

# BLISSFULL BOOKS & BALLADS

HEART-STIRRING REVIEWS & SONGS  
INSPIRED BY CLASSIC SPIRITUAL BOOKS



BY DAVID M. BRADSHAW

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*Heart-Stirring Reviews & Songs Inspired by Classic Spiritual Books*

## Foreword

### **2020 has been a year of metamorphosis for humanity.**

Everything from politics to employment to personal relationships is now being shaken, rattled and rolled so that what remains can rest upon a firmer foundation.

For many, the puzzle pieces of their life have become jumbled amid the pandemic of 2020. The picture on the box cover may no longer be recognizable. A new and larger vision may help to fit our disunited lives back together into a new whole.

Millions now find themselves with a bit more free time to learn and reflect on what's most important in life and how to find the strength and inspiration to achieve it.

Welcome to the next step on your journey to discover the “hidden wholeness” in every single circumstance in your life, including both the “good” and the “bad.”

Fasten your seat belt. You're about to be briefed by ten of the world's most inspiring spiritual authors on how to live a fulfilled life. I hope you will resonate with this orchestra of diverse perspectives offering a single, harmonious message and sound.

Today wisdom traditions worldwide are converging to form a beautiful spiritual tapestry which reflects *unity on the essentials, diversity on the non-essentials, and love in all things*, from the greatest to the least.

My prayer is that this resource will help you embrace 2021 and beyond with a fresh, hope-filled re-visioning of your life... and our world... and open new doors of growth by studying these authors and their other spiritually inspiring books.

I am dedicating this first volume to my four amazing daughters; Jennifer, Elizabeth, Grace and Braida ... as well as my ten lovable grandchildren; Cole, Jake, Bella, Christian, Noah, Harrison, Sophie, Rheya, Skyler and Pearl.

*With much gratitude,*  
David M. Bradshaw  
*Idea Factory Press*

# Introduction

*Everyone has a book inside of them, but it doesn't do any good until you pry it out.*  
-Jodi Picoult, bestselling author

Over the past decade I've increasingly concluded that all spirituality boils down to this one simple truth; "*Love God, Love Your Neighbor*". This universal "Golden Rule" serves as the practical foundation of every wisdom tradition on earth.

We each are a unique embodiment of this Love. If we can discover how to stay plugged into the Source of this Pure Love, our life would suddenly become more joy-full, peace-full and bliss-full.

Over the years I've walked on this path toward Unconditional Love I've often stumbled, but always sought to pick up nuggets of truth along the journey from wise authors and mystics whom are all like fingers pointing to the same Source.

What follows are my reviews of ten classic spiritual books written by very wise, transformational authors including; C. S. Lewis, Richard Rohr, Cathleen Dowling Singh, James Finley, Henri Nouwen, John Dear, Barbara Brown Taylor, Michael Morrell, Eric Greitens and Parker J. Palmer.

Because "music is the language of the soul," I've also been inspired to write a humble ballad for each book which I hope will further distill and express the essential truths extracted from each author.

I believe our personal inspiration helps to draw out the inspiration of others. Therefore, after recording these simple ballads I will circulate them among my musically-talented friends and family and in hopes they will be inspired to add their own unique contribution to the final mix, to be posted at [www.blissfull.org](http://www.blissfull.org).

May these 'blissful' book reviews, ballads and the important books they feature serve you well in your own personal journey toward the Source of Love. *-dmb*

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## Chapter 1

### INCORRUPTIBLE LOVE:

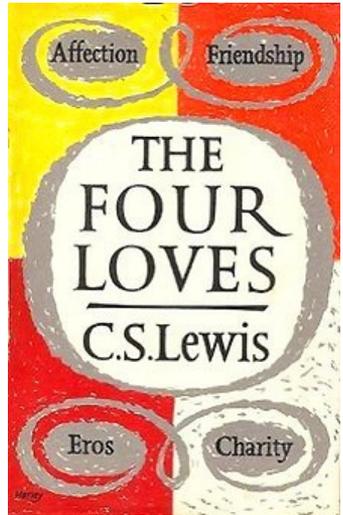
*The Four Loves*

by C. S. Lewis

Reviewed by David Bradshaw

### INTRODUCTION

We speak of love as a single emotion, feeling or decision, but the truth is there are at least two very different varieties that lie beneath a single word: being loved and loving. And beneath that are two sources from which we can draw our love from: human nature and divine nature.



The word love, like a multifaceted diamond, sparkles in all directions at once. However, the English word “love” has been diffused by the nuances of it’s many potential meanings.

Parents love their children, friends can love one another and lovers may feel passionate love toward each other. All three of these human-based loves have one thing in common: the need to both love and to be loved back.

But in all the universe, there is only one type of love that is Divine-based, and therefore entirely incorruptible, according to the beloved 20th century scholar and author C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) — unconditional love or charity, derived from the Greek word “agape”.

“The human loves can be glorious images of Divine love. No less than that: but also no more,” writes Lewis. In *The Four Loves*, one of his most famous works of nonfiction, readers explore the ups and downs of all four kinds of love. He identifies these four types of love as; family affection, the most basic form; friendship, the rarest and perhaps most insightful; eros, passionate love; and charity, the love of God.

Reviews of the book are almost unanimously excellent, such as; “A masterful commentary on the ways in which man loves, and how each kind relates to our human and spiritual nature.”

I decided to first listen to the audio version because it is the only book which is available voiced by the author from his original BBC broadcasts in 1960.

Mr. Lewis has not only a very imaginative gift for fictional writing (such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Great Divorce*) but his unique style of nonfiction storytelling is both captivating and challenging. I enjoy trying to keep up with his brilliant mix of British humor, intellectual logic woven into his deeply held beliefs.

## **I. Family Love (Greek: Storge)**

According to Lewis, storge love crosses all boundaries — between the human sexes and even the animal species. Perhaps best symbolized by the adoring love of a mother holding an infant, storge love is usually an in-born instinct. Lewis feels this is the humblest love which forms a solid foundation for all the other types of human love.

We first learn of storge love in a non-reciprocal context, when a parent loves their child, but they don't really expect the love to be returned in any significant way at first. This is why in adulthood when we say we "long for love" what we really mean is that we want to be loved as we were once loved by a parent. But storge love can be difficult to replicate by friends and lovers.

Lewis explains that storge or "needed" love often tries to imitate divine "agape" love or "given" unconditional love's actions, but it usually falls short without some type of inner transformation.

"The glory of storge love," says Lewis is that "it unites those who would otherwise not come together...Familiarity teaches us first to endure, then to enjoy — affection causes us to notice the goodness in others."

Some of the pitfalls of storge love is that it often can be assumed a human right, but may remain very conditional. Storge love, says Lewis, is prone to jealousy and can become very self-gratifying.

His warning; storge can become a substitute or even a rival with agape love, which he feels is settling for an inferior human substitute for the more divine charity of unconditional love.

## **II. Friendship Love (Greek: Phileo)**

I found the chapter on friendship love very thought-provoking. Lewis considers friendship as the most undervalued and often lacking type of human love that too many people are missing out the full benefits of.

According to Lewis, “phileo love is not universal (like storge and eros) and therefore is the most unnatural of the three human-based loves.”

All friendships are entered into voluntarily — not based upon family relationships or physical attraction. In fact, he says “Nothing is so unlike lovers as a friendship. The importance of friendship is masked by the fact that it is so arbitrary — a thing or gift of choice,” he writes. He refers to phileo love as “naked personalities” in comparison with eros as “naked bodies.”

Lewis refers to friendship as the “least jealous” of the human loves — offering us the example that when a third friend joins two good friends, the love between them all often multiplies as the size of the group grows.

It is clear that Lewis highly values the deep friendships of his life, which comes out in his heartfelt plea for an expanded perspective and priority for true friendships that he views as much more than mere companionship or comradery, usually involving strongly shared values and activities.

He reminds us that in past generations friendship was considered “the crown of life”. Friendship can be used to accomplish great things, as Lewis puts it, “Phileo love makes; the brave braver, the kind kinder, but also, the proud prouder and the cruel more cruel... Friends can give us the needed moral support... or immoral support.”

Lewis considers friendship to be “the most spiritual” of the three human loves, perhaps because of the of the willingness friends often have to lay down their life for another true friend. This section of the book challenged me to become less of a loner in the second half of life by seeking out deeper friendships.

### **III. Passion Love (Greek: Eros)**

Lewis kicks off his discussion of the most primal form of love by saying that having sex is only a small part of true eros, which he defines as “being in love — a delighted preoccupation with the beloved.”

I like that. He differentiates between mere lust, as the self-seeking desire for momentary sexual gratification, and eros, the desire for the beloved to receive pleasure. He is eluding to contemplation of a far more comprehensive desire for the well being of a beloved mate.

Lewis feels true eros obliterates the distinction between giving and receiving of love. Here he seems to be calling couples to view their strong desire for complete union to be a foreshadowing of spiritual union with God.

“Sex ceases to become a demon when it ceases to be a god,” says Lewis, warning readers of the tendency to worship sexual self-gratification, which has been a major obstacle in the spiritual life of many loving souls over the centuries.

Lewis feels there are three primary views of the human body; 1) “evil, 2) glorious,” and the third he borrows from St. Francis of Assisi is 3) “Brother Ass”. Presumably meaning that Lewis agreed with St. Francis that the body should receive minimal attention, such as would be given a lowly donkey employed as a beast of burden.

Regarding eros he warns, “Natural things are dangerous when they begin to seem too divine.” In this Lewis feels many people are tempted to worship physical love-making as the absolute pinnacle of pleasure in this life.

During the sacred act of love Lewis says “All of the forces of masculinity and femininity in the universe are engaged and work through us...As the symbols of Father Sky united with Mother Earth.” This is a powerful image of why sexual orgasms are such an amazing, exhilarating and “oneing” experience.

Eros, says Lewis, is the passion within us to say that two are better than one. We understand and are committed to a life that is better together than apart — which speaks of a mutual covenant/agreement.

Lewis views “falling in love” as something that happens to us, whereas staying love as a choice. He warns that eros can make no promise of permanence. For that, he feels that long-term selfless love (agape) is required.

He closes this section with a metaphor of how a garden cannot tend to itself, but requires an external gardener to tend to the weeds and the challenges it will face against natural elements — speaking to our need for agape love. I really loved how he treated this important subject.

#### **IV. Unconditional Love (Greek: Agape)**

To love as adults means learning how to put someone else ahead of our self. Learning to love in a mature, healthy and satisfying way isn't something we can be expected to do all alone, without assistance. That's where agape love comes in.

According to Lewis, all the natural loves (storge, phileo, eros) are “by design to be second things, not first, because they are so prone to let us down if treated as the first things.”

This statement is a perfect example of the depth of wisdom residing in C. S. Lewis. He’s saying that without making agape love our first priority, we will likely never feel fulfilled in our quest for fulfilling love.

He continues, “All creatures and relationships are temporary. To fully give our heart over to another created being is to court disaster.” To offer great love, means to open yourself up to great suffering, as the mystics have affirmed.

“To love is to be vulnerable. Only the truest form of love (between Creator and the created) will never pass away. We should draw nearer to the love of God, not by attempting to avoid true suffering inherent in any love, but by accepting them and offering them to God,” writes Lewis.

“Natural loves must be transformed by agape love to become secondary. God is love — we must begin with God’s love for all creatures — which is totally disassociated from ‘need’. He manifests this love toward us first in creation, then in human redemption,” says Lewis.

Lewis explains, “The desire to be loved is not Love itself. None of the natural loves seek the good of the object simply for the object’s sake, except agape. Yet each of the natural loves seek to imitate agape. By receiving the gift-love of agape from God, we have the double benefit of an enhanced ability to now give agape love to others,” Lewis joyfully concludes.

“God, who has loved us into existence, loves us into the power of loving others — and receiving agape from God and others... While we all desire the natural loves, we often resist receiving and giving agape from God or others.” This is so true. Many who are wonderful givers of love are much less able to receive love due to either pride or inflated egos.

Lewis continues, “To receive a love which is truly a gift which bears witness solely to the givingness of the Giver and not at all to our loveliness or worthiness is a severe mortification. We desperately need to receive such love from God and others — but we don’t naturally want to.”

“No sooner do we believe that God loves us because of what He is, than because of what we are (because we are intrinsically lovable). It is hard to believe that we are but mirrors whose brightness is wholly derived from the Sun that shines on us.”

“It is hard to bear agape love (charity) from our fellows, but yet each of us needs it. There is that within each of us that cannot be loved simply by natural love — we can’t love the unlovable without help. Agape which must be learned — is needed by all — first to be believed, then endured and then delighted in,” Lewis writes. “For where agape is, to some degree is heaven.”

The crescendo of his discourse on *The Four Loves*: “Natural loves ultimate power lies their ability to prepare us for agape love — and provide embodiment’s of agape — natural alters on which the flames of agape may descend. Natural loves can pass into eternity only to the degree that they have allowed themselves to be taken to the eternity of agape — a sort of death.”

This resonates with the words of Jesus...”Truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” (John 12:24).

## **CONCLUSION: Saturated in Love**

We live in a world saturated with Divine love, if we have the eyes to see it all around us — in every thing and in every one. How can we become so filled up with this Divine love to change our hurting — and often hating world?

One word: Agape. According to [www.LoveofGodProject.org](http://www.LoveofGodProject.org) the word “agape” is used over 260 times in the New Testament, and the Hebrew equivalent “ahavah” is used over 230 times in the Old Testament.

You could say love is the #1 theme of Biblical Scripture. If fact, all spiritual wisdom traditions affirm the Golden Rule: ‘To Love Others As You Would Have Them Love You’, which Jesus summed up the in four simple words: “Love God... Love Others”.

Many wonder for a lifetime how they can truly please God and others. The answer: practice unconditional agape love — no matter what the result.

Yes, agape love changes everything. My challenge to you dear reader, shared by the wise pastor/teacher Bob Mumford, is simply this: Give yourself to follow agape love, wherever it takes you today!

It is very likely that *The Four Loves* will end up in my four daughters and nine grandchildren’s stocking for Christmas 2020, as a follow up to previous books given to them in recent years, including *Humility* by Andrew Murray, *Resilience* by Eric Greutens and most recently *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henry Nouwen.

**P. S.** Here are a few meaning-full quotes on the topic worth reading:

“Wisdom is knowledge deepened by love.” -Matthew Fox

“History is both emanating from and also seduced by the same force: Divine Love...The dynamics for divine intimacy and human intimacy are the same.” - Richard Rohr

“The love of God creates in us such a oneing that when it is truly seen, no person can separate themselves from another.” -Julian of Norwich

“Love of God and love of one another lies at the core of every traditional religion. Love not only permeates those religions, it transcends them and binds them together. Divine love embraces everyone and everything. There is nothing outside the divine embrace.” -Teilhard de Chardin

“Like flowers waiting on rain, our hearts wait on love...giving attention to another opens us to love” -Mark Nepo

“Two things happen in any loving relationship. First, a new being — the relationship — is born with its own unique potentials and purpose. Second, the relationship — this new being — enhances and develops the individuals within it, each with their own unique potentials and purpose.” -Cynthia Bourgeault

“By love, God can be embraced and held, but not by thinking. Only love — not knowledge — can help us reach God.” -The Cloud of Unknowing

“The future of the earth lies not in science and technology, but in the spiritual power of world religions and the power of love. We are born out of love, we exist in love, and we are destined for eternal love.” -Ilia Delio

# DIVINE LOVE: THE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

(A ballad/song based on *The Four Loves*)

We're all born of Love,  
We all exist in Love,  
We are destined for Divine Love,  
It's the journey of a lifetime.

From day one - to the end of our days,  
We live and learn in the school of Love.  
Our Creator, loved us into life,  
Gives us the power of loving others.

FAMILY LOVE first teaches us we belong,  
And how to embrace another's goodness.  
We each long for unconditional love,  
Of father, mother, sister and brother.

TRUE FRIENDS are "the crown of life"  
which help us to achieve great things.  
True friends make the brave braver,  
And the kind kinder, for Love's sake.

PASSIONATE LOVE means finding delight,  
In filling our beloved's deepest needs.  
Where giving and receiving converge,  
Union with another's body, mind and soul.

DIVINE LOVE means mirroring God's love.  
Earthly loves prepare us for heavenly love.  
We're made to love God and one another,  
This requires unconditional love from above.

From the adoration of our parent's love,  
To the sparkling eyes of a best friend,  
To the passionate kiss of our beloved,  
To the transformation of Divine Love.

How, you may ask ... can we truly please God?  
By practicing unconditional love with every one!  
It's now my life's challenge, loving more each day!

## Chapter 2

### THE GRACE IN DYING:

*A Message of Hope, Comfort and Spiritual Transformation*

by **Kathleen D. Singh, PhD**

Reviewed by David Bradshaw

*"When you're prepared to die, you're also prepared to live."*

**-Dr. Billy Graham**

*"Death is not an outrage."* **-Ram Dass**

*"Be calm. God awaits you at the door."*

**-Gabriel Garcia Marquez**

*"Premeditation of death is premeditation of freedom."* **-Montaigne**

*"End? No, the journey doesn't end here. Death is just another path, one that we all must take."*

**-J.R.R. Tolkien**

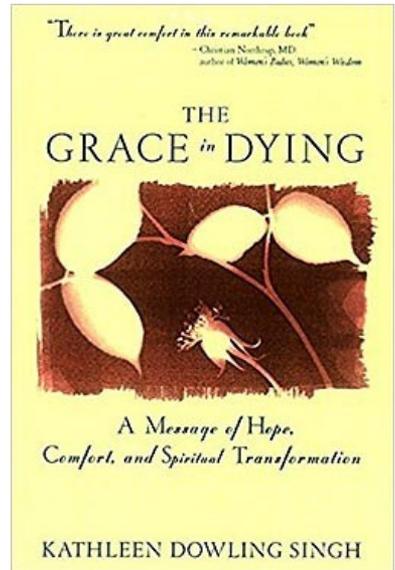
*"Dying is safe,"* writes Kathleen Singh. Let that thought sink deep into your spirit for a few moments. Then, boldly confront your deep-seated fear of death with the pure love graciously available to you now by your Creator as you read the inspired pages of *The Grace in Dying*.

For those who have sought a spiritual path in life, this book will confirm your journey to abandon your old (false) self in pursuit of a new, truer self in God.

Author Kathleen Singh reveals that re-merging with God is both a birthright and a deathright of all who are created in His image and likeness. Whatever spiritual enlightenment unaccomplished in life, will be accomplished in death.

Death is to be seen not as tragic, but rather as the final stage of transformational growth, according to Singh. "Disciplined reflection adds meaning and urgency to life," writes Eric Greiten in *Resilience*.

Singh explains: *"Death is a mirror in which all of life is reflected. We need to recognize death as a part of life as beautifully conceived as every other part. A greater*



*understanding of the process of dying in physical and psycho-spiritual dimensions also will enable us to better guide our loved ones and ourselves through this difficult and profound time.”*

*“To see how everything belongs we must trust the flow, trust life, the life so large and deep and spacious that it even includes death,”* writes Richard Rohr in *Everything Belongs*.

## Overview

*“No one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all blessings for a man, yet men fear it as if they knew that it is the greatest of evils.” -Socrates*

*“I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it.”-Mark Twain*

*“When we have passed the tests we are sent to Earth to learn, we are allowed to graduate. We are allowed to shed our body, which imprisons our souls...I’ve told my children that when I die, to release balloons in the sky to celebrate that I graduated. For me, death is a graduation.”-Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross*

Ms. Singh invites readers to take a guided tour of the incremental stages of the “Nearing Death Experience.” She explains that death is “*a universal process marked primarily by a dissolution of the body and the separate sense of self and ascendancy of Spirit.*” She observes this process usually includes these qualities ...

- 1. Relaxation** - the end of struggle, letting go, emptying of self, like an ice cube melting in a glass of water.
- 2. Withdrawal** - detachment from our worldly self, a positive, purposeful and transforming turning inward.
- 3. Radiance** - brightening aura, relaxing of facial muscles, inner illumination, light from the eyes.
- 4. Interiority** - a liminal experience of clearing our old self from out of the way to allow God to fill us.
- 5. Silence** - the language of love, dear and whispered, beyond words, a sense of great mystery of the sacred.
- 6. Sacred** - the last bond the dying person has to bodily life is an expression of pure love.
- 7. Transcendence** - a transpersonal consciousness, our personal river flowing into the ocean of God.
- 8. Knowing** - A sense of becoming part of something vast, transformation

beyond our waking state.

**9. Intensity** - energy can be felt rising through the chakras in preparation for the moment of exit.

**10. Merging** - the end of separation and duality, coming face to face with the Source of All Being, God.

**11. Experienced Perfection** - a sense of absolute safety, that all is really OK.

**12. Grace** - a transformation from perceived tragedy to experienced grace.

Reader's are immediately swept up in Kathleen's providential worldview of the dying process from "perceived tragedy to experienced grace" which leads us to an experience of transcendence - whether or not we have pursued a spiritual walk or practice in life. In the Nearing Death Experience we face an accelerated discovery of both self and God - a sort of "enlightenment at gunpoint".

She outlines the three major goals of the book as; 1) Embracing the dying experience as a time of monumental transformation, 2) a moment of profound significance in the human journey leading us from the ego-bound self which she views as an experience of separation into Unity Consciousness, and 3) viewing this end moment in a human life as being a re-merging with The Ground of Being from which we once emerged.

Her basic transformational view is that we all are born of God before we enter the world of form "undifferentiated" then during childhood, adolescence and young adulthood we experience a differentiation, or individuation. Most remain in this state of feeling as though their self is separated from God until they approach death, which requires returning or re-merging with God. Through spiritual practices some are able to find a path in life to shed the ego, or false self, and return to spiritual unity with God via prayer, meditation and contemplation.

"A human being is an organism designed to realize Spirit," writes Ms. Singh. "If transformation into the final stage of consciousness, the merging of the individual, personal identity with the Source, has occurred prior to the time of dying, the Nearing Death Experience suggests that dying, in and of itself, activates this potentiality."

I wish I'd had the opportunity to meet Kathleen in person to give her a giant hug and thank her for a life well-lived and for all of the great work she has done, but on October 1, 2017, Ms. Singh died peacefully with her loved ones.

According to her daughter's posting on Facebook, "As she would say, she was an ordinary person dying an ordinary death. Our mother personified Grace and offered it up as a gift for the world."

Kathleen Dowling Singh has authored three other books, which I have also enjoyed; *The Grace in Aging*, *The Grace in Living and Unbinding*; *The Grace Beyond Self*.

What follows are approximately 100 of the major truisms I was able to extract from this amazingly practical yet very spiritual book, which I hope you will find helpful in understanding the journey toward selflessness both in life and in death.

