters and words to a reality BIGGER than the universe. Unable to see the people, their burdens, guilt, joys, courage, and determined to not use my imagination so as to only stay true to what could be logically deduced from the verses with my own faulty reasoning! I argued like a lawyer would... not like a child

whose imagination soars on wings like eagles.

Symptoms Of My Schizophrenia Experienced During This Period Of Time:

As time continued to move forward my symptoms still continued to change. Here is a glimpse of what I was experiencing:

- My moods and perceptions are tinkered with by what I call evil spirits.
- I have visual hallucinations – images appear distorted in my mind's eye. I can never tell when I'm seeing a true image. Sometimes they appear very fat, other times very skinny. Sometimes they appear very beautiful, and at other times very ugly. I have a poor physical self-image because of this. Also, at different times demons won't let me understand the content on written pages.
- I have smell hallucinations. Most of the time I can't smell anything. When I do smell things they are usually bad smells, and I'm uncertain whether they are real or not.
- I have touch hallucinations – I feel disconnected from my body most of the time. Something attacks me around my throat every now and then, and sometimes I can't breathe.
- There are many times when I don't understand simple things; often I can't concentrate properly.
- Many times my thinking is confused and doesn't make sense.
- I have to fight off delusions. Something is trying to make me into a lunatic. These delusions come in the

form of paradigm shifts in my mind and usually have to do with my perceptions on good and evil. They seem so real.

- I can't do many of the things that I used to do before I became ill. Like thinking clearly and do mathematics.
- When I feel confident it feels artificial; when I feel discouraged it feels all too real. I feel like I'm walking on really thin ice.
- I experience Anhedonia⁶⁷ a lot of the time – when I do feel good, which is rare, I feel like the demons are trying to lead me astray.
- Parts of my personality and life skills are eaten up by the illness and demons that are trying to destroy me.
- Exercise is made much too difficult because of my suffering; I'm still sixty to eighty pounds overweight. This is also amplified by one of the side effects from my medication – weight gain.

Although I have these symptoms at this time, they can flare up without notice; stress, pressure, and anxiety can amplify them many fold over.

An Encouraging Dream:

Even after things started to get better, I often felt like I was walking on really thin ice. In a conversation with my mother I told her that I still had really bad psychotic episodes. I told her that I felt like the hurricane force storm that had come ten years ago to darken my life might possibly come back in a different form. Mom saw where I was coming from, and suggested that I felt like God was just waiting to hit me over

⁶⁷ This is loss of the ability to experience pleasurable emotions.

the head. I agreed with her that I felt that way.

In response to this, God gave Renee Schommer, a dear sister in Christ, that I had met at an Alpha course, a dream. In the dream, some other people who also attended Alpha, Renee herself, and I were working in a small city that had one really tall building, and many smaller ones no higher than two or three stories.

We would go into the smaller buildings whenever want or need motivated us, but we didn't go into the really tall building. Our place of work was a hospital or shelter that was oblong and an awful shade of green. Renee said that she dreamt that a lady named Gale came into the hospital with cancer.

The next day in the dream, Renee asked me what had happened to Gale, and I said that Gale was no longer with us. Renee said that she remembered the colors as well as the feeling of the dream. She said that in the dream when I told her the news that Gale was no longer with us she felt calmness and peace in her heart over the situation.

When Renee told me this dream she asked me if I knew somebody by the name of Gale. I said I didn't think that I did, but I would venture a guess at what the dream meant.

The woman named Gale in Renee's dream was not a person per-se. The dictionary defines a gale as a very strong wind that reaches between 50 and 88 km/h. After many years of a hurricane force storm in my life, my dark journey slowly

turned into a gale. The woman named Gale was the strong wind that had kept me worried about my financial future. Gale had cancer because her time was coming to an end. The reason why we were working at a hospital or shelter is significant for two reasons: (1) the hospital represents the place of my sickness the place that God would use to heal my spiritual woes. And (2) God would use those working at the hospital, those praying for me, to get me healthy.

When I told Renee in the dream that Gale is no longer with us, I believe that it was God's way of saying that this really strong wind's days are limited! Renee's dream and my interpretation of it both of which I believe are from God, is meant to put away all the fear that the future might bring. The peace that Renee felt in her heart during the dream when I told her that "gale" is no longer with us strikes another cord.

At one point in time I had asked Rod Young, the person who had prophesied over me, how the promise to be broken into freedom was communicated to him for me. I don't remember the exact wording he used but he said that when he asked God about me, he felt intense pain that slowly turned into peace. He therefore interpreted these communications from God as me having to first experience brokenness, which would later turn into freedom. And the freedom meant peace.