### **The Journey Into Ego**

Most of humanity remain fearful of death because they embrace a worldview of "mental ego, or separate-self consciousness". We usually lack the wisdom which is gained from a higher perspective of life, which Christ, as well as other great spiritual masters from other wisdom traditions, exhibited and taught.

I appreciate Katherine's deep desire to help readers connect the dots by including all major religious perspectives in defining the spiritual processes of life, death and resurrection in universal spiritual terms.

Ms. Singh quotes extensively from the works of Michael Washburn, an author and transpersonal theorist and Ken Wilber, considered the most influential philosopher of our time. Both of which are helping others understand the pathway to higher levels of understanding, the unitive field postulated by modern physics and confirmed by all the great spiritual mystics throughout history (including Christ).

The two great arcs of human development are; 1) the first phase of the journey which leads us to and through the development of our present state of mental ego (personal and separate self) and 2) the laying down of our self, taking up our cross - either in a conscious life process decision or ultimately in the Nearing Death Experience. These stages of transformation in the Christian tradition are encompassed in Christ's words, "I am the Alpha and the Omega".

Ms. Singh illustrates how we are born into this life from God, or "The Ground of Being" as she often refers, Undifferentiated, that is, one with God.

As Washburn suggests, when you hold a newborn and observe his or her self-contained absorption and entrancement, remember that what you are witnessing is partial embedment of the Ground of Being and the magnetic, gravitational 16

pull of the Ground. The luminosity that can be perceived and experienced in the presence of an infant is an expression of the Ground of Being. Our parents witnessed us at this stage of self. This stage evokes love.

As we grow, the self moves toward increasing differentiation, a dawning sense of me, as Kathleen puts it. This developing consciousness of the child establishes the “**First Dualism**” - the “Grand Canyon of dualisms” **between self and not-self** - which has great relevance as it also represents the last letting go in the dying process.

Ken Wilber puts it this way, “The distinction between self and non-self is the most cherished boundary we are most reluctant to give up...in death this is the last boundary we relinquish...it is the first one we draw and the last one we erase.”

This First Dualism launches us into the journey to ego and spawns our concept of space and time, as we begin to make distinctions between past, present and future, which then births the “**Second Dualism**” - **the distinction between life and death.**

These first two dualisms, which develop in early childhood, seek to divide and separate everything, our thoughts our feelings, removing us from the experience of wholeness and the unquestioning place of Love from which we came.

“A posture of defensive, protective self-containment is enacted slowly but relentlessly over the first seven years or so of life,” writes Ms. Singh, cutting us off from openness and replacing it with caution and reserve.

The “**Third Dualism**” is **between mind and body**, which is usually developed in the early to middle childhood years. According to Singh, “The loss is immense. We lose our deep integrity, the unity of body and mind, which is the unity of feeling and attention - the ability to be present.” This reinforces our sense of “primal repression” and our feelings of separation.

“With our dualistic thinking, with our penchant for boundary drawing, we have already created an illusory sense of self - a mind divorced from body, a self-image...The acquisition of language is our entry into membership in the adult worldview of our culture,” which clears the pathway for the “**Fourth Dualism**” - **our persona, which is our acceptable self-image, and the shadow self**, which consists of all the parts of our self that we cannot see or disown.

Late childhood is a period of growth and consolidation for the young and

developing mental ego. As the hormones of adolescence begin to rage comes a greater desire for intimacy, a sense of solid identity and worth. “Our personal consciousness believes in its apparent independence and self-control.”

In early adulthood years “we become lost in our own dramas; we forget our Original Nature. As we move closer to mid-life, our personal consciousness experiences a growing sense of emptiness, anxiety and alienation and a corresponding impetus toward transcendence,” writes Kathleen.

“Although the mental ego’s identity is a vehicle of authentic growth and expression during the first half of adult life, it is not a vehicle for the growth and expression of the whole person. It is an incomplete self posing as a whole self.”

With this solid foundation of understanding these four great dualisms which are a normal part of human development Ms. Singh then begins to explain how, one by one, these false dualisms begin to entirely unwind when faced with “special conditions” such as; a terminal illness or by systematic spiritual practices including prayer and mediation.

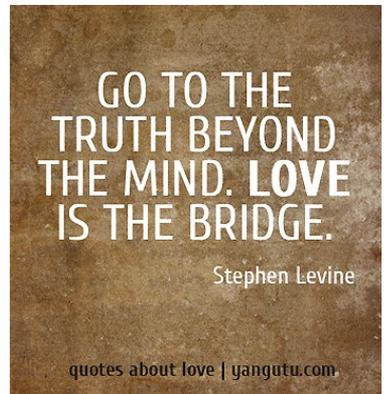
In both cases she presents readers with an amazing opportunity to participate in the process of transformation from perceived tragedy to experienced grace.

**“Death is the ultimate threat to ego.** The mental ego cannot even conceive of its own nullity...the fortunate ones are those who begin to experience and to live in expanded states of consciousness (which require overcoming the four dualisms) long before they are called to the dying process.”

“Among all my patients in the second half of life, there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life,” writes Carl Jung.

Sigmund Freud said, “Our own death is indeed unimaginable, and whenever we make the attempt to imagine it, we can perceive that we really survive as spectators... in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality.”

“The mental ego is terrified of the universe’s indifference to our cherished nonessential nature...death is feared because it is seen as the end of our



existence, which is the only viewpoint available to the mental ego...the horror of being alone in a universe no longer caring if they live or die is unbearable.”

The key when approaching death, according to Singh, is offering compassion and attention toward yourself and others. “If you have a terminal illness, find at least one person who will listen to all you have to share. **If you love someone with a terminal illness, give them the gift of your attention.**”

In an egoic-driven culture, such as we live in America, the emphasis is always on upward mobility, self-definition, comfort and success. Aging and dying are not seen as integral parts of the life process, but rather as a painful loss and decline. To solve this Singh offers a Path of Return - a journey for the ego back to the Source of its own Being - which she views as a gradual movement into transcendent dimension which are every human's birthright and deathright.

### **The Path of Return**

Singh acknowledges that the path of moving beyond the mental ego is a road less traveled, “largely confined to our spiritual geniuses, mystics, saints and sages, both heralded and unheralded.” This powerful transformation or awakening involves the death of the ego and rebirth of the self by the Spirit. “All of the splits, rifts we created in our experience of self, or life are healed on this journey...the turning point is often signaled by a restlessness or by the imposition of an illness or terminal diagnosis.”

Once the futility of our “identity project” is embraced, sometimes referred to as disillusionment, the ego gradually comes face-to-face with its greatest fears about its own illusory identity. “**The first step toward freedom is the emptying of self...** primal repression is loosened in this letting go.”

**The first dualism to be healed and reintegrated is the Fourth Dualism; the split between our persona and shadow self.** “The process of rediscovering, reowning aspects of our being, expanding our identity from an impoverished persona to a full more complete sense of self... more inclusive...owning our common humanity...There is freedom in this integration...no longer tension and energy spent holding in, pushing down, denying all those parts of our self which we are ashamed of or feel unworthy...The truth sets us free!”

**The second dualism in need of integration is the Third Dualism; the division of mind and body,** which leads to a new transformed and expanded level of

consciousness. “The death of the personal self and the beginning of transformation and emergence of the “transpersonal self,” according to Michael Washburn. It is usually a painful deconstruction period which could be likened to nailing your self onto a cross, with a growing sense of resurrection on the other side of the pain. What John of the Cross calls “The dark night of the soul.”

**With this reunification of mind and body comes also unity of feeling and attention and the ability to be present, which is the “first really expanded level of consciousness.”** In the integration of persona and shadow all of our dark corners have been illuminated which provides us a greater psychological freedom.

At this stage of consciousness the heart is open and the mind is clear. “We begin to radiate love as an experienced openness to and acceptance of what is. The cup, the self, truly runs over...In the Sufi tradition, “The task of a human being is to transform suffering into joy.” At this stage **mindfulness** - the focused and deliberate use of the gathered attention - emerges.

**At these deep levels of integration a transformation of our fear of the problem of death begins to dissolve.** “There is a growing movement toward the healing of the **Second Dualism; that border we drew creating the human sense of time, spawning the fear of mortality.**”

“The healing of the dualism of life versus death seems to occur with two concurrent realizations; 1) the soul begins to function through integrated mindbody, mindfulness, as presence. 2) the emergence power of presence, or naked awareness... leading to a healing of the human sense of time and terrifying sense of difference between life and death...first conceived during infancy, which arose with **the First Dualism of self and other, creating the concept of space and the concept of time.**”

“Attention becomes a tool of transformation in its capacity to transcend time by so deeply entering the present...this dawning recognition into the eternal and the infinite comes in the lived experience of eternity and infinity, through the vehicle of present-entered awareness, or naked attention.” As Meister Eckhart put it, “The eye in me which is seeing God is the eye in God which is seeing me.”

“Divine Contemplation is the highest level before Unity Consciousness. We finally know ourselves to be planted in Love...consciousness in search of communion. Gradually, it dawns on us that the glass door through which we are contemplating the Divine is a mirror and the Divine we are contemplating is our Self. 20

This is the emergence of Unity Consciousness. **As that sense of self utterly dissolves, so does the First Dualism...This is the experience I believe each and every one of us has as we enter death.**"

### From Tragedy to Grace

"We must recognize with honesty that we live our lives in a dispossessed state, far from our home in the Ground of Being. This is a tragic state. The prognosis of death allows us to realize that we have been living in this tragic state all along...Stephen Levine speaks of the fear of death as **'the imagined loss of imagined individuality.'** With the elimination of the untrue, the truth emerges."

**"The experience of living with terminal illness is an experience of subtracting daily...**a shedding of the illusory identifications or definitions of self...there is suffering in the loss of one's hopes, and dreams, unfulfilled accomplishments, saying goodbye to all that one cherishes; family, friends, memories, the perceived loss of a future."

"In the head-on collision between terminal illness and personal ego, hope is almost always the first powerful psychodynamic to come to the forefront. Hope typically signifies one thing: the continuation of self. There is a profound change in the quality of hope during the transformation process. **When hope evaporates, we are left with here and now. Hope, a posturing of the mental ego, is transformed into presence, a stance of Spirit.**"

"Dying is especially difficult in America...medical and hospice personnel are the secular stewards of dying in America, instead of prayer and chanting, we are just as likely to hear the sounds of a blaring TV or hospital intercom...**We as members of a spiritually impoverished culture, have failed to provide an adequate context for both living and dying.**"

**"The transformation from tragedy to grace is the transformation from the loss of the lesser self to the realization of (Absolute) Self.** Living with terminal illness is, paradoxically, a journey of healing...the process of becoming whole...the restoration of our integrity, the mending of all previously created dualisms...Healing is not a cure."

**"The breaking of the heart precedes the dissolution of the physical body.** The breaking of the heart, paradoxically, allows it to become open and full, softened by pain and disappointment, vulnerable to each precious moment...There is distinct

magnetic feeling, a feeling of melting into the intense beingness of the one who is dying. Some visitors find it uncomfortable and run. The ones that stay begin to melt too.”

“Both Eastern and Western wisdom traditions recognize that **the deepest reason we are afraid of death is that we do not know who we are.** The suffering of the mental ego prior to entering the dying process is enormous as it becomes aware that it can no longer indulge in frivolity, in unreality, in hiding.”

“The crucible, like the cross, the West’s primary symbol of transformation, represents a situation in which one is held in place, to endure and experience what is. As Walt Whitman puts it, ‘I and this mystery, here we stand.’ It is interesting that our words sacred and sacrifice share a common root, reflecting their congruence.”

“There is an overwhelming chaos here that demands nothing less than total surrender. With the surrender comes the fall, the terrifying free fall... into the abyss and onto the Ground of Being. Grace comes at the end of such suffering like the balm in Gilead. **Tragedy holds the seeds of grace. Grace is the end of illusion,** the peace that quite literally passes understanding. Grace finds it’s root in the same origin as gratitude.”

### **The “Special Conditions” of Transformation**

“Verily, verily I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone; but if it die, it brings forth much fruit.” John 12:24

“The level of mental ego seems to be a difficult level to transcend. Self-obsession is so clever and so blind. It seems special conditions must be present in order for transformation to occur. Spiritual practices of any tradition can provide the needed spark, or shock, to start the fire of transformation aflame.”

A skillful means could be a meditative sit, prayer, the path of imitation of Christ. Often evoking pain and anxiety is a way out of the pain and anxiety of the separate self. The brain will respond to a believed, dreamed or imagined reality as easily as to a physical reality, if we want to transform ourselves, we act as if.

In the world of salesmanship, this same truism can be seen... “If you want to *be* enthusiastic, you've got to *act* enthusiastic!”

“Our spiritual practice is imitation of the expression of a deeper and expanded level of consciousness, by design and by desire, until the imitation becomes 22

real. We enter the next level of consciousness we confine our being to the expressions, the natural behavior of that next level.”

“The adoption of a contemplative discipline requires considerable motivation. Nothing less will do. In the case of the transformation that occurs during the dying process, the disease itself ensures that one stays the course. Once we enter the transformative fields, there is no return and no escape.” As St. Augustine put it, “he arrives at That Which Is.”

“This is really all there is to contemplative mysticism - to be aware without judgment or comment of what is actually happening at this moment, both outside ourselves and within, listening even to our involuntary thoughts as if they were no more than the sound of rain. This is possible only when it is clear that there is nothing else to do, and no way on or back.” - Alan Watts

“Meditation slowly and progressively purifies the ordinary mind, unmasking its habits and illusions... Ken Wilber/Abraham Maslow say anytime an individual heals or makes whole the dualism of a major level (persona/shadow, mind/body, life/death, self/other) they enter next level of consciousness.”

“The power of meditation is the power of attention, which has incredible power by choosing the content of our consciousness. All wisdom traditions indicate that where awareness is, greater inclusiveness and clarity of consciousness arise. (Think ordinary light vs. laser light)”

“No one knows so much of God as the man who is thoroughly dead.” - St. Gregory - **Many spiritual masters speak of meditation as learning to die while still alive.** In the recognition of our impermanence comes the freedom to live in the present, fully, authentically.

“The dying process, as does meditation, uncovers the contradictions of desires, attachments, and fears that block us from the experience of our Original Nature...With this healing unfolds the transpersonal self.”

“The act of dying is the most powerful spiritual opportunity of a lifetime...With the acknowledgment that they have absolutely no control over the situation, they let go of knowing. And letting go of knowing they enter being - taking the one seat.”

“The time of sickness or terminal illness is a time of withdrawal and isolation...it

sometimes reminds me of a car broken down on the side of a great superhighway. Everyone else is speeding by, but you feel abandoned by the world...the tiny space on the side of the road becomes home for that present experience...attention is more present and intense.”

“Withdrawal allows us to step out of the norm and is recognized as a special condition that facilitates **psychospiritual transformation**. **The derivative word for ‘mystery’ is from the Greek meaning ‘to close the eyes.’** Shutting out the world leads to revelation of mystery.”

“For those entering the dying process, as well as those practicing a spiritual discipline, the reintegration of mind/body allows the experience of the body as the ‘temple of God.’...the true meaning of contemplation; ‘completely, to make a temple, completely to make a holy space.’ It is one of the first healings on the Path of Return.”

“The stance of humility...We are all of us ordinary people...the humility fostered by the Quakers as they follow the path of simplicity... **in the practice of ordinariness we allow ourselves to circumvent the traps and pitfalls of the mental ego** that thrives on think of itself as special.”

“Humility is forced upon us by the helpless and uncontrollable aspects of the dying process...**Death is completely humbling**...in terminal illness we begin to be able to do only very ordinary things...we begin to be revealed without the carefully cultivated mask of specialness.”

“There is nothing so much like God in all the universe as silence.” - Meister Eckhart - Both prayer and meditation are facilitated by **stillness and complete silence**, which is a powerful transformative vehicle... ‘the fasting of the mind’ ...purification of the mindstream...like a container of water in which suspended impurities sink to the bottom leaving crystal clear water.”

“With the dissolution of the physical body occurring in the Nearing Death Experience, the breath becomes life itself...labored breathing goes on until the final breath...Sitting by the side of someone dying it is helpful to adapt the rhythm of your breathing to theirs...a silent communication, connection occurs that speaks eloquently of your compassion and commitment to be there for the one who is dying.”

“While alive in this physical form we are ‘being breathed,’ inspired, has long been a part of humanity’s accumulated spiritual wisdom. The Greeks call the life force 24

pneuma, the breath of the Holy Spirit. Every human death is ultimately due to oxygen deprivation. Breath is life itself...the intersection with the source of all Being.”

“The more mindful of our breathing, we become increasingly present...breath awareness of the simultaneity of emptiness and fullness, of the interpenetration of living and dying...the Nearing Death Experience reduces us to just breathing and to mindfulness... we enter into and begin to befriend the impermanence of all this is.”

**“Resistance is the refusal to accept what is. Surrender is open receptivity to what is.** As Wilber states, ‘Since every boundary line is also a battle line, here is the human predicament: the firmer one’s boundaries the more entrenched are one’s battles. The more I hold onto pleasure the more I necessarily fear pain...The harder I cling to life, the more terrifying death becomes.’ Surrender is the end of boundaries and resistance.”

“There is a qualitative difference between acceptance and surrender...acceptance is the cessation of outward struggle, but the inner cringing remains...Surrender is not so much agreeing to, but agreeing with...in surrender we cease being a victim of life...this movement from ‘you are going to die’ to ‘I am dying’ is the act of surrendering into the experience of death.”

“With surrender and the participatory stance we face and enter reality rather trying to deny it or appease it...Surrender ends the alienation from the Ground of Being when one is already turned toward it and preparing to enter it ever more deeply...Surrender is not something that is done once and for all, it actively requires doing over and over again...Surrender increases the quality of life... and quality of one’s dying.”

“Our sense of self, identity endures profound and relentless changes during the course of terminal illness and the dying process...aspects of gender, achievement and affiliation begin to fade...Who am I if I am no longer this?...Not knowing is ‘beginners mind’ is good...it is the only space in which wisdom can arise without preconceptions, openness to possibilities inherent in each moment.”

“As terminal illness carries us closer to death, many people begin a life review...seemingly universal on the meaning, the value, one has created in one’s

brief stay on the Planet Earth...people come to appreciate, to honor their own lives...developmentally what unfolds, what we move on to is life resolution...the release of history...an integrative entering of the present moment.”

“The identity project can finally be acknowledged and then released, like waving good-bye in the driveway to a beloved child who, you know, is ready to leave home...the movement is always and inevitably from the inessential to the essential, from periphery to Center, from surface to depth. We move ‘out of our own hands’ anxious, grasping hands of our own separate identity transported by grace into safety, into peace.”

### **The Psychospiritual Stages of Dying**

“Dying is 180 degrees from birthing...Any mother can tell you with what travail life comes into form...for life to leave form requires equal travail. It is hard work to die...in dying is the task of finding the courage to be in the face of a lonely death. The challenge of the dying process is living while dying, rather than dying while living.”

“Kubler-Ross’s five stages of dying are; *denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance*...a reaction of the mental ego forced to confront the death of the body in which it presumes itself to reside. The highest spiritual values of life can originate from the thought and study of death.”

“Dying at home is qualitatively different from dying in the hospital...more peaceful, filled with genuine care and love...a more authentic expression of the self who is dying. Death is increasingly seen as an event of great spiritual import...death is an event that begs for spiritual guidance.”

“The passage from tragedy to grace begins with the terminal prognosis and ends with the final dissolution of personal consciousness...we will be describing the stages of movement from tragedy to grace...each of the experiences of suffering is ultimately healing, integrative and regenerative. All that we have imagined ourselves to be is lost in dying...I will call these phases Chaos, Surrender and Transcendence.”

“The stage of Chaos is characterized by turbulence (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance)...as well as alienation, anxiety, the despair that leads to ‘letting go’ and the dread of engulfment.”

“Surrender is a deep phase which begins the moment the ego’s presumed sovereignty is surrendered. In Surrender one opens to Reality, to one’s deeper Being, recognizing the Ground as its own Essential Nature.”

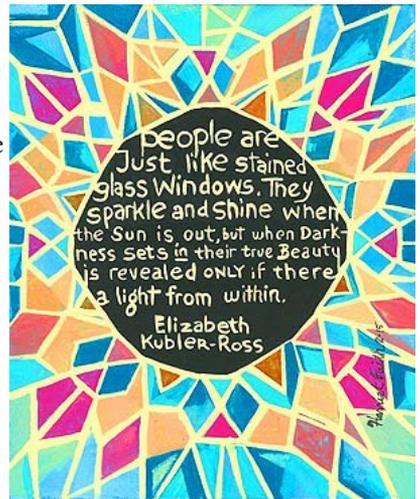
“Transcendence is that phase that goes deeply into expanded, enveloping states of spiritual integration. It corresponds to the period Washburn calls ‘regeneration of Spirit’ as well as to the expansion of consciousness Wilber refers to as ‘transpersonal awareness.’”

## Chaos

“Chaos can be characterized by the dismantling of all previous, primarily mental-ego-level identity structures. The will to live crashes, over and over, into the disease process itself, engendering turmoil, suffering and confusion. We are driven by fear...our whole life, reality is disappearing...the reality that ‘we’ are about to be over, we are terrified...the possibility that we can never be forgiven...perpetual hell.”

“Fear that no one will love them anymore...their lives have been meaningless...It is terrifying to think of abandoning the ego when we know nothing else...darkness ensues when our most fundamental desire - for continued existence - are frustrated.”

“Denial has been called the ultimate pushing away of the present, serving the same purpose as anesthesia. Denial is a powerful tendency of the mind. Denial is our first technicolor view of the ‘Grim Reaper’...the look of somewhat vacant madness when the topic being denied is approached. Denial is what we all experience in our minds when confronted with a conflict between knowledge and belief.”



“Denial can actually be a creative defense mechanism. It allows the mental ego time to create a category for its own death. When denial no longer has any blocking power, the scream of ‘NO!’ turns quickly to the shout, ‘Why Me?’ Anger arise when the will to live crashes into a terminal prognosis.”

“Anger is the highly emotional phase in the dying process...a reaction to our

perceived loss of control, which is humbling and overwhelming, far beyond what you can imagine if you have never witnessed it...anger is healing psychologically in that it is real and closer to the truth than repression.”

“Bargaining also is well-laced with fear...we want a miracle, a reprieve from death...We begin to answer the question ‘Who or what is God to me?’ Bargaining is a prayer of supplication, revealing our conviction that God is totally other...revealing our belief that if God loved us, would let us live.”

“Bargaining can be conceived as a battle between hope and despair, which comes in waves. It represents the struggle in the mind that is the beginning of acceptance. Bargaining phase of the stage of Chaos reveals to us the ‘if only’ nature of original mind. It leads at some point to depression.”

“The darkness of this depression is the disturbing experience of recognizing, perhaps for the first time, how far we are from the truth. Although painful, dark, and deadening, this period of depression also has some positive aspects to it - the beginning of the loss of all of our cherished illusions.”

“With depression we begin to face honestly the powerlessness and the aloneness of the mental ego. With acceptance, although still a far remove from surrender, the protective wall of the identity structure can begin to crumble.”

## **Acceptance**

“Acceptance is the mental ego’s balancing act, acknowledging inevitability of its own mortality...Outer struggle ceases and we call this stage acceptance. which is centered in a very deep experience of disillusionment marked by remorse, regret, recognition of helplessness and some outer stillness.”

“Acceptance is often marked by withdrawal and silence...the movement toward the threshold of silence, is the path that will lead us beyond acceptance... out of the mental ego and into the realms of the transpersonal. With acceptance the dying person begin to be occupied with things ahead.”

“Acceptance is dying while living...the terminally ill person typically will be tired and often quite weak...the hours of sleep for a dying person begin to approximate the hours of sleep of a newborn. This sleep is part of the psychoalchemy, a transformative sleep in preparation for Surrender.”

## **From Chaos to Surrender**

“Acceptance opens the way to the naked experience of our alienation from the Ground of Being...the real state of being for almost every one of us for most of our lives.”

“The mental ego ceases believing in itself...for it has become only a mask, a persona, a disguise. The self can no longer live an identity already revealed to be illusory...during this turbulence the shadow is depressed...repentance helps empty our mind and heart of guilt. Self-forgiveness leads us to peace.”

“When despair is reached it is the absolute end of the line of the mental ego. The pain of despair is unendurable, finally more than the mental ego can bear, it let's go. The surrender that arises out of despair is part of the natural progression...the ego jumps with ‘fear and trembling’ into the abyss.”

“The transpersonal realm of being is a dimension where the separate sense of self is melted, purged, cleansed away, dissolved, dissipated, forgotten. Dreams, visions, images are the sign posts of the transpersonal realms.”

“In one moment you have lost it all, and then, in the very next moment, you find you have what has always been your most fierce and secret longing. This is the phenomenology, the inner experience of Surrender...Light begins to fill the self, ‘the resurrection body’, the body of bliss.”

## **Surrender Into Transcendence**

“Dying we now behold Thee revealed.” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Transcendence is what occurs as consciousness coincides with the Ground of Being. This is integration as it is organismically experienced. Dread and engulfment shade into awe and ecstasy...leading us to full and complete integration of the self with Spirit...the presence of God.”

“All traces of fear are lost and the feeling state become one of reverential joy...the peace that passes understanding...spontaneous qualities of grace. Love appears to be the last connection the dying have with the world of form...Love pours into and pours out of us and through us.”

“Transcendence brings us to the level of identity of pure Presence, far more inclusive than the Second Dualism time divisions of past, present and future...and with it the fear of death has dissolved.”

“The First Dualism, self versus not-self, is all that hold us back from Unity Consciousness. Once this dualism is understood and experience to be illusory, our sense of identity shifts to the entire universe. This is Transcendence. Self-realization follows upon surrender of the ego. Soul is interior to the mind, just as Spirit is interior to the soul. The inner experience of Transcendence is filled with grace.”

### **The Nearing Death Experience**

“With sensitive, compassionate palliative care we can focus on the soul in the body and not on the horror of someone gasping for breath. If you have or if someone you love has a terminal illness, call hospice early.”

“The dying process could be described as an awakening from the dream of form through the chaos of dissolution. The entire experience of both living and dying is more peaceful the earlier we experience Surrender.”

“The Karnofsky scale (0-100) measures the functionality of a person. At 90-100 a person is still fully functioning able to carry on activities of life normally, evidencing little or no physical signs or symptoms of illness.”

“With a Karnofsky scale of 80 the person can carry on normal activity, but more signs and symptoms of the disease are manifesting such as; decreased appetite and strength, weight loss, increased pain, shortness of breath, dizziness, itching, rashes, frequent vomiting.”

“Those with a depth of their lived faith often move with greater ease through the stages leading to Surrender and Transcendence...others with espoused belief system that was un-lived or unexamined or both often find their structure flimsy and quickly crumbles.”

“Contemplative stability also figures as a factor during the end stage of a disease process...we know it dramatically reduces 'death anxiety'...contemplative stability suggests the person has entered transpersonal realms prior to the disease process.”

“At a Karnofsky scale of 70% his/her life changes dramatically; weight loss, difficult emotions of fear, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, anxiety, alienation and dread of being engulfed.”

“Increased systemic deterioration due to terminal illness eventually brings performance level down to 60% on Karnofsky scale, a person need occasional assistance. Life is quieter, simpler. mental ego begins transformation.”

“At Karnofsky scale of 50% we require considerable assistance with even the simplest activities of daily life. Medical care is frequent and medications routinely administered to restrain symptoms. This is the end of independence.”

“From a Karnofsky scale of 50% on down, decline is usually much more rapid. Change becomes constant. Karnofsky level of 40% the person is ‘disabled’ and require constant care and assistance with every aspect of life. At this level most people pass the invisible border from knowledge they are sick to awareness they are dying.”

“This is the cross, the crucible, what many dying people describe as the cocoon state, where metamorphosis occurs. Psychological Chaos begins to shift into psychospiritual Surrender and Transcendence.”

“Often at this point it is the one who is dying who begins to comfort the ones who will miss him/her. It appears that for many people some inner source of strength is being tapped.”

“At a Karnofsky scale of 30% we begin to approach the process of active dying, as it is described medically. Often dying people feel like an ice cube melting into a glass of water, or an autumn leaf shaking in the wind.”

“Love is the last connection we have to the world of form and the natural condition of our being revealed when all else is relinquished...All that matters is in the palm of my hand, my family, my love for them and theirs for me.”

### **Signs and Symptoms of Active Dying**

“At a Karnofsky scale of 20% or less one has entered a phase called ‘active dying’- which proceed over a period of time from typically a few days to a few hours. Level of 10% is characterized as ‘moribound.’ Fatal processes are progressing rapidly. Karnofsky level of 0% the person is dead, with no measurable indices of life.”

“This stage requires commonsense acts of human mercy and compassion; wiping the brow, wetting the lips, turning the body and keeping it clean, speaking softly and truthfully and comfortingly... current medical thinking suggests that artificial nutrition and hydration actually make the process of dying more uncomfortable.”

“Music that employs alpha and theta brainwave entrainment or antiphonal music of the Christian monastic tradition of death preparation may be calming and appears to foster the entrance of consciousness into deeper dimensions.”

“Often seeming agitation can be calmed by the soft, reassuring voice of a beloved or by place a hand under the hand of the dying person to allow the solace of comfort without constraint.”

**Entering the Mystery** - “My work with the dying has been a privilege. I have been transformed, becoming more alert to God, to mystery. This book, with its view of the dying process is a passage filled with grace, is an artifact of our times. It arises as we a maturing culture begin to embrace death as a part of life and more frequently allow our loved ones to die in our midst.”

“The imagery we as a culture conceive of death and dying has shifted subtly in the last few decades, moving from enclosing darkness to images of expansive radiance. Thank God we have come this far.”

“We will discover for ourselves that the tragedy is not in dying, but in living disconnected from Life. We will experience grace the moment we experience our connection with Spirit. Grace is the common thread linking dying, contemplative practice and spiritual growth.”

“May we undertake the contemplative practices that will nurture our deep and more inclusive consciousness in the midst of our lives rather than at its edge, and allow ourselves to be offerings of love and hope for those who live contracted in suffering.”

“The Cloud of Unknowing reminds us that the only way back to union with God is ‘forgetting, forgetting, forgetting.’ This is the emptying of self. The qualities of grace, of Being, arise in moments of self-forgetfulness.”

**At the Edge of Life** - “Water is water, no matter what its shape or form. The solidarity of ice imagines itself to be its edges and density. Melting, it remembers; Evaporating, it ascends.” -Stephen Levine

“Enlightenment for a wave is the moment the wave realizes that it is water. At that moment, all fear of death disappears.” -Thich Hhat Hanh

“Let us be the ear that listens without judgment and with deep compassion to all that the voice of our loved one has to say in the phase of Chaos. Let us be the still and quiet point of acceptance where the personal life is reviewed and resolved, honored and released. Let us be the silent and understanding companion to the voiceless time of Surrender. Sit and breath with your loved one, matching your rhythm. Sit and meditate with your loved one matching your visions.

Let us share, far beyond the last breath and even through a breaking heart, in our loved one's Transcendence; the entrance, at the edge of life, into the peaceful resplendent Center” -AMEN!

## **Making Space For Grace**

(A ballad/song based on *The Grace in Dying*)

May we all find the inner joy of surrender,  
Making space for Grace in both life and death.  
Death is a mirror, reflecting all of life,  
From perceived tragedy, to experienced grace.  
We're all ordinary people, facing ordinary death,  
Selflessly born into this world, we shall selflessly die.

Living is fragile, and dying is safe,  
Giving is healing, crying myself awake.  
Our journey into ego, notions of time and space,  
Our journey out of ego, helps make space for Grace.  
The key to happiness in life; compassion and attention,  
The key to embracing death; acceptance and surrender.

Life's task; transforming our suffering into joy,  
Death's task; transcending body, mind and spirit.  
Knowing ourselves to be planted in Divine Love,  
We seamlessly merge from earthly to heavenly love.  
Like an ice cube, melting back into water,  
Warmed by God's love, we ascend as heavenly steam.

May we all find the inner joy of surrender,  
making space for Grace in both life and death.  
Within every tragedy is the seeds of Grace,  
A seed must fall to the ground to produce fruit.  
Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted,  
Grace and peace follow suffering and pain.

Living is fragile, and dying is safe,  
Giving is healing, crying myself awake.  
We give thanks for every breath we take,  
Inspired lives, until a last breath we take.  
Like stained-glass windows, we sparkle in the sun,  
But true beauty is revealed from the light within.

All traces of fear of death are now lost,  
As space for Grace and joy is now found.  
Love's last connection with this world,  
33 Love's our natural condition leaving this world.

## Chapter 3

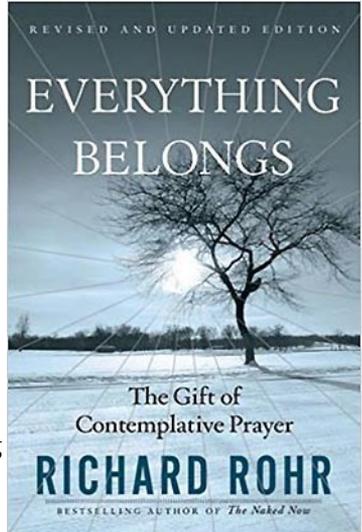
### EVERYTHING BELONGS

*The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* by Richard Rohr  
Book Review/Summary by David Bradshaw

#### Introduction

This timeless classic by Richard Rohr is just as fresh and relevant today as it was groundbreaking when first written fifteen years ago. The book's premise is simple, yet counterintuitive; either everything belongs, or nothing belongs. Either our Creator accepts all of us as-is by way of grace, or nobody is ever good enough to be accepted based upon our works.

In his familiar and endearing Franciscan spirit of inclusivity, Rohr invites us to join him in exploring an exciting new path toward greater self-understanding as well as intimacy with God and all of creation.



To fully grasp the truth of God's amazing grace is a lifetime project which requires transcending your 'rational' mind, according to Rohr. We desperately need to connect with our 'contemplative' (or reflective) mind to begin to 'see' everything and everyone with a new set of eyes.

From this fresh, spacious place of contemplative grace we can more fully embrace and represent our loving God in a new "Third Way" - beyond the confining left-right political, economic and religious systems.

The world system, and much of the religious world, has followed a success formula which is based on a foundational premise that we must first accept certain basic beliefs, then behave in a certain acceptable way, in order to finally be good enough to belong to the right group or culture. (believe-behave-belong)

But within the pages of this book you'll discover why this logical and perhaps even rational formula is nevertheless 100% backwards. The truth, which is repeatedly taught by Jesus, is that you and I (and everyone else) belong first - regardless of our belief and/or our behavior. (belong-believe-behave)

Take a moment to reflect on the implications this simple perception reversal of your relationship with God and with others. This means that nothing can or will ever separate you from the love and acceptance of your Creator. Nothing. Not sin. Not bad behavior. Not bad beliefs. No-thing! This just may be the most liberating statement of God's grace we will ever attempt to comprehend in this life.

This summary is a humble effort to highlight 101 of the key, bite-size truisms I found, which may help you also discover that “Everything really does Belong!” (Even and especially those things which still may appear to be just plain wrong!)

The book is divided into six chapters building toward the stated goal of revealing The Gift of Contemplative Prayer. Are you ready to jump into a bold, life-changing and transformative spiritual journey? Great! Let's go...

## **Chapter I: Center & Circumference**

1. The path of love and the path of suffering are the Two Great Paths of transformation. Suffering gets our attention. Love and prayer gets us to our heart and passions.
2. We are not in control of our center or circumference. The ordinary path is gradual awakening and occasional quieting. For most transformation begins at the edges, but we must not stay on the circumference too long.
3. The Two Knowings (our self and God) seem to move forward together toward conversion, transformation and holiness.
4. In God's reign “Everything Belongs” - even the broken and poor parts. Dualistic thinking starts in the soul, moves to the mind and eventually moves to the streets.
5. We live in a consumer-driven culture, often infected by “affluenza” which leads to toxic blindness. Most of us have to be taught how to see. True seeing is the heart of spirituality.
6. It's much easier to attend “church” than to practice the presence of God. We begin by accepting the edges of our life. We don't find our center, it finds us. We live ourselves into a new way of thinking (not visa-versa).
7. Our journeys around and through our realities or “circumferences” lead us to the core reality, where we meet both our truest self and truest God.

8. Jesus' most common (almost exclusive) self-name is "The Human One" or "Son of Humanity" - 79 times in the four gospels. Jesus' reality, His cross is to say "Yes" to what His humanity asks of Him.

9. Too often Christians have been worshiping Jesus' journey instead of doing His journey. Why? Because the first feels very "religious" while the second feels very human and not glorious.

10. "First there is the fall, then the recovery from the fall. But both are the mercy of God." -Julian of Norwich- We tend not to see the transformative pattern of death and rebirth until the second half of life.

11. It is much easier to belong to a group than to know that you belong to God. Being over and against is easier than being in love, in relationship.

12. You have to develop ego before you can learn to let go of it. Jesus lived for 30 years before He began public ministry and started talking.

13. The Third Way is the contemplative gift of holding the tension of opposites. These people are risk takers and reformers without a private agenda, jobs or security to maintain, to fearlessly do God's work.

14. God is always bigger than the boxes we build for God, so we should not waste too much time protecting boxes. People who've learned to live from their center in God know which boundaries are worth maintaining and which to surrender.

## **Chapter II: Vision of Enchantment**

15. We cannot attain the presence of God because we are already totally in the presence of God. What is absent is awareness! There is nothing to attain or learn - but there are some things we need to unlearn.

16. Human culture is in a mass hypnotic trance. We're sleep-walkers. All religious teachers have recognized human beings do not naturally see, we need to be taught how to see. "Stay watchful" -Jesus

17. Experiencing radical grace is like living in another world. Prayer is a way of living in the presence of God. Spirituality is about seeing, not earning or achieving, relationship rather than results or requirements.

18. To see how everything belongs we must trust the flow, trust life, the life so large and deep and spacious that it even includes its opposite – death.

19. The parable of the sower explains the types of soil. Most spiritual work is about readying the student. Both soil and soul have to be a bit unsettled and loosened up. When the student is ready, the teacher will show up.

20. The “beginners mind” requires a willing heart to change, to see our own mixture of good and evil, wheat and tares, saint and sinner. The only perfection available to us is honest acceptance of our imperfection.

21. If you must have perfection to be happy with yourself, you have only two choices; blind ourselves to our own evil (deny the weeds) or we can give up in discouragement (deny the wheat).

22. Beginners mind is a posture of eagerness, of spiritual hunger, which is hard to maintain without some pain/suffering. We dare not rid ourselves of pain before we have learned what it has to teach us. (That’s why the poor have a head start).

23. The sign of Jonah is Jesus primary metaphor for transformation. Jonah was swallowed whole, taken where he did not want to go inside the belly of a whale for a while. Only when he understood his calling was he spit upon the shore.

24. We must learn to stay with the pain of life, without answers, without conclusions, and some days without meaning. That is the path, the perilous dark path of true prayer.

25. “It is grace that forms the void inside of us, and it is grace alone that can fill the void.” -Simone Weil- Grace leads us to a state of emptiness, that momentary sense of meaninglessness in which we ask, “What is it all for?”

26. When we avoid darkness, we avoid tension, spiritual creativity and finally transformation. We avoid God, who works in darkness, where we are not in control! Maybe that is the secret: relinquishing control.

27. Liminality - a threshold, central to initiation rites and a good metaphor for preparation for transformation - especially from a boy to a man. Boys naturally want to ascend, religion has to teach him the language of descent. Humility & honesty are the foundation of all spirituality.

28. Liminal space induces a type of inner crisis to help us make a needed transition. Birth and death are only understood by experience. Liminal space is always an experience of displacement in the hope of a new point of view. The word translated repentance (metanoia) is literally “beyond the mind.”

29. Like travel, transformation is a kind of journey, a willingness to go some place else. Liminal space is to pull us out of our private, absolute center. Until we have points of comparison we don't understand much.

30. High religious positions can be the blindest of all, mistaking symbolism for substance, rituals for reality. That's called idolatry - when we worship and protect the means instead of the end. Religion should be understood as the 'fingers pointing to the moon,' not the moon itself.

31. When we first have a liminal experience it can be very inflating. Like falling in love it is so exciting to finally see the truth. But without humility and honesty it can be dangerous to use the language of descent for an ascent - God can become a way for the humiliated ego to reascend.

32. The last experience of God is frequently the greatest obstacle to the next experience of God. We aren't born again. We are born again and again and again. All great spirituality is about letting go.

33. We need failure and quiet time to recognize this pattern. Without grace we will not enter into the void. Without grace the void will not be filled. Life teaches us the habit of grace.

34. Excessive drinking and drugs lower our consciousness, does not lead us to liminal experience. Instead they lessen awareness, which avoids the great letting go. Jesus refused to take drugged wine on the cross (Matt. 21:34)

35. Preoccupation with exchange/market value is an unsatisfying foundation for life. Prayer reconnects us. Everything becomes priceless if it is sacred. And everything is sacred if the world is God's temple.

36. How you see anything is how you see everything. When we see the image of God where we don't want to see the image of God, then we see with eyes not of our own. We must love and recognize the divine image, even in our enemy. Everything becomes enchanting with true sight.

### **Chapter III: Ego and Soul**

37. The contemplative secret is to learn to live in the now. The calculating mind is opposite of the contemplative mind. The first is thought by the system, the second is recognizing by the Spirit.

38. Prayer to help draw us into a contemplative frame of mind ... "Be. still. and know. that I am. God."

39. Our culture teaches us that ego is the only game in town, and mistakes private ego as if it is full reality. The nature of ego is it tries to fix, name, control and insure everything for itself. But ego fixes us in the past.

40. The religious version of egocentricity is wanting to be right, to be in control. Jesus said "unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies..." (Jn. 12:24) As soon as we are in a judging mode we can't love.

41. Love and freedom cannot grow in self-preoccupied and calculating minds. When we live out of ego we impose our demands on reality. When we live in God's presence we await reality's demands on us. The present moment has no competition. When I'm in competition, I'm not in love.

42. "The Lord looks on his servants with pity, not with blame. In God's sight we do not fall, in our sight we do not stand. Both of these are true, but the deeper insight belongs to God." -Julian of Norwich- Like our children we cannot reject them because they are me. That seems to be how God loves what God creates.

43. "Kinesthetic knowing" - from birth to 2-3 yrs. old we know ourselves in the security of those who hold us and gaze upon us (original knowing). That's the great gift a good mother and father are - they enable us to know ourselves at a depth that cannot be shaken. When we begin to doubt, we take teddy bears and dolls.

44. When primal knowing is wounded or missing an immense doubt is created. How can we surrender unless we believe there is someone trustworthy?

45. At the end of Einstein's life: "Now I see that the only question is; 'Is the universe friendly?'" The gift of true religion is to part the veil and reassure us we live in a benevolent universe in which there's no need to fear. We live in a world of original blessing, not original sin. Abundance, not scarcity as world teaches.

46. The need to control, compare and dominate moves us deeper and deeper into the world of anxiety. We begin to eliminate people we can't fix, control or see God's image in. Around 500 AD came the proliferation of the mirror, people began to live almost entirely outside themselves - to live through others eyes, bringing constant dissatisfaction. Until we break the material world's hold on us, we will never be happy.

47. The price paid for technology is our soul. Soul does not know self by comparison and differentiation. The soul just is. It knows itself through what is now, both dark and light, no game of succeeding or faulting - everything belongs.

48. Priority of contemplation - must proceed activism or revolution or it will fail. Jesus emphasized transformation of consciousness and soul. We need less reformation and more transformation.

49. In the early stages of contemplation we wait in silence. When we are nothing we are in a fine position to receive everything from God.

50. The primary philosophical and spiritual problem in the West is the lie of individualism. "I think, therefore I am" -Descartes- Enlightenment created a false vantage point, making church and community almost impossible. Secularism is a lonely and desperate project of a disconnected life.

51. Prayer isn't primarily words; it is primarily a place, an attitude, a stance. That's why Paul could say "pray always...unceasingly".

52. We long for the whole Christ. In the West (extroverted) we have a longing for the missing side of the gospel which we find in Eastern (introverted).

53. A child's beginners mind is without ego identity to prove, project or protect. They know kinestically and respond to what is, not what should or might be.

54. Prayer is different than mere therapy. Therapy heals our disconnectedness from a specific problem, person or emotion. Prayer heals our split from life itself, our deepest disconnectedness. Prayer affirms us at our core.

55. It's no surprise that we call it "salvation", from the Latin word "salus" for healing. People show great euphoria and excitement after a born-again experience. They're right. Suddenly life is okay.

56. Salvation often feels like a kind of universal amnesty, a total forgiveness of ourselves and all other things.

#### **Chapter IV:. Cleaning the Lens**

57. "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would be seen as it is."  
-William Blake-

58. "The tragedy of Christianity is that it came to see itself as replacing other religions instead of adding something to all of them." -Simone Weil

59. Christianity has created a great problem by presenting itself as a completing ideology rather than a way to see all things. Rather than revealing God in new and surprising places, too often it has led us to confine God to our place.