An important detail confirming that the dream was indeed from God is this. After Renee shared the dream with me. I

began to read George Orwell's book named *1984*. In the book (to my surprise) there was also an oblong green building just like in Renee's dream. To me this was no mere coincidence. The plot in *1984* was about truth, deception, and torture. Something I was very familiar with because of my illness. During this time I was unable to complete reading *1984* because I was still susceptible to terrible psychotic episodes. But it heartened me that both the dream and the book had this common detail.

This dream confirms that in the long-term peace, freedom, and less stormy weather were in order for me. I didn't have to worry about anything because God is in control!

What Was The Gale?

God's freedom is only pursued by those who thirst for righteousness. But that does not mean that they don't experience temptation like everyone else. A strong temptation for me, which I call "my thorn in my flesh," is my desire for earthly security. Because my circumstances never worked out like I thought they would my faith took a beating from the intense waves of confusion that battered me for many years – first from the storm, and then from the gale.

The question: "Does God have a plan for me besides me loving others deeply out of my faith?" bothered me continually for most of my dark journey. Closely related to this question was the struggle for security. Many people prefer security over freedom. I have been no different. Why? The answer is because with freedom comes choices, and with

choices comes the possibility of failures and more hardships.

Consider slaves. All their lives they just do what their masters command. They don't worry about whether the early or late rains will come. They don't worry about the prices of supplies or taxes. They don't worry about what the crop will fetch at the harvest. They don't worry about others stealing from them cause they have never owned anything themselves. When slaves become free they usually do everything out of fear because they have no faith or confidence that things will work out. They will more easily bow down to idols or demons, because they promise easy returns for their work. Slaves know little about love, friendships, or commitments. They do as they are told.

During my dark journey I was tempted to choose the security that the world has to offer over the freedom that the invisible God has to offer!

For many years during the dark journey I had tried to form a plan to follow in an attempt to become financially self-sufficient, but for the reasons as outlined in this book the doors would not open. God did not seem to bless anything I did. Confidence comes from setting goals and achieving them. After a while, I lost confidence in thinking about my future because of my failures.

I felt such pain and hopelessness when I thought about the future, and this made me prone to envy because of the apparent riches of others and my poverty. It was a battle. Trusting in God is the right pathway to take, and things hardly

ever work out the way we think they will. This can be good news! Whatever else I did, I had to daily choose to put my faith in God to look after my future.

The good news is that when darkness, chaos, and confusion reign in one's life, God often uses it as an opportunity or pathway to something better than what we had before. That is, provided we don't lose our faith in the process. In short I eventual was able to find employment, and the gale blew itself out. But the Oblong green building was still in my future. There was a lot of psychosis, darkness, confusion, torture, and choices to be made in the future. This would get triggered by a medication change that at first looked promising, got really bad, and then rebounded to an even better place.

After these affairs were set in order, I was no longer under so much stress and insecurity. The gale had completely blown itself out!

From this point on in my story, I reckoned that the worst was over. Since there is no cure for my schizophrenia yet, that means I have it for life. It also means having to suffer from its many symptoms for some time to come. In part this means having to take medications (along with receiving their side effects) for the rest of my life which is a small price to pay for better health.

There were about another 100-pages of stuff tacked on to this book before the conclusion, but I deleted them to shorten the story. Because of this the reader might think that

not enough good came out of the promise God gave me “to be broken into freedom”. I have written a self-help book called: *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive* that uses examples from my life on how to clean the inside of the cup so the outside becomes clean too. I have also written two other books; one called: *Exploring Faith, Hope & Love* and the other called: *Exploring Humility and Pride*. They became my focus, and motivation to get to the Promise Land. I have also written a book called: *Going Deeper With The Twelve Steps* that gives advice on how to forgive and conquer more addictions.

12 Conclusion

The story of Lazarus' life, death, and resurrection as told in the Gospel of John, Chapter 11, can be considered to be a parable of my life. Like Lazarus I too had people concerned about me when I first became devastatingly ill, and they also sent word to Jesus with prayers on my behalf to do something for me. However, Jesus was seemingly unmoved. He waited for me to die to my self-righteous-independent-I-know-better-than-God-and-other-people attitudes by making me enter darkness for many years where my diseased heart's soil and rutted mind was broken through much pain, confusion, and intrigues inspired by a slippery serpent or devil wrestling with me in my mind.