60. "If it is true, it is of the Holy Spirit." -Thomas Aquinas The only question is veracity, not origin. The Gospel is not a competing idea, its how we see all ideas in their proper context.
61. "God refuses to be known, except by love." -John of the Cross- If we lead with the calculating mind (vs. contemplative mind) we'll never get to love.
62. Our first job is to see clearly who we are, then act on it. Being human is just a little lower than God (Ps. 8:5) Faith gives us a kind of extraordinary dignity.
63. "Perfect love cast out all fear" (I John 4:18). The world system moves forward out of fear. In contemplative prayer we move into a different realm of pure grace and freedom where love flourishes.
64. The private ego does not deserve all this dignity...in the great wisdom traditions the wounds to our ego are our teachers and must be welcomed. They must be paid attention too, not litigated.
65. We must rediscover the gift of free will. When grace is no longer an experienced reality, it seems the realm of freedom is lost too.
66. Secular freedom is having to do what you want to do. Religious freedom is wanting to do what you have to do. Primal freedom to be yourself, to live in the truth despite all circumstances.
67. In the silence of contemplation we will observe the process whereby we actively choose and create what we pay attention to. During the first 20 minutes only our primary agenda shows itself.
68. The contemplative mind refuses to project evil elsewhere...we must be free to say "yes" before we say "no" to get ourselves out of the way - dying to self before we judge anyone else.
69. The levels of moral development (Lawrence Kohlberg) describe six distinct levels or stages. He concluded we are incapable of understanding a stage more than one beyond our own. Jesus is a sixth level person, which is why some are not able to understand His teaching.
70. The greatest barrier to the next level of consciousness is our comfort and control at the level we are at now. Our first response to anyone calling us to truth, greatness or a higher level will be anxiety. Every step up the ladder of moral development is taken in semi-darkness, by the light of faith.

71. God alone seems capable of guiding us through these transitional and dark stages. Alone we panic and run. Women tend to be better at bodily knowing than men are ... perhaps because the state of body and mind are in union. Men have paid a price for “power”. We surrendered our kinesthetic knowing and, unfortunately, much of our soul.

72. Prayer, silence and suffering seem to be the necessary teachers in all great traditions, to lead us to emotional and spiritual strength and transformation.

73. New physics tells us that matter is mostly the manifestation of spirit. Spirit, consciousness, relationship itself is the real thing. Energy is not in particles of the atom, but in the space between the particles.

74. Now it suddenly becomes easier to deal with people who are dying, because we know they are returning to Spirit! “Life has not ended, but merely changed.” Death becomes holy. We need to lose this fascination with only the young and beautiful people - as if youth and beauty were the only truth.

75. Growth in the spiritual life is not by acquisition of something new, but rather by letting go of fear and attachment to self-image. We grow by subtraction much more than by addition.

## **Chapter V: Don't Push the River**

76. The only authority we have in other's lives is what we ourselves have walked and know to be true. Then we earn the right to speak and give hope and meaning to the next generation.

77. The final stage of the wisdom of faith is becoming the Holy Fool - one who knows he does not know - but doesn't need to either.

78. We can see a convergence of big mind (East) with small mind (West). Small mind needs big mind for context and perspective. Big mind needs small mind or it gets lost in mystique and abstraction. Rational and mystical mind both needed for wholeness, but they are not easy partners, yet all are a necessary part of the body of Christ.

79. If we can learn to trust God, the next movement of our soul is to trust ourselves - because God trusts us. God will even use sin to transform you. “Sin shall not be a shame to humans, but a glory...the mark of sin shall be turned to honor.” -Julian of Norwich-

80. The Gospel is all about the mystery of forgiveness. If Jesus is the revelation of the heart of God, it is very good news about the nature of God. The Samaritan woman is loved, accepted and then sent to advertise the good news as an apostle! (Jn. 4:18)

81. "You will know the mystery of salvation through fore-giveness of sin" (Lk. 1:77) This means being given beforehand - before you earned it, were worthy of it, or maybe even asked for it. Early Church Fathers believed in "apokatastasis" universal restoration (Acts 3:21) as the real meaning of the resurrection of Christ. God finally wins in every person's life... which led to Catholic tradition of Purgatory.

82. 2/3 of Jesus teachings are about forgiveness and 1/3 of the parables. Could God's love really be that great and universal? Is life just a great school of love? Parables seem to teach that all laborers receive the same pay (Matt 20:1-16) In the Prodigal son parable (Luke 15:28) the elder son refuses to attend the free banquet.

83. Forgiveness is God's entry into powerlessness, as we see in the image of the cross. God is a lover, "Closer to me than myself" -Meister Eckhart- Transformation happens through tears much more than through threats and punishments.

84. Religion and relationships are one, "re-ligio" is the task of putting our divided realities back together; human and divine, male and female, heaven and earth. Sinners are those who choose to keep it all divided.

85. Christianity is the only world religion that believes God became a living human being - the incarnation of Jesus. The material world now becomes the privileged place for divine encounter.

86. The biblical human is clearly tripartite, which mirrors the diving Trinity. (I Thes. 5:23) "Blameless, spirit, soul and body." Spirit tends toward the mind, universals, absolutes and God. Soul tends toward psyche, experience, particulars, "me." The soul is the lost element of human trinity...the body is the rejected element.

87. Spirit is described as "flowing water" and "a spring with you" (Jn. 4:10-14) "river of life" (Rev. 22:1-2). Life is not just about you, you are part of a much larger stream; God. Faith does not need to push the river, just trust that there is a river, it's flowing and we are in it. The river is God's providential love - do not be afraid!

88. Without awareness of the river, a sense that we are supported, we succumb to fear, so we frighten others. We all want to be around people whom we feel safe and forgiven just by being next to them.

89. When the church is no longer teaching people how to pray, it's lost its reason for existence. After prayer, the church needs to teach "the weeping mode" - which leads to owning our complicity in the problem.

90. The freedom to cry is a clear sign you have actually experienced God. Jesus called mourning blessed (Matt. 5:4) When weeping is lost, our grief seems to turn into anger, blaming and controlling mode. Francis cried a lot and Claire also.

91. Peace of mind is a contradiction of terms. Contemplative prayer must lead us beyond our mind to a more spacious place. A prayer of silence is not so much to express, but to experience dependence - like a child on a mother's lap.

92. The man/woman who cannot cry is a savage. To descend into "the tears of things" I take my boys to nursing homes. The old man/woman who can't laugh is a fool - the person of prayer can cry from the heart and laugh from the belly.

## **Chapter VI: Return to the Sacred**

93. In sacred space the old world is able to fall apart and the new world is able to be revealed. Without liminal space we idolize normalcy.

94. Jesus is called priest, prophet and King. We see the priesthood every Sunday in liturgy, our feasts and symbols celebrate Christ the King, but it is the prophet who leads us out of normalcy. We resist having Christ deconstruct the system. I've never in all the Christian world found a church named "Christ the Prophet." Both the church and the state are threatened by true mystics.

95. There is no shortcut from simple consciousness to enlightenment. We must go through radically unsettling transformation and liminal steps. Most problems are psychological, but most solutions are spiritual requiring a loss of ego-self power.

96. We need to look for our shadow, what we have avoided, dismissed and disdained. As we integrate and forgive our shadow life looks different. We see things as God does. God doesn't look at our faults, but at the place we are trying to say "yes" like we do with our children.

97. There's a certain fear of death that comes from not having lived yet, an existential terror about losing what you've never found. Once you've touched

the mystery of life you are not afraid of death. Like Francis, we can say “Welcome Sister death.”

98. Jesus came to promise life and love is eternal, but we can enter into it now. It’s heaven all the way to heaven. And it’s hell all the way to hell. Not later, but now.

99. Walking the Third Way - Christianity is a religion of attachment to love, risk, pain and suffering. There is also a dance with detachment, the purifying of attachment. The work of the soul is attachment, the work of the Spirit is detachment. This tension dance is often called The Third Way.

100. The Third Way is a way of wisdom of the cross. Liberals deny the vertical arm of the cross (transcendence and tradition) while Conservatives deny the horizontal arm (breadth and inclusivity). The prophet combines the best of both which makes them radical and unacceptable in both camps.

101. Before enlightenment all fear, judgment and criticism is stated in the second person “you are” - After enlightenment, we join Jesus on the cross and all criticism is henceforth stated in the first person “we are.”

### **Conclusion: A Contemplative Seeing of the Doctrine of the Cross**

1. God is found in all things.
2. Human existence is neither perfectly consistent, nor is it incoherent chaos.
3. The price we pay for holding together these opposites is always some form of crucifixion.
4. The Pascal mystery is true life that comes only through journeys of death and rebirth.
5. We should never be surprised or scandalized by the sinful and the tragic.
6. We must resist all utopian ideologies - Jesus is an utter realist.
7. Following Jesus is not a “salvation scheme” or social order, it is a vocation to share the fate of God for the life of the world.
8. God is calling everything and everyone to Himself.
9. Institutional religion is a humanly necessary but immature manifestation of God's hidden mystery.
10. By God’s choice and grace many live in the mystery of suffering and joy of God without formally belonging to any church.
11. The cosmic Christ is no threat to anything but separateness, illusion, domination and imperial ego.
12. The contemplative mind is the only mind big enough to see this, and the only kind of seeing that is surrendered enough to trust it. “No problem can be solved by the same consciousness that caused it.” -Einstein-

# Everything Belongs

(A ballad/song based on *Everything Belongs*)

Believe it or not, everything belongs,  
Believe it or not, nothing's out of place.  
Suffering gets my attention,  
And Love expands my heart.

I want to see like God sees,  
Trusting the flow of life,  
So deep it even includes death.

How I see anything, Is how I see everything,  
Suddenly I love even my enemy.  
Grace leads me to emptiness,  
Then fills the void with more Grace.

Lord help me learn to let go,  
To be born again, and again, and again.  
All is priceless if it's sacred,  
All is sacred if the world is God's temple.

When I'm nothing before my God,  
I'm ready to receive all from God.  
I grow by subtraction, not addition,  
by letting go, not by holding tight.

I am learning to trust God,  
As I learn that God trusts me.  
To sin is not a shame,  
God even uses sin to transform me.

A world of original blessing, not sin,  
A world of abundance, not scarcity.  
My soul learns from both dark and light,  
God loves all creation, rejecting none.

The work of the soul is attachment,  
The work of the spirit is detachment,  
The Third Way is a divine dance of both.

Life is nothing but a great school of love,  
God is a Lover, closer to me than myself.  
God's love is a river that's flowing,  
And we're all in it, so fear not!

## Chapter 4

### HOLY ENVY:

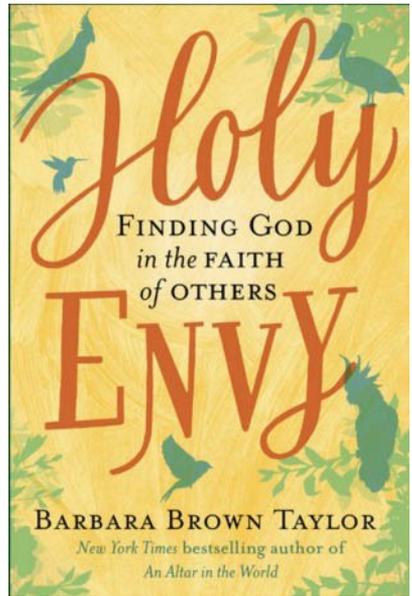
*Finding God in the Faith of Others*

by Barbara Brown Taylor

Reviewed by David Bradshaw

#### Introduction to Interspirituality

“The definitive revolution is the spiritual awakening of humankind. This revolution will be the task of the Interspiritual Age. The necessary shifts in consciousness require a new approach to spirituality that transcends past religious cultures of fragmentation and isolation.” -Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*



I was first introduced to Barbara Brown Taylor at a conference she spoke at on the topic of The Universal Christ hosted by author Richard Rohr and the Center for Action and Contemplation. Her topic was the subject of her last book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*. Christians, including myself have been rather prejudice against the darkness, so I was interested in her entirely enlightening presentation about what we can learn about God in the darkness — which physics now reveals is full of microscopic light particles.

Barbara is very gifted at communicating complex spiritual truths using everyday experiences. As another of her book titles proclaims, she sees *An Altar in the World* — not just in church buildings. This ability to mystically see God in all things and people, combined with her gift of being an articulate storyteller, pays off big in her newest book, *Holy Envy*, as she tackles the timely subject of how Christians can gracefully move from spiritual exclusivity toward greater inclusivity in just over 200 fast-moving pages.

Warning: Reading Ms. Taylor can easily become both habit-forming and myth-busting as she weaves her contagious love of God and neighbor tightly into the fabric of her stories.

Readers are immediately invited into her Piedmont College classroom located in northeast Georgia — as well as real-world experiences in mosques and temples — 47 for a whirlwind course in the world's major religions. What is most refreshing

is that Barbara's starting point is loving exploration, rather than condescending spiritual judgment.

## **Growing Your Faith By Experiencing Others**

“The tragedy of Christianity is that it came to see itself as replacing other religions instead of adding something to all of them.” -Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*  
Barbara's experience serving as an Episcopal priest for decades allows her the humility to offer herself as a perfect example of how little most Christians know about others within our own faith, let alone the other major faiths of the world. Thankfully, her spiritual journey brings both her students (and her readers) to a new place of “holy envy” — by learning to love other people and their different spiritual traditions with the same love she offers to those who embrace her own spiritual tradition.

Given the current state of cultural, spiritual, ethnic and racial polarization in America, I'd say this book is the perfect healing balm which needs to be liberally applied to the faithful — especially by those mature elders who are willing and interested in extending an olive branch of peace toward other wisdom traditions.

Are you brave enough to set aside your preconceived notions about God and explore the divine mystery through other people's eyes?

If so, be prepared to be swept into a new, spacious spiritual world that will enable you to love all Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists with a new level of passion — and inspire you to love your God and your neighbor (both believing and unbelieving).

## **Overcoming The “Cocoon Effect”**

“Christianity has created a great problem by presenting itself as a completing ideology rather than a way to see all things. Rather than revealing God in new and surprising places, too often it has led us to confine God to our place.” -Richard Rohr, *What Mystics Know*

Most people are busy during their first half of life establishing a strong foundational belief system and a healthy ego. So when encountering others who hold a different spiritual perspective we're often quick to defend our brand of faith, which typically has been passed on to us by our family, friends or community.

The exclusive claims of Christianity, coupled with surrounding ourselves with only our own, can create what Barbara calls a “cocoon effect,” which often prevents us from thinking very much about the faith of others. As she puts it, “It is difficult 48

to discern what made the confrontations between Christians any different than the confrontations between Christians and people of other faiths.”

When Christians speak in language loaded with exclusivity we are violating the most basic command of loving our neighbor, Brown emphasizes. “Something all great religions have in common; the truth of their teaching hinges on how people treat one another.” Both Old and New Testament verses command believers to “love the strangers” among us. Jesus said “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.” (John 10:16).

Part of the problem Christians have, according to Ms. Brown, is knowing when to read the Bible literally, and when to read it literarily — that is, figuratively instead of word for word. Most Fundamentalist Christians have been taught that all of the Bible is to be read literally — which is only one school of interpretation. Barbara sums it up, “Every sacred text has human readers...we interpret to meet our own needs.”

“At one end of the Biblical interpretation spectrum is the literal approach, “which seeks accuracy and factuality,” Brian McLaren explains in *The Great Spiritual Migration*, “while at the other end is a literary approach, which looks for artistry and meaning. Both can have great value, depending upon the text and context.”

The best way to overcome the “cocoon effect” is to rub shoulders with others from different spiritual perspectives than our own. We need to listen carefully to how we sound to strangers. “We need partners from outside of our in-groups to keep telling how we sound,” admits Ms. Brown.

## **So, What’s To Envy?**

“Just as the church had discerned the mystery of Christ hidden in the religious history of Israel, so it was possible and necessary to discover the face of Christ hidden within all the religions of the world.” -Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses of Our Time*

While walking down the path of spiritual inclusion with her college students, Barbara does an excellent job in living up to the book’s title “Holy Envy,” by naming many of the specific spiritual practices of the world’s major religions she and her students have grown to envy — and why.

For example, Barbara found herself experiencing ‘holy envy’ when visiting a Hindu temple as the leaders blessed her and her students regardless of their beliefs. “Why 49 was my religion so much less generous?” she asked herself. “Who had

convinced us that faith was a competitive sport...and that only one team could win for all eternity.”

When examining Hinduism she was struck by the freedom that followers have to find their own path to divine union via scholarship, service, meditation and devotion. She was shocked to discover that Hindus love both Jesus and Vishnu as well as the similarity of resurrection and reincarnation which both require life, death and rebirth.

When we look for truth in others we can often understand our own truth better says Ms. Brown. “I learn from other spiritual leaders, but I come home to Jesus at night.”

When visiting a Buddhist temple, Barbara embraced the teaching of the founder, Siddhartha Gautma, who never claimed to be God, but rather said he was an enlightened man who found the path to peace by understanding that life is never pain-free, but that suffering can be overcome. She envied the Buddhist’s confidence in their own ability to decide their path, rather than always looking to others for direction.

### **Conclusion – “Nothing Left to Envy”**

“The world’s great spiritual traditions and human attempts to comprehend the Divine into two basic categories; ‘Ascending’ and ‘Descending’ — seeking God above the earth and seeking God in the earth. It is in this union of Ascending and Descending currents that harmony is found...it seems that only when both are united that both can be saved...If you and I do not contribute to this union, then it is very possible we will destroy the only Earth we have and forfeit the only Heaven we might otherwise embrace.” -Ken Wilbur, *A Brief History of Everything*

Ken Wilber views religion as having two primary functions. The first is to create “meaning for the separate self.” The second and mature function of religion is to help individuals transcend that very self. Moving from the small “false” self to the larger “True” self. This resonates with the message of “Holy Envy.”

Ms. Brown concludes that the meteoric rise of the spiritual category ‘Spiritual, but not Religious’... “Reflects the fact that for many people it is easier than trying to reconcile strict Christian teachings (such as heaven, hell, creation, evolution, etc.) with their affection for non-Christian friends.”

“Holy envy,” she writes, “alerts me to things in other religions that have become neglected in my own... such as the inclusiveness of Hinduism, the non-violence of Buddhism, the prayer life of Islam and the intentional Sabbath of Judaism.” 50

“It is past time for a Copernican revolution in theology, in which God assumes the prime place at the center and Christianity joins the orbit of the great religions circling around.” I like that image. And I love this book, along with her other 3 books, *Altar in the World*, *Leaving Church*, and *Learning to Walk in the Darkness*.

Barbara concludes her compelling call to interspirituality with a story of her visit to Church of the Common Ground, which meets outdoors at a park in Atlanta. The service began with an interrupter/heckler who later quieted down and listened as the church humbly gathered in a circle and celebrated communion. She suddenly found herself... “where the church meets the world... with no walls or ceiling”... leaving her with “nothing left to envy.”

## **Holy Envy**

(Based on the book *Holy Envy*)

Imagine seeing all with new eyes full of love,  
Embracing union with all - starting with God.  
Ending the trajectory of violence and division,  
Changing the flow of history toward compassion.

Holy envy - finding God in the faith of others,  
Holy envy - seeing God's face in one another,  
Holy envy - listening for the genuine in each other.

Welcome to the inter-spiritual awakening,  
The end of exclusion, dawning full inclusion.  
A new worldview where East meets West,  
A new recognition that The Golden Rule is best.

Holy envy - finding God in the faith of others,  
Holy envy - seeing God's face in one another,  
Holy envy - listening for the genuine in each other.

I now see universal truth and everything belongs,  
I can see why dividing and Judging is so wrong.  
Let us now agree to place God at the very center,  
May we both ascend and descend into godly union.

Holy envy - finding God in the faith of others,  
Holy envy - seeing God's face in one another,  
Holy envy - listening for the genuine in each other.

## Chapter 5

### The RETURN of The PRODIGAL SON:

*A Story of Homecoming*

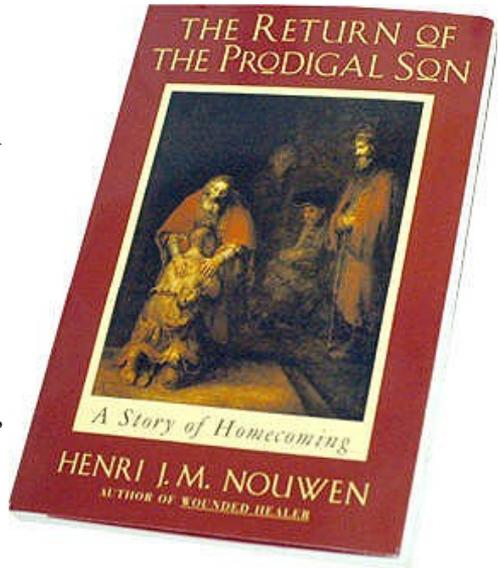
by Henri J. M. Nouwen (1932-1996)

Reviewed by David Bradshaw

#### Introduction – Art Imitates Life

This book is a testimony to the power of art to inspire and transform lives. It's really about the essence of Christianity condensed into one, simple parable about two very different sons and one very compassionate Father.

The story of the Prodigal Son is one of the best known of Jesus' teachings, but Henri Nouwen uses an examination of Rembrandt's rendition of the parable to help readers analyze many additional elements of spiritual transformation. Beyond a simple explanation of the prodigal son's spiritual journey, Henri encourages readers to ponder the spiritual challenges faced by all the characters.



This is the first book I've read by Henri Nouwen, a beloved Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer and theologian. His distinguished career teaching and lecturing at Notre Dame, Yale and Harvard divinity schools (as well as writing 39 books) took a dramatic turn in 1983 after he encountered Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son* painting while visiting the L'Arche Daybreak community in France.

Rembrandt's masterpiece made a deep spiritual impression upon Henri. Soon thereafter, he was given an opportunity to visit the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg to see the original painting. Following several days contemplating the spiritual implications of this painting upon his life Nouwen felt called to write this book.

“Rebrandt's painting set in motion a long spiritual adventure that brought me to a new understanding of my vocation and offered me a new strength to live 52

it...Moving from teaching university students to living with mentally handicapped people was, for me at least, a step toward the platform where the Father embraces his kneeling son...the journey from teaching about love to allowing myself to be loved proved much longer than I realized,” writes Nouwen.

Following his encounter with the painting his spiritual journey was marked by three phases represented by the main characters of the parable and the painting - the younger son, the elder son and the father - which comprise the three parts of the book, which can also serve the reader as a pattern of better understanding the spiritual evolution within their own life. Henri's conclusion: “I am the younger son; I am the elder son; and I am on my way to becoming the father...a father who asks no questions, wanting only to welcome his children home.”

It is said that the last words and works of a man often reflect his most important conclusions and contributions to posterity. *The Return of the Prodigal Son* is a perfect example; as one of Nouwen's final and most popular books, as well as one of Rembrandt's final and most popular paintings.

## **Part I - The Younger Son**

“The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country.” -Luke 15:11-13

To understand the full impact of this parable, Nouwen provides readers with the cultural context, explaining the taboo of a son requesting his inheritance prematurely as essentially saying that he wished his father were already dead. “The son's ‘leaving’ in search of a ‘distant country’ is therefore, a much more offensive act than it seems at first reading. It is a heartless rejection of the home in which the son was born and nurtured,” writes Nouwen.

“Leaving home,” explains Henri, “is then, much more than a historical event, it is a denial of the spiritual reality that I belong to God with every part of my being, that God holds me safe in an eternal embrace...Home is the center of my being where I can hear the voice that says: You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests - the same voice that gave life to the first Adam and spoke to Jesus, the second Adam; the same voice that speaks to all the children of God and sets them free to live in the midst of a dark world while remaining in the light.”

Nouwen then reflects on the many times in his own life he has run off searching for love and acceptance in all the wrong places, which he says, “is the great tragedy of my life and of the lives of so many I meet on my journey.” His candidness prompts readers to also search their own heart, to ask if we too may have

turned a deaf ear to the voice of God's calling us his Beloved? According to Henri, "I leave home every time I lose faith in the voice that calls me Beloved...The world's love is and always will be conditional."

Nouwen beautifully summarizes: "Looking again at Rembrandt's portrayal of the return of the younger son, I now see now much more is taking place than a mere compassionate gesture toward a wayward child. The great event I see is the end of the great rebellion. The rebellion of Adam and all his descendants is forgiven, and the original blessing by which Adam received everlasting life is restored...these hands have always been stretched out - even when there were no shoulders upon which to rest them."

## **The Prodigal Returns**

"He wasted his money in reckless living. He spent everything he had. Then a severe famine spread over that country, and he was left without a thing. So he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat.

At last he came to his senses and said, 'All my father's hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am about to starve! I will get up and go to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers.' So he got up and started back to his father." -Luke 15: 13-20.

In Rembrandt's rendition of the prodigal son we see his emptiness, alienation, humiliation and defeat, which are well represented by his tattered clothing and shaved head - making his appearance worse than his father's slaves. According to Nouwen, "Real loneliness comes when we have lost all sense of having things in common," or being accepted in a community. Although the prodigal was lost and destitute; "be it his money, his friends, his reputation, his self-respect, his inner joy and peace - he still remained his father's child."

"The younger son's return takes place at the very moment that he reclaims his sonship, even though he has lost all the dignity that belongs to it...it seems the prodigal had to lose everything to come into touch with the bedrock of his sonship - the ground of his being...One of the greatest challenges of the spiritual life is to receive God's forgiveness...Although claiming my true identity as a child of God, I still live as though the God to whom I am returning demands an explanation. I still think about his love as conditional," reflects Nouwen.

Henri challenges readers to consider a further metaphor hidden within this beloved parable: “Jesus himself became the prodigal son for our sake. He left the house of his heavenly Father, came to a foreign country, gave away all that he had, and returned through his cross to the Father’s home...not as a rebellious son, but as the obedient son, sent out to bring home all the lost children of God...Jesus, who told the story to those who criticized him for associating with sinners, himself lived the long and painful journey that he describes.” WOW, great insight!

Nouwen concludes Part I with this panoramic perspective, “The young man being embraced by the Father is no longer just one repentant sinner, but the whole of humanity returning to God. Thus Rembrandt’s painting becomes more than the mere portrayal of a moving a parable. It becomes the summary of the history of our salvation.”

## **Part II - The Elder Son**

“In the meantime the elder son was out in the field. On his way back, when he came close to the house, he heard the music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him, 'What's going on?'. 'Your brother has come back home,' the servant answered, 'and your father has killed the prize calf, because he got him back safe and sound.' The older brother was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in. But he spoke back to his father, 'Look, all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends! But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home, you kill the prize calf for him!'” - Luke 15: 25-30

Although the return of the prodigal son is the central event in both Christ’s parable and Rembrandt’s painting, Nouwen sheds new light on the elder son in Part II of the book. Perhaps in part, because a close friend of Henri told him that his life more closely resembled the elder son than the prodigal son, which sparked fresh spiritual reflection upon the topic.

Nouwen admits, “It is hard for me to concede that this bitter, resentful, angry man might be closer to me in a spiritual way than the lustful younger brother. Yet the more I think about the elder son, the more I recognize myself in him.”

Nouwen explains why the elder son, who never left home, was lost too - but he was estranged from his father in a different way; “The lostness of the resentful ‘saint’ is so hard to reach precisely because it is so closely wedded to the desire to be good and virtuous.”

Instead of gratitude for the return of his wayward brother, the elder son's "He was angry then and refused to go in." As Nouwen puts it, "Joy and resentment cannot coexist. The music and dancing, instead of inviting to joy, become a cause for even greater withdrawal."

Henri continues, "There are many elder sons and elder daughters who are lost while still at home...characterized by judgment and condemnation, anger and resentment, bitterness and jealousy - that are so pernicious and so damaging to the human heart."

Deeper reflection upon the parable clarifies that both sons have good and bad character traits - which are equally accepted by their father. "The father only is good. He loves both sons. He runs out to meet both. He wants both to sit at the table and participate in his joy...What is so clear is that God is always there, always ready to give and forgive, absolutely independent of our response. God's love does not depend on our repentance or our inner or outer change," writes Nouwen.

"The story of the prodigal son is the story of a God who goes searching for me and who doesn't give up until he has found me. "Without trust, I cannot let myself be found. Trust is that deep inner conviction that the Father wants me home...There is a very strong, dark voice in me that says the opposite...without discipline, I become prey to self-perpetuating hopelessness," concludes Nouwen.

"The return of the elder son is becoming as important as, if not more important, than the return of the prodigal son...Jesus is himself not only the younger son, but the elder son as well. He has come to show the Father's love and to free me from the bondage of my resentments."

"The words of the father in the parable: 'My son, you are with me always, and all I have is yours' express the true relationship of God the Father with Jesus his son... As I look again at Rembrandt's elder son, I realize that the cold light on his face can become deep and warm - transforming him totally - and make him who he truly is: 'The Beloved Son on whom God's favor rests.'"

### **Part III - The Father**

"While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. . . the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate . . . So his father went out and pleaded with him...The father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 56

But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” -Luke 15:20-24, 31-32

The majesty of Rembrandt’s painting and Christ’s parable come to a crescendo in Part III of the book, as readers are led by Nouwen to focus on the compassion and love of the father as the Christian’s ultimate goal. “What gives Rembrandt’s portrayal of the father such an irresistible power is that the most divine is captured in the most human.”

In his final rendition of the prodigal son painted in 1669, Rembrandt chose a nearly blind old man to represent the father - in contrast to his earlier rendition painted as a young man in 1632. Perhaps because his own life had moved toward the shadows of old age. Henri reflects, “As the light of his interiorizes, he begins to paint blind people as the real see-ers... The inner light-giving fire of love that has grown strong through the artists many years of suffering burns in the heart of the father who welcomes his returning son.”

“Rembrandt’s hands had painted countless human faces and human hands. In this, one of his last paintings, he painted the face and hands of God... Rembrandt was the son, he became the father, and thus was made ready to enter eternal life.”

Nouwen sees the true center of the painting to be the hands of the father, gently resting on the prodigal son’s shoulders. “...in them mercy become flesh; upon them forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing come together, and through them, not only the tired son, but also the worn-out father find their rest.”

### **Our Heavenly Father Seeks the Lost**

All three of Jesus’ parables in Luke 15 illustrate a proactive God seeking; the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost sons. “It was not I who chose God, but God who first chose me... I am beginning now to see how radically the character of my spiritual journey will change when I no longer think of God as hiding out and making it as difficult as possible for me to find him, but instead, as the one who is looking for me while I am doing the hiding.”

“For a very long time I considered low self-esteem to be some kind of virtue,” confides Nouwen, “but now I realize that the real sin is to deny God’s first love for me, to ignore my original goodness... I do not think I am alone in this struggle to claim God’s first love and my original goodness.”

Henri underlines the divine eagerness to embrace all God’s children, saying “The  
57 father does not even give his son a chance to apologize. He preempts his son’s

begging by spontaneous forgiveness and puts aside his pleas as completely irrelevant in the light of the joy of his return.”

Jesus often speaks of joyful dining at a banquet table with every hungry soul, to illustrate the availability of the Kingdom of God to all. ‘Rejoice with me’ the woman says, ‘I have found my lost coin,’ ‘Rejoice with me,’ the shepherd says, ‘I have found my lost sheep,’ ‘Rejoice with me,’ the father says, ‘this son of mine was lost and is found.’”

In the concluding chapter “Becoming the Father,” Nouwen issues his final challenge to readers. “But there is more...when the prodigal son returns home, he returns not to remain a child, but to claim his sonship and to become a father himself...Having reclaimed my sonship, I now have to claim fatherhood...I now see the hands that forgive, console, heal and offer a festive meal must become my own.”

### **From Sonship to Fatherhood**

“Rembrandt’s painting, and his own tragic life, offered me a context to discover that the final stage of the spiritual life is to so fully let go of all fear of the Father that it becomes possible to become like him...to live out his divine compassion in my daily life.”

“Perhaps the most radical statement Jesus ever made is: ‘Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate.’ ... Jesus is the model for our becoming the Father...His unity with the Father is so intimate and so complete that to see Jesus is to see the Father... ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,’... Jesus shows us what true sonship is.”

“In this perspective, the story of the prodigal son takes on a whole new dimension... Jesus becomes the younger son as well as the elder son in order to show me how to become the Father. Through him I can become a true son again and, as a true son, I finally can grow to become compassionate, as our heavenly Father is.”

“Looking at Rembrandt’s painting of the father, I can see three ways to a truly compassionate fatherhood: grief, forgiveness, and generosity...Grief asks me to allow the sins of the world to pierce my heart and make me shed tears...forgiveness is that unconditional love which does not demand anything for itself...generosity pours himself out for his sons.”

“These are three aspects of the Father’s call to BE home. As the Father, I am no longer called to COME home as the younger or elder son, but to BE there as 58

the one to whom the wayward children can return and be welcomed with joy...indeed, my youth is over...As the Father, I have to dare to carry the responsibility of a spiritually adult person..."

"Then both sons in me can gradually be transformed into the compassionate father. This transformation leads me to the fulfillment of the deepest desire of my restless heart. Because what greater joy can there be for me than to stretch out my tired arms and let my hands rest in a blessing on the shoulders of my home-coming children?" Henri concludes the book with this insightful question.

## **Conclusion – The Father’s Heart of Limitless Mercy**

Nouwen’s book is both autobiographical and devotional. But, it is more than just a devotional book on the Biblical parable of the prodigal son; it is a devotional book on Rembrandt’s *Return of the Prodigal Son* painting as well. He provides an illuminating commentary on Rembrandt’s painting that was only possible in combination with his spiritual insight into the parable. His analysis offers readers a new perspective on this classic parable, revealing why this parable might well have been called “a parable of the lost sons” or “a parable of a Father’s compassion.”

Neither the parable nor Rembrandt’s painting clarify whether the elder son eventually confesses his sin or asks the father’s forgiveness. “Unlike a fairy tale, the parable provides no happy ending. Instead it leaves us face to face with one of life’s hardest spiritual choices: to trust or not trust in God’s all-forgiving love,” says Nouwen.

Only one thing is certain; the Father’s heart of limitless mercy. I strongly recommend this book for young and old alike. This excellent book ended up in my kids and Gkids stockings at Christmas 2018. In fact, I was so moved by both the book and the painting that I bought a print of Rembrandt’s painting from art.com, which serves as a daily reminder of the limitless compassion of our loving Creator.

## **The Prodigal Sons**

(Based on *The Return of the Prodigal Son*)

The story is told of the prodigal son,  
Who left Father’s love in search of fun.  
After reckless living in a distant land,  
empty of all his Father placed in his hand.

Stripped of his dignity he decides to come home,  
Hoping to regain Father's forgiveness and shalom.  
As he approaches father to his total surprise,  
He sees only compassion deep within his eyes.

He said, "Bring the best robe, sandals and ring,  
My lost son is now found, come, let us all sing!  
Come one and all gather, for a great feast,  
Let us now celebrate, my joy is complete!"

From self-hood to sonship, the Father is good,  
The journey of each child to reach manhood.  
From self-hood to sonship, the Father is good,  
His great love the prodigal now understood.

Meanwhile, the elder brother's anger burned,  
Resentment grew, away from Father he turned.  
He said: "What have you ever given to me?...  
For these many years I have served Thee?"

Father now showed mercy to his other son,  
"You are always with me, we are as one...  
Beloved everything I have is for you...  
As I have, forgive your brother too."

Come sons and daughters into Father's arms,  
A loving embrace, free of malice or harm.  
Join Father's feast at his banquet table,  
Claim your place, He's made you able.

Come home, wayward children, come home,  
Be welcomed with joy my child, come home.  
Father offers peace for each restless heart,  
receive limitless love, yours from the start.

From self-hood to sonship, now to Father-hood,  
The journey of each life is destined for good.  
From self-hood to sonship, now to Father-hood,  
God's love for both prodigals is now understood.

## Chapter 6

### THE BEATITUDES OF PEACE

*Meditations on the Beatitudes, Peacemaking and the Spiritual Life*

By John Dear

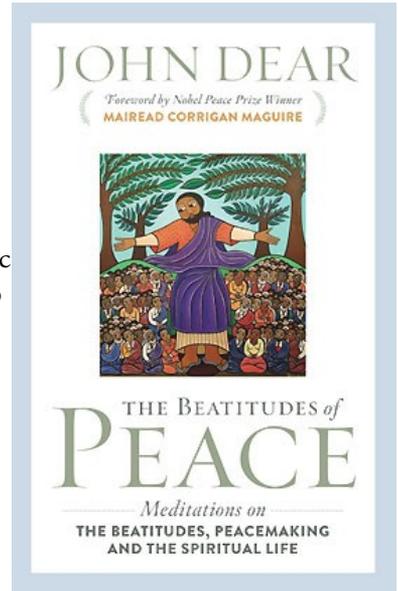
Reviewed by David Bradshaw

#### Introduction

“The pearl of justice is found in the heart of mercy.” -Catherine of Siena

As the world reels from the latest senseless, tragic acts of violence in America, it also seems wise to reflect and examine our own lives to discern if there be any violent thoughts within our hearts in need of cleansing and healing.

In today's politically fragmented and war-torn world it is the people of faith who are called to serve as divinely appointed peacemakers. But in our present hostile environment where do we start? Is there a blueprint for peacemaking?



Yes! In fact, the Prince of Peace delivered His inaugural speech on the subject in the Sermon on the Mount, which, for those brave enough to base their lives upon His words, still hold the potential to change the course of human history, according to peace activist and author John Dear.

Dear, 58, is a Catholic priest, author and speaker who's been nominated four times for the Nobel Peace Prize and arrested 85 times for protesting, once serving a year in jail. His *Campaign Nonviolence* now has 50 cities offering support. He co-founded, the website Pace e Bene (Italian for “peace and all good.”)

Dear views the Beatitudes as Jesus' prophetic announcement of a new heaven-sent orthodoxy (correct beliefs) which should lead his followers toward inner transformation and a new orthopraxy (correct conduct) - thus birthing a new worldwide cultural transformation which brings the peace of heaven onto earth.

The word 'peace' has many meanings. In a spiritual context it is best understood as the result of God's presence in a person's life. There are two different words

used in Scripture for peace; ‘Shalom’ - mentioned 250 times in the Old Testament - means entering into a state of wholeness, unity, or a restored relationship.

The New Testament Greek word translated as peace ‘Eirene’, is mentioned 91 times and often refers to the state of law and order. Both definitions of peace are vital, but sorely lacking in our modern world. Until we can plug into the source of inner peace, the prospects for external peace in the world system are very grim.

This God-centered, peace-full heavenly Kingdom which Jesus proclaimed in the Beatitudes was intended to gradually fill the whole earth, but instead it became derailed by what Dear calls the “Anti-Beatitudes of War,” which have been embraced by Christians and non-Christians alike for the last 1,700 years.

Dear reminds readers that during the first 300 years Christianity remained faithful to the Beatitudes. The church remained an interactive, decentralized family of believers who gathered mostly in homes to share meals, fellowship, teaching and who numbers greatly multiplied - without the Roman empire's blessing.

Then suddenly everything changed virtually overnight. According to Dear, “For three centuries Jesus followers refused to kill for the empire or hail the emperor as a god. For this civil disobedience, early Christians were sometimes persecuted and executed.”

“Then, in the fourth century emperor (Constantine) declared himself a Christian... and welcomed Christians into the Roman military. In a flash, the emperor threw out the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount...justified mass murder, blessed killing for one's empire, and undid everything Jesus taught.”

Most of the church sank slowly into the world's system of building a vertical empire, rather than seeking first the righteousness, peace, joy of God's Kingdom.

A small remnant of faithful Christians fled into the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Arabia who chose to renounce the world under Constantinian rule (referred to as the Desert Fathers and Mothers). They were unwilling to violate Jesus' clear teaching in the Sermon on the Mount commanding His followers to cease from killing, violence and war in favor of healing, nonviolence and peace.

The Constantinian empire nurtured a new culture of violence and war, which spread worldwide and to every nation - including those who officially embraced Christianity, yet refused to live by the simple, peaceful words of Christ recorded in the Beatitudes and Sermon on the Mount. Dear devotes the remainder of the book to calling Christians, and all humanity, to heed Jesus' Beatitudes of peace.

For emphasis, I have included relevant quotes from other contemplative leaders and their reflections on the Beatitudes and The Sermon on the Mount, including; Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgeault, Chris Teigreen and others which underline John's vital message of spiritual transformation as the pathway to a peaceful reformation.

***Blessed are the poor in spirit ... for theirs is the Kingdom of God.***

“Humility is nothing but the disappearance of self in the vision that God is all. Pride must die in you, or nothing of heaven can live in you.” -Andrew Murray, *Humility*

Dear begins his interpretation of the Beatitudes by explaining why it is difficult for we who live in first-world nations like the U.S. to understand what poverty of spirit, downward mobility and solidarity with the poor truly mean.

John then recounts the stories of the violence and suffering endured by citizens of Afghanistan, a war-torn nation which globally ranks near the very worse in poverty, pollution, infant mortality and violation of woman's rights.

“This beatitude confronts idolatry - of money, possessions, privilege and power,” writes Dear, advising that we find God's blessing as “we share our lives with the poor and move into downward mobility, instead of seeking wealth.”

He views the daily practice of 20-30 minutes of peaceful meditation as a key to the doorway to poverty of spirit by preparing us to live in the present moment. “As we recognize our brokenness, woundedness, blindness and poverty before God, we receive the gift of humility,” writes Dear.

***Blessed are those who mourn ... for they shall be comforted.***

“Mourning is an appropriate response to the brokenness of this world and of our own lives,” -Chris Tiegreen, *Heaven on Earth*

Why does Jesus begin his greatest sermon talking about poverty of spirit and mourning, ponders John. “Perhaps because poverty of spirit and grief are the common experience of billions of people throughout history...and they are the doorway into God's presence...He blesses those who need it most.”

Humility and grief are often the daily experiences of peacemakers. “We will find ourselves in the powerlessness and emptiness of non-violent love, and thus feel universal compassion for all people, especially the poor, suffering and dying.”

“Jesus praises the weeping class, those who can enter into solidarity with the pain of the world and do not try to extract themselves from it. Jesus is saying that those who can grieve, those who can cry are those who will understand,” says Richard Rohr in *Jesus Plan For A New World: The Sermon on the Mount*.

“When we mourn we are in a state of free fall, our heart is reaching out toward what we have seemingly lost, but cannot help loving anyway...just as ice must melt before it can begin to flow...Tears have been a classic spiritual way of doing this,” writes author Cynthia Bourgeault.

“When we sit daily in silence with God and let our common loss break our hearts, we will find a deep spiritual peace the world does not know; and we will be given new strength to hear the Sermon on the Mount, join the grassroots movement for social change and welcome the kingdom of God in our midst,” concludes Dear.

***Blessed are the meek ... for they shall inherit the earth.***

“Perspective of the meek: ‘In himself, nothing; in God, everything.’” -A.W. Tozer

John emphasizes that meekness does not denote passivity, but has been aptly referred to as “strength under God’s control.” This Beatitude is a quote from Psalm 37:11: “the humble (gentle, meek, nonviolent) shall have the land for their own.”

In *Jesus Plan For A New World*, Richard Rohr explains, “If there was one hated group in Palestine of Jesus’ day, it was the landlords who possessed land. Nobody possessed land except by violence, oppression, and making the little peasants pay a portion of their harvest.”

“Jesus is turning that around saying no, it’s you little ones who are finally going to possess the land...Hebrew Scripture teaches that only God possesses the land, that we’re all stewards, pilgrims and strangers on the earth.”

John reflects, “As I try to cultivate peace within myself and live in gentleness and nonviolence, I become one with creation. I am inheriting the earth.”

Dear believes we have much to learn from indigenous people who through their solidarity with creation can teach us to be meek, gentle, strong and courageous, yet nonviolent and to delight in the simple things of life and nature.

***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (justice) ... for they shall be satisfied.***

“Not only do the followers of Jesus renounce their rights, they renounce their own righteousness too. They cannot have righteousness except by hungering and thirsting for it.” -Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Dear points out that the word used for righteousness is not just referring to personal integrity and holiness, but also the pursuit of universal social, economic, racial and political justice.

“Here in the U.S., injustice surrounds us...homelessness, malnourished children, racism, sexism, mass incarceration without rehabilitation...every day 287 adults are shot in murders, assaults and suicides and unintentional shootings.”

“This Beatitude is both spiritual and social,” says Richard Rohr. “We are to thirst for justice. To live a just life in this world is to have identified with the longings and hungers of the poor, the meek and those who weep...What real prayer does is stir holy desire but not always satisfy it.”

Jesus promises for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice that he will be “living bread and living water”. Dear admits the struggle for justice may take a long time, but we know truth is on the side of justice. “The arc of the moral universe is long,” Martin Luther King Jr. said, “but it bends toward justice.”

*Blessed are the merciful ... for they shall receive mercy.*

“What does the Lord require of thee? But to act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.” -Micah 6:8

According to Dear, “Mercy, like love and peace, begins with ourselves. We learn to let ourselves off the hook, forgive ourselves, and be kind and nonviolent to ourselves.”

“Mercy is a way to describe the mystery of forgiveness. According to Jesus, ‘Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice’ (Matt. 9:13, 12:7)...Mercy is a loving allowing, a willing breaking of the rules by the One who made the rules - a wink and a smile...” writes Richard Rohr.