The following question therefore arises: How should one live during our dark times or our difficult journeys?

First of all, don't focus too much on the symptoms whether or not they are caused by demons, chemicals or biology. Jesus ought to be our focus together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Keep it simple, reject the evil and, more than that embrace the good. Seek counsel from mature Christians. Do not look too far ahead. Do not worry about tomorrow. Rather invest in tomorrow by trusting God today. He will open doors for you to walk through, and close doors that are not in His plans for you. Wait patiently for the Lord to lift you up by humbling yourself now. Become teachable. Learn to care for

people, and out of that love them. Jesus calls us to live out the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount through His leading and grace.⁶⁸ Be fruit and friendship focused not rule and slave focused. Persevere in prayer. Fight off bitterness, and grow in thankfulness.

The demons will help you paint your life as having a future both bleak, and dark. They will lie to you about your identity. They will help you paint God as distant and unconcerned with no future blessings coming from Him. They will help you question everything that you are standing on. They will do this to try and make you feel self-pity, and anger in the hope that you will jettison God. Remember those saints that have gone before you. Remember the cross. Be brave, and lean not on your own understanding when this darkness enfolds you. When the Scriptures say to not lean on your own understanding, God is not telling you to stop thinking. Rather, He is telling you to not give up on Him when He appears to be absent from a dark and bleak world. Instead, lean on Him who loves you with an unending sacrificial love. It's difficult, but not impossible. God is doing a work in you, and if so much pain and suffering are going into it, something glorious will come out in the end when you endure to the end! As Scripture says, God will bestow on us a crown of beauty instead of ashes.⁶⁹

If you decide to follow the way of Jesus through your trials or dark journeys, then it won't be easy. You can overcome all of

⁶⁸ Cf. Matthew 5:1-7:29, or Luke 6:20-6:49

⁶⁹ Cf. Isaiah 61:3

the adversity in life through the grace of God that is in Christ Jesus through faith! Deciding to believe that God is good, that He is inside your heart supplying grace to your every need, is much easier than going at it alone. What are the alternatives? Believing that there is a purpose to your suffering goes a long way to offset any prolonged anger. The rewards are well worth it – you can do it with His love. Know this: it is our faith in Jesus that enables us to overcome the world. Thankfulness is not commanded. Do not see your being thankful as a duty or a key to salvation. Let your thankfulness rise genuinely not by force without choice. God is not a slave driver. Work through your feelings cautiously through the backdrop of Scripture and prayer. As far as is possible conquer your fears with your faith by believing that you can do all things through Jesus who strengthens you.

How else would we know that God does save to the uttermost, unless we are severely tested? How else would we know what holiness is if we weren't purified? How else would we know that God is faithful to us if we didn't go through deep waters with God there sustaining us? How else would we come to know more deeply the living God's love, if we did not suffer?

When God makes a promise, and it is fulfilled, the recipient knows that it comes from God, because God always gives something special. All journeys to freedom and maturity do not come without sacrifices. Also, faith is required, because at times it will appear "crazy" to believe in God's promises. When God makes a promise, He may be late in fulfilling it in

our eyes.

My prayer is that God's Love that is seasoned with truth and compassion might bore tunnels of love into your heart as He did with me in my dark journey. Just imagine the results – real freedom to love God, and people as ourselves.

I used to think that king Solomon was wrong to ask for wisdom from God. A wise person may not always follow his wisdom if he doesn't have a pure heart. After all, look at what happened to Solomon. I thought that my choice was wiser. My choice was a pure heart. But a pure heart can be corrupted if it has no wisdom. So what is to be done? The answer is that these gifts go together. In that way the road to love through faith and hope will more than likely be navigated.

Later, after realizing this, I decided that if God were to ask me for whatever I wanted, then I would have to say I would want Him (who is LOVE its very self). On the one hand I already have Him in my heart. On the other hand, I would be bad company for God if I did not have a pure heart. I would also make bad decisions if I lacked wisdom and so bring shame to His Name. So, I thought, I would have to say if God asked me to ask for one thing, then I would have to ask Him that we might enjoy His fellowship for ever. Then it dawned on me that I already know how God would answer me! He would say, "Then follow me!" Amen, and Amen!

About The Author

I lived my early life in South Africa, but have lived since then in Canada. I now live in Burnaby, BC and work in Vancouver. I have struggled with Schizophrenia since 1992. I have struggled with many addictions. I am still fighting the fight of faith.

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