The politics of mercy involves forgiving those who have hurt us or those we love. Jesus demonstrates this in his response to the woman caught in adultery and her male religious accusers as he doodles in the sand saying “Let the one without sin be the first to throw a stone.” Dear views this as a “creative nonviolent response.”

“The root of the word mercy comes from ‘merc’, which gives us ‘commerce’ and ‘merchant’...Exchange is the very nature of divine life...According to modern neuroscience, all things share in divine life through participation in this dance of giving and receiving...This Beatitude invites us into a deep trust of God's flow,” writes Cynthia Bourgeault.

Dear reminds readers, “At the end of his journal *The Sign of Jonas*, Thomas Merton defined God as ‘Mercy within Mercy within Mercy.’ For Jesus, that is the goal of each one of us, that we can be as merciful as God.”

***Blessed are the pure in heart ... for they shall see God.***

“Spiritual truth is discernible only to a pure heart, not a keen intellect.” -Oswald Chambers

In this Beatitude Jesus points us to an inner innocence and childlike wonder that keeps us open to the presence of God, according to John. “The word purity set off alarms...For some purity connotes perfection...leading to self-righteousness, then judgmentalism of others” says Dear. Instead, he views inner purity as a process, a way of life rather than a static goal. “For Jesus, the heart is the center of life, literally, figuratively and spiritually.”

“The proper translation of this Beatitude is ‘Blessed are those whose heart is not divided’ or ‘whose heart is a unified whole.’ Jesus emerged from his baptism as the ‘ihidaya,’ meaning the ‘single one’ in Aramaic - one who has unified his being and become ‘enlightened.’ According to Jesus, this enlightenment takes place primarily within the heart. When your heart becomes ‘single’ - that is, desires one thing only...then you ‘see God,’” writes Cynthia Bourgeault.

“When the heart is right, seeing will be right. Jesus says, ‘The lamp of your body is your eye’ When your eye is clear, your whole body is filled with light...What you always see in people who love God and themselves is the ability to make eye contact...So Jesus calls us to purity of heart with the promise that correct seeing will follow,” writes Richard Rohr.

“The pure in heart live in all-out pursuit of the things of the Kingdom and of the King Himself...wholehearted devotion will result in the reward of seeing God,” writes Chris Tiegreen, *Heaven on Earth*.

“If we dare go deep into purity of heart,” writes Dear, “into inner peace, love and nonviolence, we will find ourselves living in the beatific vision, in the presence of God...and see God everywhere at all times in everyone and all things.”

***Blessed are the peacemakers ... they shall be called the children of God.***

“To be peacemaker, you must know the peace giver.” -Billy Graham

“This is the only time the word ‘**peacemakers**’ is ever used in the entire Bible. A peacemaker literally is the “one who reconciles quarrels.”

“Clearly you can see Jesus is not on the side of the violent, but on the side of the nonviolent...If you are truly consistently pro-life it means to be nonviolent - from womb to tomb,” writes Richard Rohr.

Dear views peacemaking as “the climax of the Beatitudes, and one of the key teachings of the gospel, yet for over 1,700 years it is also one of the most widely ignored...Jesus announces that God is a peacemaker and with this Beatitude, He calls us all to be peacemakers.”

Jesus redefines the very nature of God. “This one verse throws out thousands of years of belief in a violent god and every reference to the warmaking god in the Hebrew Scriptures. It does away with any spiritual justification for warfare,” writes Dear.

“Peacemakers are no longer wielding the sword that divides the world into good guys and bad guys, insiders and outsiders, winning team and losing team,” writes Cynthia Bourgeault, “When the field of vision has been unified, the inner being comes to rest, and that inner peaceableness flows to the outer world as harmony and compassion.”

John Dear stresses the call to become grassroots peacemakers in every possible way; standing up against violence, war and injustice. He concludes, “As we consciously seek to become peacemakers and meditate on God as a peacemaker, we begin to understand our true selves as sons and daughters of the God of peace.”

“Blessed are those who make shalom, who seek restoration and wholeness in their lives, the lives of other, and the world at large...The true seekers of shalom, the peacemakers who will be happy, have a global focus. They pray for God’s Kingdom of shalom to come here on earth, just as it is in heaven...and are called the children of God. We reflect the heart of our Father so thoroughly that we become vessels of His shalom everywhere,” writes Chris Tiegreen, *Heaven on Earth*.

***Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice ... for theirs is the kingdom of God.***

“If you were not strangers here, the dogs of the world would not bark at you.”  
-Samuel Rutherford

“In this closing Beatitude Jesus invites us to take bold risks just as he does in the nonviolent struggle of justice for the poor and oppressed,” says Dear, “and he urges us to realize that, as with the poor in spirit in the first Beatitude, the reign of God is ours.”

“The first and last Beatitude are present tense. Theirs IS the Kingdom of heaven. Persecution has begun to happen to the believing community, and he’s telling them to ‘rejoice and be glad!’ Persecution for the cause of justice is inevitable,” writes Richard Rohr.

“I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves,” Jesus taught his twelve disciples. Yet His advice is “Do not be afraid.” John explains, “These warnings appear throughout the four gospels...He gives the reason for the inevitable persecution; ‘They do things because they have not known either the Father or me.’ (John 16:2-3). This verse exposes what’s at the heart of the world’s violence, a lack of relationship with God, or a misguided view of God as violent.”

According to John, “Over the years, I decided that persecution was part of my job description as a follower of Jesus and a practitioner of the Beatitudes.” Dear continues, “Christianity is the only religion with a spiritual teaching that insists on work for justice, peace and nonviolence - and trains you for the persecution that will follow...In this final Beatitude we learn the two primary emotions of nonviolent peacemakers - sorrow and joy.”

“Situations of persecution (or anything else that shakes us out of our egoic comfort zone) can become great teaching tools if we have the courage to use them that way,” writes Cynthia Bourgeault.

“The standards in the Kingdom aren’t the same as the world system. Everything is measured differently. The goal isn’t to reject as much temporary pain as possible in order to experience as much temporary pleasure as possible. It’s to reach out for the true prize, whatever it costs,” writes Chris Tiegreen.

## **Conclusion: Receiving a Prophet’s Reward**

“Love is the strongest force the world possesses and yet it is the humblest imaginable.” -Mahatma Gandhi

For me the biggest takeaway from John’s reflections on the Beatitudes is that Jesus is the original peacemaker, and He is calling all of us to follow in His footsteps. This journey includes allowing the Spirit of God to do its inner work of transforming our hearts and well as inspiring us to find our place of service in God’s Kingdom by reaching out, and prophetically speaking up, on behalf of the “least” among us.

Dear explains the Hebrew word for “prophet” means “to speak for someone else.” As we engage in speaking up for the poor, suffering, helpless and downtrodden in need of justice and peace we carry on the prophetic tradition. Brave souls, like 68

John Dear, know that the prophet's earthly reward historically almost always includes persecution and/or premature death.

John explains ten major characteristics of a true prophet, which include; listening to the word of God, centering on hearing from God, interpreting the signs of the times, siding with the poor and powerless, concern for justice and peace, confronting the status quo, living without the usual security, confronting religious complacency, embracing compassion and gentleness and offering hope.

Dear believes that Christians from all traditions can and should follow Jesus in showing the world a third way beyond the typical divisive left-right politics as an alternative which seeks to serve as a bridge between both. As Richard Rohr says; the joy of serving as a bridge is that you get walked on from both sides. The goal is to end violence by transformation, a changing of the heart.

John views Matt. 5:43-45 as Jesus' most revolutionary commandment; "You have heard is said, 'You shall love your countrymen and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." as the pinnacle of the Sermon on the Mount. He goes so far as to say it sums up Christianity. I agree. Yet, sadly "we've done our best to avoid and disobey it," says Dear.

Dear concludes with a rousing call to "arise and walk forth," which is another translation of the familiar "Blessed are..." or "Happy are..." preface to all of the Beatitudes. The key to spreading the message of nonviolence is that we embody the message and carry it everywhere we go. "As Beatitude people, Sermon on the Mount people, from now on we seek the kingdom of God first," prays John Dear.

Oh for the day the entire earth will resonate with this message and say ... AMEN!

## **THE BLESSINGS OF GOD'S KINGDOM**

*(A ballad/song based on The Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-10))*

BLESSED are the POOR in spirit,  
For theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.  
BLESSED are those who MOURN,  
For they will be comforted.

THESE are HIS commandments,  
The BLESSINGS of GOD's Kingdom;  
LOVE GOD with your whole heart,  
LOVE Your NEIGHBOR as Your-self...  
69 ... And even your enemy.

BLESSED are the MEEK,  
For they will inherit the earth.  
BLESSED are those SEEKING righteousness,  
For they will be filled.

THESE are HIS commandments,  
The BLESSINGS of GOD's Kingdom;  
LOVE GOD with your whole heart,  
LOVE Your NEIGHBOR as Your-self..  
And even your enemy.

BLESSED are the MERCIFUL,  
For they will be shown mercy.  
BLESSED are the PURE IN HEART,  
For they will see GOD.

THESE are HIS commandments,  
The BLESSINGS of GOD's Kingdom;  
LOVE GOD with your whole heart,  
LOVE Your NEIGHBOR as Your-self..  
And even your enemy.

BLESSED are the PEACEMAKERS,  
For they'll be called children of GOD.  
BLESSED are those PERSECUTED,  
For theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

THESE are HIS commandments,  
The BLESSINGS of GOD's Kingdom;  
LOVE GOD with your whole heart,  
LOVE Your NEIGHBOR as Your-self..  
And even your enemy.

## Chapter 7

### ON THE BRINK OF EVERYTHING

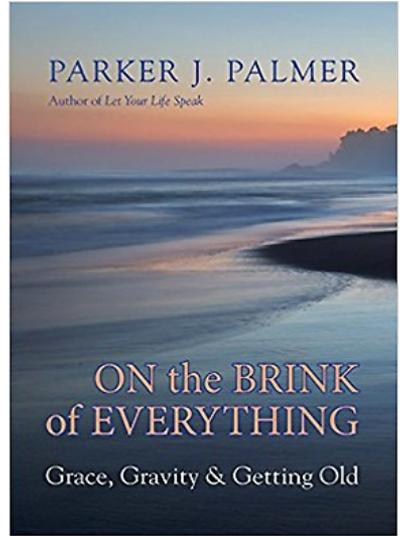
*Grace, Gravity and Growing Old*

by Parker J. Palmer

Reviewed by David Bradshaw

#### Introduction

Referring to himself as an “An Angry Quaker” Parker J. Palmer reveals how the narrow and often twisty road led him to discover a contemplative perspective of the greatest paradoxes of his life and modern American culture. Parker explains with clarity how to discover your vocation - where your great joy meets the world's great need.



Reflecting upon his last eight decades as a writer, teacher and activist, Palmer's latest book lives up to the title by helping readers discover his hard-won life lessons learned and how to age gracefully - which he describes in humorous prose and poetic beauty.

The book, which consists of a collection of 24 inspired essays, is a fun read whether you've followed his life and work over the last 40 years, or like me, this is your first. Either way, Parker's 10th book will likely have you nodding in agreement at his lovable, outspoken and very inclusive worldview.

Palmer shares a treasure chest of truisms encompassing the distilled common sense from many wisdom traditions. He paints his stories using colorful word pictures drawn from diverse palette of luminaries including; Thomas Merton, Rumi, Gandhi, George Orwell, Dickinson and Yeats, just to name a few.

Throughout history contemplatives and mystics like Palmer have warned us that when society does not see the world as a whole, we lose a divine perspective and ignore the edges of society, seeing them as “the others.” Parker reminds readers, quoting Kurt Vonnegut “out on the edge you can see all kinds of things you can't see from the center.”

Like his fellow contemplative teacher Richard Rohr, Parker concludes that everything in our life belongs - “the anger and the love, the anguish and joy...they now appear as strong threads of a larger weave.”

While Parker’s political views are left of center, he offers excellent common sense steps to facilitate healing our biggest cultural divides - starting with America’s still-all-to-prevalent racism.

I like the book’s easy readability, featuring a short introduction to each of the seven chapters and a paragraph summary of his 3-4 short essays and then a concluding poem in each chapter.

Parker Palmer is a mentor’s mentor. Read this book as you would drink a glass of fine wine, slowly, present to the nuances of its rich flavor, as each sip brings you closer to ‘the brink of everything’ delicious in life.

### **Here is a collection of my favorite ‘Palmerism’ quotes from the book...**

“Being human means being broken and yet whole. The word integrity comes from a root that means ‘intact.’...being ‘integral,’ whole and undivided - which means embracing our brokenness as an integral part of life.”

“Our lives leave a trail of words, even when we’re not speaking or writing. With every move we make...we’re dictating the next few lines of the text called our lives, composing it as we go.”

“Sanctuary is wherever I find safe space to regain my bearings, reclaim my soul, heal my wounds, and return to the world as a wounded healer...I need sanctuary if I want to loosen the grip of our culture’s violence on me...The one I need may not be a building, but silence, the woods, a friendship, a poem, or a song.”

“Heartbreak comes with the territory called being human...Suffering breaks our hearts, but the heart can break in two quite different ways. There’s the brittle heart that breaks into shards...then there’s the supple heart, the one that breaks open, not apart, the one that can grow into greater capacity for the many forms of love...Only the supple heart can hold suffering in a way that opens to new life. How can I make my heart more supple? The answer, I think, is to exercise my heart by stretching it, the way a runner stretches the leg muscles to avoid injury.”

If you do not have time to read this important book right now, below are another 100 inspiring quotes from all 24 of his wonderful essays...enjoy!

## Chapter I. The View from the Brink: What I Can See from Here

### Essay #1: On the Brink of Everything

“I like being on the brink of everything because it gives me new perspectives on my past, present, and future and new insights into the inner dynamics that shape and drive my life.”

“I’ll know I’ve made it to heaven if I can get early-morning coffee there...I’m told they can dark-roast beans in the Other Place.”

“What I know for sure is this: we come from mystery and we return to mystery.”

### Essay #2: Does My Life Have Meaning?

“The question ‘Does my life have meaning?’ is a road to nowhere.... I don’t and can’t know the meaning of my life...all I can control are my own intentions and my willingness to give myself to them.”

“Once I understand that I’m not the sun, I can get out of the sun’s way and stop casting shadows. I can step aside to let the true sun shine on everyone and everything, making all things ripe with the glow of life.”

“It is not easy to subdue the overweening ego in order to free the adventuresome soul. But whenever we manage to so, it saves us grief and serves the world well.”

### Essay #3: Withering into Truth

*The Coming of Wisdom with Time* - “Though leaves are many, the root is one; Through all the lying days of my youth I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun, Now may I wither into the truth.” -William Butler Yeats

“Here’s a collection of six lessons as birthday gifts to myself; 1. Actively embracing aging gives me a chance to move beyond ‘the lying days of my youth’ and to ‘wither into the truth’ - if I resist the temptation to Botox my withering.”

2. “Poetry has redemptive power for me. Poets...have provided life jackets to keep me from drowning, ballast to keep me from ascending to where there’s not enough oxygen to support life...and maps to keep me from getting lost in the wilderness.”

3. “Though I’ve written ten books and hundreds of essays...perhaps the most important sentence I’ve ever written is that one word ‘Enough’ ... that word can safeguard the soul and saying it comes more easily with age.”

4. “One thing I care about is the younger generation and the world they’re coming into...’generativity’ means offering whatever we know that they might find useful...and even more important, learning from them.”

5. “Most older folks I know fret about unloading material goods they’ve collected over the years...But the junk I really want to jettison in my old age is psychological junk - such as longtime convictions about what gives life meaning that no longer serves me well.”

6. “Sooner or later, ‘withering into truth’ culminates in death, the ultimate form of withering and perhaps the ultimate source of truth...I have no idea what I will learn from dying. This I know for sure: I have no bad memories of wherever I came from when I arrived on this planet, so I have no good reason to fear where I’m going...”

## **Chapter II. Young and Old: The Dance of Generations**

“When young and old connect, it’s like joining the poles of a battery. Together we generate energy for personal and social change that age-segregated society cuts off...the young yearn for us to take an interest in them, their fears, their dreams, and their futures.”

### **Essay #4. The Music of Mentoring**

“It’s unfair to lay all the responsibility for the future on the younger generation...We - young and old together - hold the future in our hands...it will take an intergenerational effort.”

“Let’s stop talking about ‘passing the baton’ to the young...and invite young adults to join the orchestra. As we sit together, we can help them learn the music of the emerging world, which they hear more clearly than we do.”

“Many people, said Oliver Wendell Holmes, ‘die with all their music in them.’ I was saved from that sad fate by a series of mentors who reached out to me when I was young to help me find my own music...”

“Mentoring is a mutuality in which two people evoke the potentials in each other...tell your stories of ‘creative failure’ to your students...when the moment is ripe.”

“Unlike many folks my age, the young people I work with waste no time grieving the collapse of the ‘old order’ of the religious, educational, vocational, and political structures that helped form their elders lives.”

“That freedom allows them to be loyal to their own gifts and visions, and to the relationships required to bring those visions to life...Mentors and apprentices are partners in the ancient human dance, and one of teaching’s great rewards it gives us is to get back on the dance floor.”

### **Essay #5: Welcome to the Human Race**

“Dear Courtney...We both know that everyone has inner wisdom, and that one of the best ways to evoke it is in dialogue. When we knock down the walls that keep us apart (e.g., gender and age) and in that in-between space, we all have a chance to wise up.”

“I never saw my vocational journey in terms of ‘achieving great things.’...I see it as a series of probes into my gifts and the needs of the world, trying to discover where they might intersect.”

“...Too many men lose their sense of identity...as their work roles diminish or disappear...It happens because we haven’t done the inner work required to develop a sense of self that’s grounded in who we are rather than what we do.”

“...Being human means being broken and yet whole. The word integrity comes from a root that means ‘intact.’...being ‘integral,’ whole and undivided - which means embracing our brokenness as an integral part of life...I yearn for the day men and women alike can sit with people they trust...and share the journey toward broken-wholeness.”

### **Essay #6: Living from the Inside Out**

(Commencement address to Class of 2015 at Naropa University, Boulder, CO.)

“My first suggestion is simple: be reckless when it comes to affairs of the heart...offer yourself to the world...with openhearted generosity...cultivate a beginner’s mind...take the risk of failing and falling...in the service of love, truth and justice.”

“Second, as you integrate ignorance and failure into your knowledge and success... take everything that’s bright and beautiful in you and introduce it to your shadow side...Everyone has a shadow...too many leaders refuse to name and claim their shadow...value self-knowledge...if you choose to live an unexamined life, I beg you: do not take a job that involves other people.”

“Third, as you welcome whatever you find alien within yourself, extend the same  
75 welcome to whatever you find in the outer world...hospitality to the

stranger...The old majority in this society - people who look like me - is on its way out...collaborate with them, and help remove the obstacles in their way..."

"Fourth, take on big jobs worth doing, like the spread of love, peace and justice... refusing to be seduced by our cultural obsession with being effective as measured by short-term results...a standard that supersedes effectiveness...is 'faithfulness'... public education is a tragic example...millions of kids...long to be treasured, not measured."

"Fifth, since suffering as well as joy comes with being human, I urge you to remember this: violence is what happens when we don't know what to do with our suffering...The good news that suffering can be transformed...exercise your heart by taking in life's pains and joys...it will make your heart supple...a greater capacity for love."

"Finally, I quote Saint Benedict, who said, 'Daily keep your death before your eyes.'...If an unexamined life is not worth living, it's equally true that the un-lived life is not worth examining... Diane Ackerman reminds us to live - truly live - our lives...'It began in mystery, and it will end in mystery, but what a savage and beautiful country lies in between.'"

### **Chapter III. Getting Real: From Illusion to Reality**

"The spiritual journey is an endless process of engaging life as it is, stripping away our illusions about ourselves, our world, and the relationship of the two, moving closer to reality as we do."

"Death is, after all, the end of all our illusions - so why not do what we can to lose our illusions before death strips them from us? That way we are less likely to die disappointed or in despair."

#### **Essay #7: Contemplative by Catastrophe**

"I was about thirty when I first felt drawn to the contemplative life. Inspired by reading Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, I had vision of joining a monastic community...it struck me that contemplation didn't depend on a particular practice. All forms of contemplation share the same goal: to help us see through the deceptions of self and world."

"Contemplation is any way one has of penetrating illusion and touching reality...When I succeed at something...I am fortifying one my favorite illusions...But when failure bursts my ego-balloon, I spend long hours trying 76

to understand what went wrong, often learning (or relearning) that the ‘what’ is within me.”

“Failure is one of the many forms contemplation can take...When you are with someone who values you not for what you do but for who you are, there’s no need to pretend or wear a mask.”

“...Why do we commiserate with others when they tell us about an experience that’s ‘disillusioned’ them?... Surely it would be better to say ‘Congratulations!’... Please let me help disillusion you even further.”

“I envy people who have whatever it takes to practice contemplative disciplines day in and day out... I call these people ‘contemplatives by intention’... I’m a ‘contemplative by catastrophe’. My wake-up calls generally come after the wreck has happened and I’m trying to dig myself out of the debris.”

### **Essay #8: A Friendship, a Love, a Rescue**

“...The deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words...” -Thomas Merton

“I met Thomas Merton a year after he died...through his writing and through the communion that lies ‘beyond words’...Without Merton’s friendship and the hope it has given me over the past forty-five years, I’m not sure I could have kept faith...”

“For nearly half a century, Merton has illumined the path and companioned me on my journey...Here are reflections on four of those ways... 1. The Quest for True Self...the pivotal distinction Merton makes between ‘true self’ and ‘false self’...the quest for true self eventually led me to Quakerism, with its conviction that ‘there is that of God in every person.’ ‘Most of us...live lives of self-impersonation’ I can’t imagine a sadder way to die than with the sense that I never showed up on earth as my God-given self.”

“2. The Promise of Paradox...Merton taught me to look at life not only through the logical lens of ‘either-or’ but also through the paradoxical lens of ‘both-and.’...this is the key to creativity...personal wholeness...Merton’s lived understanding of paradox came to my rescue: to be whole, I must be able to say that I am both shadow and light.”

“3. The Call to Community...”In 1974 I left my community organizing job in Wash. D.C. and moved with my family to a Quaker living-learning community  
77 called Pendle Hill near Philadelphia...in the Quaker tradition I found a way to

join the inner journey with social concerns, which later led me to found the Center for Courage & Renewal...whose mission is to help 'rejoin soul and role'."

"4. The 'Hidden Wholeness' in a Broken World...the spiritual eye can discern beneath the broken surface of things - whether political systems, relationships, or a broken heart...in a program we called Living Room Conversations...we helped people act on their deep-down desire to live in 'connectedness' that the human spirit yearns for. And it worked...a community that might have been shattered became...more whole."

### **Essay #9: Down Is the Way to Well-Being**

"During my first forty years, I'd been driven by the notion that 'up, up and away' was the right direction to go...Wrong. Living at altitude is dangerous....But a life on the ground, grounded in reality of our own nature...allows us to fall, get back up, brush ourselves off, and take next steps without doing ourselves great harm."

"...The spirituality I'd embraced was more about flying above life's mess than engaging with in on the ground. How did the Christian tradition in which I was raised - centered in 'the Word made flesh' become so disembodied?"

"...An image that helped me understand how depression can have a 'befriending' intent - and how my failure to 'listen to my life' had left me in a place of deep pain...Imagine a friend walking a block behind me, calling my name, trying to get my attention...to tell me some hard but healing truths about myself...I, afraid of what I might hear...kept on walking...closer he came, now shouting my name, but I walked on...frustrated he began to throw stones and sticks to get my attention... But despite my pain, I kept walking away...there was only one thing left for my friend to do: drop a boulder called depression on me...not with intent to kill but to get me to turn toward him and ask a simple question: 'What do you want?' ...I finally made that turn...to take my first steps on the path to well-being."

"Thomas Merton's name for that friend is 'true self.' That is not the ego self that wants to inflate us. It's not the intellectual self that wants to hover above life's mess...not the ethical self that wants to live by someone else's 'oughts'...not the spiritual self that want to fly nonstop to heaven."

- "True self is a true friend - it's a friendship we ignore at our peril. And pass the word: friends don't let friends live at altitude."

## Essay #10: Notes from a Week in the Winter Woods

“Woke up about 5:00 AM...watching some of my dark emotions rise phoenix-like from the ashes of the night and flap around to get my attention. ‘Welcome and entertain them all!’ says Rumi in his poem *The Guest House*. ‘Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.’...Rumi’s ‘beyond’ was right: peace comes from embracing the interplay of shadow and light.”

“Solitude does not necessarily mean living apart from others, rather it means never living apart from one’s self...it is about being fully present to ourselves, whether or not we are with others.”

“I read in *A Year with Thomas Merton*...as he reflected on the complex mix of rights and wrongs in his own life: ‘I am thrown into contradiction: to realize [this] is mercy, to accept it is love, and help others do the same is compassion.’...Merton goes on to say that the contradictions in our lives are the engines of creativity. It’s true...what we get wrong makes us reach for something better.”

“Most of my heroes are no strangers to laughter. Grandpa Palmer comes quickly to mind. The man was proof-positive of William James’s claim that ‘common sense and a sense of humor are the same thing, moving at different speeds.’”

“On this final day of my retreat, I’m still meditating on the opening line of the January 13 entry in *A Year with Thomas Merton*: ‘There is one thing I must do here in my woodshed hermitage...and that is to prepare for my death. But that means a preparation in gentleness.’...The prospect of death...makes it clear that my calling is to be gentle with the many expressions of life, old and new...and that includes me.”

### Chapter IV. Work and Vocation: Writing a Life

“As we grow older, it’s important to get clear about the difference between a job and a vocation...My grandfather Jesse Parker, was a machine tool operator who crafted parts for John Deere tractors...he was forced to retire at age 65...But Grandpa’s vocation was not making tractor parts - it was a love of turning raw material into things of use or beauty, and he pursued it passionately following his retirement.”

## Essay #11: The Accidental Author

“Now and then, someone asks me for advice on how to become a writer...I don't offer advice. Instead I ask questions in hope of evoking my conversation partner's inner teacher, the most reliable source of guidance anyone has.”

“My best writing originates not in expertise, but in a place called ‘beginners mind.’...writing is not about gathering facts...it begins with dropping deep into my not-knowing...I want to make my own discoveries, think my own thoughts, and feel my own feelings before I learn what the experts say about the subject.”

“Write about what you want to know because it intrigues and puzzles you. That's the hunger that keeps me engaged with a craft I find endlessly challenging.”

“For whatever it's worth, my ‘advice light’ boils down to this (1) Care more about the process than the outcome. (2) As you are getting started, give your work away in order to maximize your chances of dumb luck...(3) Be willing to dive deep, spend a long time floundering, and practice beginner's mind no matter how loudly your ego protests.”

## Essay #12: Born Baffled

“I love the challenge of writing and the feeling of aliveness it brings me..here's a place where faith and writing converge: no matter which path you're on, it's often hard to tell whether you're wrestling with angels or demons...As Mark Twain said, ‘Go to Heaven for the weather, Hell for the company.’”

“I became a writer because I was born baffled...Like writing, faith is a way of dealing with things that baffle us until we look at them through new eyes...so my approach to writing is simple: I find something that baffles me, write enough to peel back the first layer of my not-knowing - at which point I find another bafflement, then another, and keep writing...”

“When I was young, my ego often became bloated...I forgot the counsel my father gave me... ‘Remember, Park, today's peacock is tomorrow's feather duster.’...When my ego becomes bloated with the illusion of expertise, I risk losing the gift of bafflement that has always animated my writing.”

“When you share your story of struggle, you offer me companionship in mine... that's the most powerful soul medicine I know...The God I'm familiar with does not work like GPS, but accompanies me as I try to grope my way through the darkest of dark places...a good writer can do a little bit of that for the reader.”

“Writing allows my mask to fall away so my true face can appear and I can get a clearer look at things I need to be facing into.”

“I have a sense that the words I choose to put on paper are intersecting with realities that are already ‘out there,’ but will remain invisible until someone gives them verbal form.”

“When people of any [wisdom] tradition insist that the treasure cannot be carried except in their earthen vessels, they commit idolatry, and sometimes people die: idolatry is the driver behind all religious violence. Why do we do it? Because we are afraid of how we’d have to change if we freed the sacred from our credal cages...”

### **Essay #13: The Poem I Would Have Writ**

“Our lives leave a trail of words, even when we’re not speaking or writing. With every move we make...we’re dictating the next few lines of the text called our lives, composing it as we go.”

“My life has been the poem I would have writ, But I could not both live and utter it’ -Henry David Thoreau...What a remarkable notion, that the text one writes with one’s life might be a poem...Pay attention to what they say, and occasionally they will surprise you by composing something of meaning.”

“It took me fifty years of being dogged by Thoreau’s couplet to arrive at this destination - not a book of many pages, but a five-stanza poem...That’s one stanza per decade.”

### **Essay #14: Begin Again**

“I’ve been feeling stuck as a writer... forgive me for adding a trivial personal problem to my list of major social ills, but we all live at the intersection of our small worlds and the big one around us. If we want to serve others, we must attend to both.”

“The day after I watched ‘Begin Again’, the movie’s title came back to me in the form of guidance. You need to begin again...with what Buddhists call ‘beginners mind.’ To get unstuck, I must let go of my ‘career’ as an established writer and begin again as a novice.”

“I am a novice in every new moment of the day - each of them presents possibilities unknown and untried...As Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki said, ‘In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, in the expert’s mind there are few.’”

## Chapter V: Keep Reaching Out: Staying Engaged with the World

### Essay #15: What's an Angry Quaker to Do?

"I'm a Quaker... a religious tradition that asks me to live by such values as community, equality, simplicity and nonviolence...I frequently find myself in deep oatmeal when it comes to politics, where I seem to have an anger management problem...A few years ago a friend...gave me a T-shirt that says, 'One Mean Quaker.'"

"Occasionally, I'm taken to task by people who regard anger as a spiritual flaw to be eliminated. But I beg to differ...I know anger has the potential to harm the person who's angry...But I also know that anger buried under pious cover poses more threats to my well-being...than anger expressed nonviolently."

"What does it mean, in the words of May Sarton, to 'at last act for love'? For me it means...to redouble my efforts to help us renew our capacity for civic community and civil discourse. I want to harness the energy of anger and ride it into action that helps bring citizens together in life-giving encounters."

"By discussing our differences openly, honestly...we honor the intentions of the framers of the Constitution...that regards conflict not as the enemy of a good social order but as the engine of a better social order - if we hold our conflicts creatively."

"Spirituality and anger (and humor) are not necessarily at odds. Or so it seems to One Mean Quaker as I continue to stumble through life..."

### Essay #16: The Soul of a Patriot

"On January 20, 2017, the country I love inaugurated a president who embodies many of our culture's most soulless traits: adolescent impulsiveness, an unbridled drive for wealth and power, a taste for violence, nonstop narcissism, and massive arrogance...How do I stay engaged and whole when my country is under attack by an enemy that we invited in?"

"There are three types of patriots, two bad, one good. The bad ones are the uncritical lovers and loveless critics. Good patriots carry on a lover's quarrel with their country, a reflection of God's lover's quarrel with the world." -William Sloan Coffin...What would it mean to have a lover's quarrel with my country right now? Four responses...

"First, it must be a quarrel about what is and is not true...Second, we must engage in civil discourse across political divides...Third, this lover's quarrel needs to

surface what is not being said...Finally, if it's to be a lover's quarrel, we need to keep the love alive."

"You're not the boss of me...Those words remind me that among my unalienable rights is the freedom to follow my soul instead of my leaders, if in doing so I serve the common good. They also encourage me to persist in my lover's quarrel with my country, as a patriot must."

### **Essay #17: In Praise of Diversity**

"At a time when so much of American life is driven by fear of 'otherness' - by false and toxic nostalgia for 'the good old days' when 'we were all alike' - let's ask where we would be without diversity."

"Mother Nature can help us answer that question...Biodiversity makes an ecosystem more creative, productive, adaptive to change, and resilient in the face of stress...The parallels between biodiversity and social diversity seem clear and compelling to me. Here are just a few of them:"

"Diversity makes our lives more vital...Diversity makes us smarter and more creative...the collective becomes smarter than any individual in it...Diversity gives us a chance to increase our personal resilience...Diversity ups the odds that we will enjoy the benefits of the human comedy."

"I urge those of you who cling to your dreams of the 'good old days'...to take a nice nap and dream on, dream on...The rest of us will help midwife the rebirth of America, hoping that our national nausea in this moment is just another symptom that our country is pregnant with change."

### **Essay #18: Seeking Sanctuary**

"Sanctuary is wherever I find safe space to regain my bearings, reclaim my soul, heal my wounds, and return to the world as a wounded healer...it's about spiritual survival and the capacity to carry on."

"We live in a culture of violence... People have different ways of dealing with cultural violence. Some turn to escapism by embracing world-rejecting religious or political beliefs. But this leads to deepening isolation... and paranoia about 'those people'...trying to destroy or control us."

"Others jump into the American mosh pit, seeking wealth or power or notoriety, contributing to the world's violence as they do...Others try to call our culture back to sanity and make the world a better place."

“Merton names one of our deepest needs: to protect and nurture the ‘root of inner wisdom’ that makes work and life itself fruitful...we need neither flee from the world nor exploit it. Instead we can love the world with all of its (and our) flaws...”

“I know I need sanctuary if I want to loosen the grip of our culture’s violence on me...The one I need may not be a building, but silence, the woods, a friendship, a poem, or a song...my friend and colleague Carrie Newcomer sent me a song *Sanctuary* ...The song itself has become a place of sanctuary for me. May it serve you that way as well.”

## Chapter VI. Keep Reaching In: Staying Engaged with Your Soul

“Some people don’t know what reaching in means, despite the fact that for millennia the world’s wisdom traditions majored in mapping out various pathways to the soul...From elementary through graduate school, we receive little guidance for the inner journey, even though Socrates... regarded self-examination as key to a life worth living.”

### Essay #19: Embracing the Human Frailty

*The Guest House*... “Being Human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight. The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in. Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.” -*Rumi*

“If you live your life experimentally, the failures will be personal, and some will be spectacular. And yet, as every good scientist knows, we often learn more from experiments that fail than from those that succeed.”

“This is the demanding path toward wholeness...that takes us toward being fully human, one that can be walked only by those willing to fall down and get up time and again.”

“Today, when people share their brokenness with me, my first goal is to create safe space where they can give voice to whatever they thought was unspeakable... Rumi’s words help us stay faithful to the task of becoming fully human in a world where we can neither survive or thrive until we embrace the human frailty with reverence and respect.”

## Essay #20: Confessing My Complicity

“My confession is simple. Daily I get hooked on my anger about our arrogant and unprincipled president...Anger isn't the problem. The problem is getting hooked on anger - addicted to an emotion that gives you a fleeting high but leaves you feeling worse...robbing you of well-being and creating an insatiable desire for the next hit.”

“When I look at myself closely and honestly, I see a form of white supremacy that's subtle but pernicious...I held an unacknowledged assumption that 'white is normal,' that white ways are the 'normal' ways. All others are 'exotic' at best, often 'strange'...and sometimes 'scary'.”

“On a planet where white people are in the minority, the arrogance of 'white is normal' is breathtaking - and like all arrogance, it distorts one's view of self and world.”

“Is there any hope for white illusionists like me? ... My friend Valarie Kaur... has been helping me understand what hope in action looks like through her *Revolutionary Love Project*, which envisions a world where love is a public ethic and shared practice...this is next-generation embodiment of revolutionary nonviolence.”

## Essay #21: Heartbreak and Hope for New Life

“Heartbreak comes with the territory called being human...Suffering breaks our hearts, but the heart can break in two quite different ways. There's the brittle heart that breaks into shards...then there's the supple heart, the one that breaks open, not apart, the one that can grow into greater capacity for the many forms of love.”

“Only the supple heart can hold suffering in a way that opens to new life. How can I make my heart more supple? The answer, I think, is to exercise my heart by stretching it, the way a runner stretches the leg muscles to avoid injury.”

“My heart is stretched every time I'm able to take in life's little deaths without an anesthetic: a friendship gone sour, a mean-spirited critique of my work, failure at a task that was important to me...Taking it all in - the good and the bad alike - is a form of exercise that slowly transforms my clenched fist of a heart into an open hand.”

“Alternative responses to suffering are within reach in our personal and political lives. Will we use them? It depends on our willingness to exercise our hearts...so  
85 that when suffering strikes, they will break open to new life.”

## **Essay #22: A Season of Paradox**

“I’m a professional melancholic, and for years my delight in the autumn color show quickly morphed into sadness as I watched the beauty die...Then I began to understand a simple fact: all the ‘falling’ that’s going on out there is full of promise. Seeds are being planted and leaves are being composted as earth prepares for yet another uprising of green.”

“It’s easy to fixate on everything that goes to ground as time goes by...But I’ve come to understand that life ‘composts’ and ‘seeds’ us as autumn does the earth, I’ve seen how possibility gets planted in us even in the hardest of times.”

“There is in all visible things...a hidden wholeness...Diminishment and beauty, darkness and light, death and life are not opposites: they are held together in the paradox of the ‘hidden wholeness’. In paradox opposites do not negate each other - they cohabit and co-create in mysterious unity at the heart of reality.”

“Split off from each other, neither darkness nor light is fit for human habitation. But the moment we say ‘Yes’ to both of them and join their paradoxical dance, the two conspire to make us healthy and whole.”

## **Chapter VII. Over the Edge: Where We Go When We Die**

“The finality of death is meant to challenge us to decision to be fully present here now, and so begin eternal life. For eternity rightly understood is not the perpetuation of time, on and on, but rather the overcoming of time by the now that does not pass away.” - Brother David Steidl-Rast, Benedictine monk

“No need to wait until you die to collect your rewards in some heaven high. Pay attention to what’s right here, right now, and you’ll be rewarded immediately - the Beloved Community is in our midst.”

## **Essay #23: Fierce with Reality**

“You only need claim the events of your life to make yourself yours. When you truly possess all you have been and done...you are fierce with reality.” -Florida Scott Maxwell, Psychologist, Author

“Today, as I close in on eighty, I know there are no shortcuts to wholeness. The only way to become whole is to put our arms lovingly around everything we know ourselves to be: self-serving and generous, spiteful and compassionate, cowardly and courageous...my shadow as well as my light...We must be able to say...‘I am all of the above’.”

“How can we learn to embrace with love the whole of who we are? ...meditation, journaling and therapy have all been helpful to me. Here are three others that I sometimes find even more helpful:

“1. Reach out to the younger generation - not to advise them but to learn from them, gain energy from them and support them on their way.”

“2. Move toward whatever you fear, not away from it. If, for example, you fear ‘the other,’ get into his or her story face-to-face, and watch your fear shrink as your empathy expands.”

“3. Spend time in the natural world, as much time as you can. Nature constantly reminds me that everything has a place, that nothing need be excluded. Wholeness is the goal, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life.”

#### **Essay #24: A Wilderness Pilgrimage**

“Every August for the past twenty years, my wife and I have visited the *Boundary Waters Canoe Area* of northern Minnesota, a million acres of federally protected wilderness along the Canadian border...I soon realized that my annual trek to this patch of heaven, the Boundary Waters, was a pilgrimage to holy ground, a place of healing.”

“It’s not just tranquility alone that make this wilderness a place of healing for me. It’s the patient, resourceful, resilient way nature heals itself, showing me what it takes to heal my own wounds so I can be in the world as a wounded healer.”

“On July 4, 1999, a derecho - a line of fierce, fast moving windstorms and create an inland hurricane - ripped through the Boundary Waters. It took down millions of trees, creating tinder for numerous fires to ravage the forest over the next few years...it was several years before I felt able to try a familiar trail...When I did I saw how the void created by death had been filling with new life...giving me a chance to witness resurrection.”

“For years, I’ve been asking myself the ancient question, ‘How then, shall we live?’ But at age seventy-nine, as I also ask ‘How then, shall we die?’ no path serves me better than those I’ve tracked through the Boundary Waters. It’s a place where, time and again, I’ve been taken to ‘the brink of everything’ and given a glimpse of heaven.”

“As far as I can tell, matter and spirit are intertwined and indivisible, a distinction  
87 without a difference, two sides of the same coin...If flesh and matter are not

infused with spirit, how could we and the natural world be so full of beauty, healing and grace?”

“When my own small life ends in some version of wind and fire, my body will be transformed by the same alchemy that keeps making all things new, witness this wilderness...dross will be turned into gold.”

“It’s all good and it’s all gold...I won’t be glad to say goodbye to life...But I’ll be glad to play a bit part in making new life possible for others...that makes life worth dying for.”

## **On the Brink of Everything Great**

(Based on *On The Brink of Everything*)

We are born into this world from mystery,  
And, when life’s done, we return to mystery.  
The meaning of life no one can be sure,  
But I can & do control my intention to serve.  
To free my adventurous true soul,  
I must flee my old self-seeking ego.  
I’m aging now as my time slips away,  
Moving beyond my lying childish days.

How shall I then live, my dearest friends?  
How shall I then die, when it finally ends?  
As my small life on earth now grows old,  
May the dross graciously be turned into gold.

Now it’s time to jettison all my mental junk,  
Long-held views I must rid from my trunk.  
I’m called to embrace both darkness & light,  
To co-create a unified heart, yeah that’s right.  
My big chance to connect both battery poles,  
Come let’s re-connect, both young and old.  
I’m investing my life now, becoming a mentor,  
Sharing lessons-learned, seeking what’s in store.

How shall I then live, my dearest friends?  
How shall I then die, when it finally ends?  
As my small life on earth now grows old,  
May the dross graciously be turned into gold.

I embrace suffering and joy, a holy couple,  
God teach my heart how to remain supple.  
A spiritual trip to new reality from illusion,  
Means embracing diversity & full inclusion.  
The great quest in life to find our true-self,  
Is found loving God & neighbor as our-self.  
We now join our inner journey toward soul,  
With outward action - to rejoin soul & role.

How shall I then live, my dearest friends?  
How shall I then die, when it finally ends?  
As my small life on earth now grows old,  
May the dross graciously be turned into gold.

The key is moving toward that which I fear,  
Not away from it, as if it's something queer.  
Matter and spirit have been forever joined,  
Intertwined - two sides of the same coin.  
We are born into this world from mystery,  
And, when life's done, we return to mystery.  
The meaning of life no one can be sure,  
But I can & do control my intention to serve.

## Chapter 8

### THE DIVINE DANCE

*The Trinity And Your Transformation*

by Richard Rohr with Mike Morrell

Reviewed by David Bradshaw

“What gets us into trouble is not what we don't know. It's what we know for sure that just ain't so.” -Mark Twain

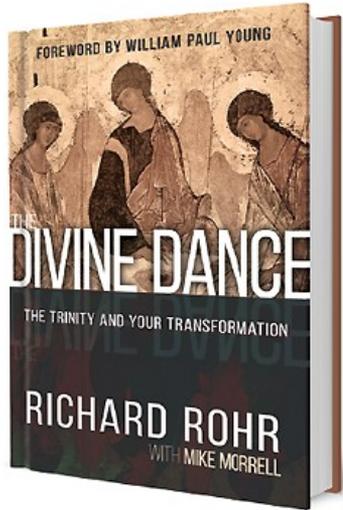
As our broken, disconnected world dances on the precipice of widespread civil unrest, *The Divine Dance*, by Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell, is quietly and gently calling us toward another dance - and ultimately a reflective, spiritually transforming revolution.

In this latest installment of wisdom from Richard Rohr, a Franciscan teacher and man I'm increasingly finding myself a willing disciple of, readers are challenged to take a fresh look at the mystery of the Trinity.

This book is extremely timely given the sharp left-right political, economic and religious divisions which presently exist - as well as the tendency of Christians to ignore or ridicule the other major wisdom traditions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism and especially Islam.

Rather than seeking to divide, Rohr is calling Christians to find areas of agreement and unity without compromising our core beliefs. This is so entirely refreshing that this book deserves a place in your library. Even if you do not agree with all of his conclusions, I promise you will be challenged to rethink things you thought you knew "for sure."

*The Divine Dance* is calling the entire faith community to embrace contemplation and a major restoration of the mystery and majesty of participatory Christianity, which thrived during the first three centuries of the Christian faith, and he believes is leading up to a "Trinitarian revolution." This mostly internal revolution has the potential to help heal and bring together our fragmented world.



“What if changing our perception of God has the potential to change everything?” asks Rohr. “We might still be in the infancy stage of Christianity...Mystery isn’t something you can’t understand, but rather something you endlessly understand.”

Rohr believes, “God has become a very contested idea today...debates argued, wars waged and hearts broken trying to own, define or even relate to this being.” Gaining more intimacy and relationship with a loving God can help serve as a bridge over today’s cultural impasse. He bravely leads seekers on a journey of self-discovery of what’s going on inside the Godhead.

“God is relationship itself...absolute relatedness...salvation is the readiness, capacity and willingness to stay in relationship,” declare Rohr and Morrell. “When you don’t give other people any power in your life, when you block them, I think you’re spiritually dead. And not far from evil...The Way of Jesus is an invitation to a Trinitarian way of living, loving and relating - on earth as it is in Godhead.”

Rohr is announcing the end of spectator spirituality which today still dominates the church, Catholic and Protestant. In its place, Rohr teaches readers how to flow into participation with the Trinity so that heaven is reflected in us, on earth, as we prepare for eternity.

Rohr’s premise, running through all of his books, is simply: “The way down is the way up.” This requires letting our self-guard down and permitting God’s spirit to rule our hearts, minds, words and actions.

When Jesus prays in John chapter 17 that believers are taken “out of the world,” He is speaking of being taken out of the world’s system of thinking and values, which Rohr says are “almost always going in the opposite direction of the mystery of the Trinity.” And I would add, the opposite of the Kingdom of God.

Rohr is not talking about just a slight adjustment in our view of God, but rather a major paradigm shift; “from Supreme Monarch living in isolation as a Critical Spectator,” to “the Ultimate Participant in everything - both the good and the painful...The Trinitarian Revolution reveals God as being with us in all of life instead of on the sidelines.”

If you’re like me, likely you’ll find yourself underlining key statements for future reference and reflection. Below are 35 key takeaways from my first read of this important book. My prayer is that these short quotes will help give you a glimpse of why this may be Rohr’s most transformational book yet - and what you might gain (and lose) by reading it yourself.

## PART I: WANTED: A TRINITARIAN REVOLUTION

### 1. RESTORING CONNECTEDNESS

“The greatest dis-ease facing humanity right now is our profound sense of disconnectedness - from God, ourselves, each other and the world.”

### 2. POSITIVITY'S DIRECTION

“If God is the great I AM, then we would have to say that evil/Satan is the I AM NOT, who is forever accusing others, denies humans their substance and makes negativity, opposition and the creation of separateness his primary task. The Trinity beautifully undoes the negativity by a totally positive movement that never reverses direction.”

### 3. INTERFAITH INCLUSIVITY

“Our new appreciation of the Trinity is giving us a new grounding for interfaith understanding. Trinitarian theology is going to offer us perhaps the best foundation for interfaith dialogue and friendship we've ever had.”

### 4. MIND/HEART UNITY

“...something beautiful is afoot - the reversal of a century-long lover's quarrel between science and spirituality, mind and heart.”

### 5. ATOMIC TRINITY

“The atom is the basic building block of the universe (proton, electron, neutron)... describing Trinity mystery is similar to atomic energy... as it is within, so it is without...the shape of the cosmos - from quasar to quark - is triune... when atoms are destabilized, we created a bomb of death and destruction.”

### 6. CHOOSING GRATITUDE

“Neuroscience now tells us fear, negativity and hatred stick like Velcro to our nerves... while positivity, gratitude and appreciation slide away like Teflon from those same nerves until we savor them or choose them for a minimum of 15 seconds - only then do they imprint.”

### 7. RESTORING HOPE

“Trinity is the ultimate paradigm shift... we cannot separate Jesus from the Trinity... God as Trinity gives hope to society as a whole.”

### 8. EMPTY, THEN INFILLED

“Emptiness alone is prepared for fullness - Father, infinite one, Son, imminent one, Spirit intimate one - when we are at home with all three, we are living inside Trinitarian spirituality.”

## 9. CIRCULAR POWER

“The law of Three changes everything - the magic of three breaks us out of our dualistic impasses. Trinitarian theology says true power is circular, not hierarchic.”

## PART TWO - WHY THE TRINITY? WHY NOW?

## 10. CONTEMPLATION TRAINING

“Contemplation is training yourself to see things overlooked, the wholeness in all things.”

## 11. A LOVING FATHER

“We feared the Father more than loved Him. We’re currently suffering from a Trinity Deficit Disorder ... Here's why; Absentee Father. When God as a loving Father is missing, there is a fundamental scariness and insecurity to our whole human journey... you’ll believe anything and do anything to feel dignity and meaning ... in a fatherless society you’ve got to save yourself.”

## 12. TRINITARIAN BIRTHING

“Do you want to know what goes on in the core of the Trinity? In the core of the Trinity, the Father laughs and gives birth to the Son. The Son laughs back at the Father and gives birth to the Spirit. The whole Trinity laughs and gives birth to us.”  
-Meister Eckhart, 14th cent. German Dominican

## 13. DIVINE ACCEPTANCE

“If you ascribe negativity on to God, you’re really in trouble spiritually because you’ve got no way out... without traversing four stages of grief and dying - denial, anger, bargaining & depression - before reaching divine acceptance.”

## 14. EMBRACING BOTH PATHS

“Two paths that allow people to have a genuinely new experience: the path of wonder and the path of suffering.”

## 15. STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

“Suffering is the only thing strong enough to break down your control systems, explanatory mechanisms, logical paradigms, desire to be in charge and carefully maintained sense of control.”

## 16. THE UN-COMFORT ZONE

“Let pain bring its gift of vulnerability. Let some of it change you, let some it call you outside your comfort zone to this bigger place where we are all one. (at-onement)”

## 17. SPIRITUAL REBIRTH

“Maybe our Christian religion in its present formulation has to die for a truly cosmic and love-centered spiritual path to be born.”

## 18. SUFFERING LOVE

“Whenever we love, we are in some way participating in the very suffering of God, the necessary self-emptying that must precede and make room for every infilling.”

## 19. PARADOXICAL FORGIVENESS

“To forgive you have to be able to see the other person - at least momentarily - as a whole person, as an image of the Divine, containing holiness and horror at the same time...You have to learn to live well with paradox or you can't forgive.”

## 20. MATURE SPIRITUALITY

“The Bible is the best book in the world, but has often been the worst book - not because of its content - but because of the spiritual maturity of those reading it.”  
“Corruption of the best is the worst” -Thomas Aquinas

## 21. SHARED SPIRITUAL HERITAGE

“In Hindu theology, there are three qualities of God and all reality, 1. ‘Sat’ - Father, being, 2. ‘Chit’ - Son, consciousness, knowledge, 3. ‘Ananda’ - Spirit, bliss, happiness - Now more than ever, we need to draw from or shared spiritual heritage to better understand our own belief.”

## 22. KNOWING LIGHT & DARK

“In the long tradition of Christian mysticism, there are two great strains of knowing; ‘kataphatic’ (seen according to the light) or a positive way and ‘apophatic’ (seen against the light) or a negative way...The apophatic has largely disappeared over the last 500 years...this has resulted in an eclipse of the Father.”

## 23. ALL VULNERABLE GOD

“We haven't realized that God has forever redefined divine power in the Trinity. The Christian God's power comes through his powerlessness and humility. Our God is much more properly called all-vulnerable than all-mighty.”

## 24. AN INCLUSIVE SAVIOR

“We made Jesus Christ into an exclusive savior instead of the totally inclusive savior he was meant to be.”

## 25. A FEAR-LESS FAITH

“Once Christians learn to honor the Cosmic Christ as a larger ontological (the nature of being) identity than the historic Jesus, then Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and spiritual-but-not religious people have no reason to be afraid.” 94

## 26. LOSS AND RENEWAL

“The Divine pattern revealed in Trinity is loss and renewal, self-emptying and living on an expanded level, surrender and receptivity, death and resurrection, darkness and light. The Pascal pattern is always loss and renewal. There is no renewal without loss.” (*The Wisdom Pattern: Order ~ Disorder ~ Reorder*)

## 27. RESURRECTION REQUIRES DEATH

“By and large, what human beings want is resurrection without death, answers without doubt, light without darkness, the conclusion without the process.”

## 28. IMPLANTED HOPE

“Let’s call Holy Spirit Implanted Hope. When God the Holy Spirit is missing, there’s no inner momentum...no inner aliveness that keeps people from dying from their wounds.”

## 29. FROM HURTING TO HEALING

“We move from hurting people hurting others to wounded healers healing others.”

## 30. KNOWING GOD'S HEART

“God refuses to be known except through trustful loving relationship. You cannot know God with your mind alone.”

## 31. SEEING WHOLENESS

“A mystic is precisely one who sees things in wholes and not just in parts ... Big truth must be presented on small stages for humans to get the point.”

## **PART 3 - THE HOLY SPIRIT**

## 32. HOLY SPIRIT HEALING

“The Holy Spirit sustains and heals all things into Love by slowly unveiling the inherent goodness, truth and beauty in everything.”

## 33. TRINITY OF LOVE

“The Holy Spirit is the love relationship between the Father and the Son.”

## 34. DESTINATION LOVE

“Love is not something you do; love is someone you are, your True Self. Love is where you come from and where you are going.”

## 35. HEAVEN ON EARTH

“Your job is simply to exemplify heaven now... the remedy when you find it hard to exemplify heaven now, to let love happen.”

# TRINITY

*(Ballad/song based on lyrics by Richard Rohr)*

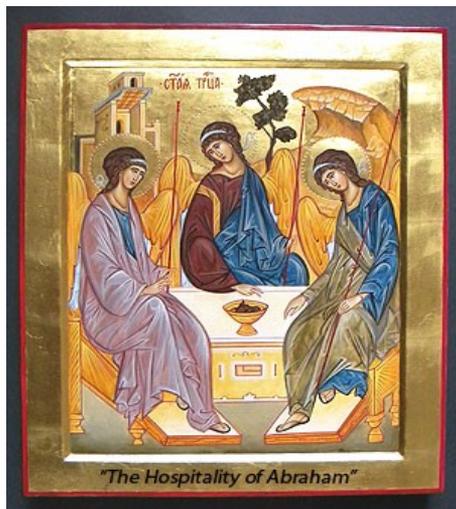
God for us, we call you Father  
God alongside us, we call you Jesus  
God within us, we call you Holy Spirit  
Trinity, three in one.

You are the eternal mystery,  
That enables, enfolds and enlivens all things,  
Even us, and even me. Trinity.

God for us, we call you Father  
God alongside us, we call you Jesus  
God within us, we call you Holy Spirit  
Trinity, three in One.

Every name falls short of your goodness and greatness,  
We can only see who You are in what is.  
We ask for such perfect seeing,  
As it was in the beginning, in now, and ever shall be. Trinity

God for us, we call you Father  
God alongside us, we call you Jesus  
God within us, we call you Holy Spirit  
Trinity, three in One.



## Chapter 9

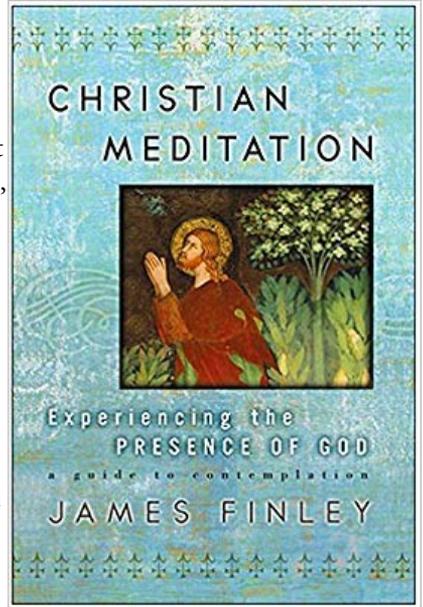
### CHRISTIAN MEDITATION:

*Experiencing the Presence of God - A Guide to Contemplation*

by James Finley

Reviewed by David Bradshaw

“There are two kinds of lives; active life (lower) and contemplative life (higher)... a man cannot be fully active unless he is partly contemplative, nor fully contemplative unless partly active...Active life begins and ends in this life. Contemplative life begins in this life and lasts without end.” - *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Chapter 8



#### Introduction

James Finley is a lighthearted, joy-filled clinical psychologist and former Trappist monk who studied under modern contemplative leader and author Thomas Merton over fifty years ago. He offers an excellent primer for Christian's seeking to develop a regular contemplative or meditative practice with a Christ-centered focus.

Finley's desire in writing the book is to help those who are seeking to learn how to be more "awake, compassionate and Christ-like human beings" by embarking on a path of interior reflection and contemplation.

Amazingly, this spiritual journey inward is not something we can mentally ascend to, but rather it is something we can only experience as we begin to practice. He says, "Paradoxically, to discover that the oneness with God we seek is wholly present, without our realizing it, in the humble origins of our spiritual journey."

T.S. Elliot's famous poem *Four Quartets* reflects this idea, "The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

Finley defines meditation as "the transformative process of shifting from surface, matter-of-fact ego consciousness to more interior, meditative level of awareness of the spiritual dimensions of our lives."

“Ego consciousness is the subjective perception of being a separate self that has to find God...the ego is not expansive enough to fulfill our hearts... not generous or gracious enough to bring us all the way home...only infinite union with infinite love will do,” says James.

Cynthia Bourgeault says as much in her important book on the subject, *The Heart of Centering Prayer*, “The fruits of Centering Prayer are found in daily life, what happens afterward, such as; greater spaciousness and flexibility in life and personal relationships, the purification or healing of the unconscious, a deepening capacity to abide in a state of attention to the heart (not the head), a deepening relationship with God and with your deepest self.”

In Chapter One, “Divine Destination” Finley offers two metaphors to help explain the already present nature of God’s presence. First, imagine yourself lost on a road seeking a small town which your map says is nearby. Somewhat frustrated you decide to stop at a gas station to ask a local for directions to find your destination. They giggle at the question, saying “Your in it!” The path to God is like that, says James.

Or, imagine you take a little trip to the ocean. You take off your shoes and wade into the water ankle deep. It’s true you are in only ankle deep, but its also true that you are in the ocean. In order to get in deeper, you simply need to move forward and it will get plenty deep soon enough.

## **Hearts Prepared for Contemplation**

Finley believes that our reading of Scripture, other spiritual reading and prayer prepare our hearts for contemplation, in which “we rest in God resting in us...we are at home with God at home with us.”

“We meditate that we might awaken to this unitive mystery, not just in meditation, but in every moment of our lives. This is how Christ lived. We meditate that we might learn to see through Christ’s eyes the divine mystery of all that surrounds us.”

James defines “mysticism” in Christian texts not as having visions, audibly hearing God’s voice or similar extraordinary experiences or events, but rather as a “life-transforming realization of our oneness with God...liberated from our tendencies to derive our security and identity from anything less than God.”

This definition is similar to Franciscan teacher Richard Rohr’s definition in his excellent book, *What Mystics Know ...* “A Christian mystic is anyone who places experiencing God personally as their number one priority, as opposed to

simply knowing about God in Scripture, church doctrine and theology.” Rohr advocates prioritizing God-centeredness to rule over self-centeredness.

It seems the truly profound things in life are also truly simple. As Finley puts it, “The generosity of God ceaselessly flows through all that is most simple in life... allowing the generosity of God to flow through us into others.”

## **Learning to Meditate**

In Chapter Two, James offers some basic guidelines, while at the same time affirming that there's “no such thing as Christian meditation... formally and officially designated as such.” Instead he affirms that there are a diversity of methods which are strikingly similar over history.

We begin by setting aside a dedicated time to sit - ideally about 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes at night. Although once a day is a good way to start the practice.

Find a comfortable chair or pillow allowing you to sit upright with eyes closed and begin mindful breathing slowly with your hands in a meaningful position in your lap. Your mental attitude is one of being open, present, humbly saying “Here I am Lord,” neither clinging nor rejecting your thoughts and feelings.

Finley, like Cynthia Bourgeault and others, recommend designating a special word of your own choice, or a short phrase, to help return your focus as your mind drifts, such as; “Yah-Weh, God, Mercy, Jesus or I love you.”

“Little by little as you continue in the practice you will experience yourself becoming more familiar with the inner landscape of your newly awakened heart,” writes Finley.

As your meditation period ends, silently bow in gratitude, asking God to help you learn how to maintain “the thread of meditative awareness throughout the day,” advised Finley.

Jesus used the metaphor of standing at the “door” of our heart, knocking and waiting. “The good news of the Christian faith is that God has left the door unlocked and slightly ajar - waiting for you to open it and experience oneness with God - who is the fullness of life itself.”

## Awakened to God's Love

James uses a great image of how lovers delight in surprising each other with little signs of love throughout the day..."Catching one another off guard with unexpected manifestations of love."

He reminds us that because "God is love" (I John 4:8) God's ways are the ways in which love awakens us again and again, "to the infinite love that is the reality of all that is real."

I love his imagery of a parent getting on the floor to do the silliest of things to revel in the sound of our child's laughter. "'Lovers say and do the simplest most tender and seemingly foolish things to express and embody the depths of their love for one another,'" says Finley. So very true.

"A woman sees her beloved, she holds her beloved. In doing this she is awakened to a love that transcends the concrete immediacy of the beloved (whether or not hair is combed or socks match). Every detail about him is transcended by the love to which his presence awakens in her... She is awakened to the mystery of lived manifesting in and as who he simply is... She settles into who he is and who they are simply together." What a beautiful expression of the rhapsody of God's love!

Finley explains further, "This explains why it rings true for this man and woman to call their moments of sexual union 'making love.' Their 'lovemaking' makes love present in and as their very lovemaking. Seen this way, their making love is a meditation practice." Wow! God is desiring a relationship with us this close!

"God is closer to us than we are to ourselves," said St. Augustine.

"Christ was continually calling out those around him to join him in seeing the Godly nature of everyone and everything he saw...In moments of spontaneous experience we fleetingly realize this closer-than-close presence of God intimately." writes James.

"Lovers often plan their moments of intimacy...but when the premeditated moment of renewed oneness catches fire, it burns with a light that qualitatively transcends anything that could be accounted for by their efforts. The intimacy can drain away if diversions and distractions are not recognized and let go of."

"Yet lovers do not live in a perpetual ecstasy of love. Rather their moments of ecstatic union open their eyes to the true nature of all their ordinary moments with one another." Amen! Lord open our eyes!

“Similarly, as we meditate we are not attempting to will our way toward extraordinary experience of God, rather our moments of extraordinary experience of God’s presence open our eyes to the endless holy nature of our ordinary experiences of ordinary daily life. Our meditative practice embodies our desire to stabilize ourselves as whole and complete in our ordinary experience of ordinary day-to-day lives.”

## **A Parable of Entering a River**

Finley is gifted at telling stories to illustrate rather deep spiritual truths with simplicity. For example, he offers a parable of entering a river to help readers to grasp the alreadiness of our being immersed in God’s kingdom.

“When you enter a river you get completely wet. It matters not if you enter after great deliberation or you fall in accidentally. It matters not whether it is the first time or you’ve entered countless times. It matters not if you enter alone in the middle of the night or in broad daylight with thousands of others. It matters not if for a brief moment or a long time. It matters not if a man, woman, old, young, saint, scoundrel, believer or not, rich or poor. Call this the GRACIOUSNESS of the river.”

“Spontaneous meditative experience discloses in a fleeting flash that there is nothing missing anywhere.” Or as Richard Rohr puts it, “everything belongs.” “Anyone at anytime might find themselves falling into the river, completely drenched in a graced and childlike clarity.”

“Jesus is the great ‘River Enterer’...calling others down to the river to discover they are created in God’s image and likeness... they are all God’s children, in whom God is well pleased!” (Luke 3:22)

Finley expands this imagery by explaining how man has so complicated entering the flow of God’s river that we have lost sight of how simple it is to get wet.

Too often we have required river-entering ceremonies, erected tents and buildings over the river-entering path, written river-entering books, libraries, seminaries, created ‘Riverologists’, bottling and selling the river water. Most of which is unnecessary and even distracting from simply jumping into the river of God’s loving presence! We miss the bigger, all-inclusive picture.

“Down the river you come upon a place where the river empties into the vast sea... and you realize you and the river have come to rest in the vast depths toward which all reality and life unceasingly flows... the oneness with God that Jesus 101 proclaims to be the fullness of life itself.”

## A Stairway to Heaven

Chapter 4 offers some practical tips about how to grow in your daily practice of contemplation which he feels can revolutionize your life, once the challenging ego-slaying aspects of meditation are overcome.

“You are learning to die to your illusions about yourself... to all that is less than God. The path that lies ahead for spirituality, love and creativity is often paved with the hard work of learning to be a down-to-earth human being, transparently open to ever more expansive levels of self-transformation.”

Finley introduces the readers to *The Ladder of Monks* written by Guigo II, a 12th century monk from Carthusian Monastery in France. Guigo offers four stages of preparing for contemplation which include; 1) Scripture reading, 2) meditation, 3) prayer and 4) contemplation.

“Transformative events that occur in a life devoted to seeking God in meditation often do not occur during times of meditation and prayer, rather during one’s day-to-day life.”

“The ladder to heaven must be solidly placed on down-to-earth loving concern for compassion toward others and our self,” concludes Finley.

In concluding this book review of part one of *CHRISTIAN MEDITATION*, I would like to focus on Guigo’s beautiful imagery of savoring the reading and chewing over the Word of God in our mind, heart and soul as the first step to experiencing the presence of God and ascending this ladder to heaven.

“Imagine a woman opening a letter from a man whom she risked disclosing her deep feelings of love. It is with a sense of excitement that she begins to read, seeking some indication that he feels for her something of what she feels for him...she revels and rests in each self-disclosure, reading his words over and over again ... in doing so the words descend ever deeper into the hidden recesses of her heart.”

So it is in our willingness to let go (kenosis) of our distractions and truly listen to what our loving God is saying that we embark on our journey up the ladder from earth to heaven. “Sustained intimacy rides the waves of deep uninterrupted openness to all love has to offer.” Amen!

According to Finley daily meditative practice goes best as we learn to stand firmly on the first rung of the ladder to heaven. The song *Stairway to Heaven* by Led Zeppelin comes to mind;

“There's a lady who's sure  
All that glitters is gold  
And she's buying a stairway to  
heaven  
When she gets there she knows  
If the stores are all closed  
With a word she can get what she  
came for  
Oh oh oh oh and she's buying a  
stairway to heaven.”



## **OPEN THE DOOR TO YOUR HEART**

*(A Ballad/song based on Christian Meditation)*

Are you ready for the journey of your life?  
It can begin right now, here's the secret of how.  
Sit still. Breathe deep. Saying "Here I am Lord,"  
Eyes shut, learning to see through the eyes of Christ.  
The divine mystery of all that surrounds you,  
The secret of transformation is letting go.

Open the door to your heart,  
Step into contemplative life,  
Which begins where ego ends,  
And lasts for time without end.

God is closer to you than your self,  
Awaken to God's presence from within.  
Read and meditate upon God's Word,  
Watch it change your heart from within.  
Immerse yourself in the Kingdom of God,  
The secret of transformation is letting go.

Open the door to your heart,  
Step into contemplative life,  
Which begins where ego ends,  
And lasts for time without end.

## Chapter 10

### RESILIENCE:

*Hard Won Wisdom For Living A Better Life*

By Eric Greitens

Reviewed by David Bradshaw

### INTRODUCTION

If you've ever faced pain, suffering or depression created by debilitating circumstances out of your control, then Resilience deserves a place in your library. It was recommended to me by a life coach I met with to discuss how best to respond in wisdom to a difficult personal crisis. I was attracted to the book's title, so I took his sage advice.

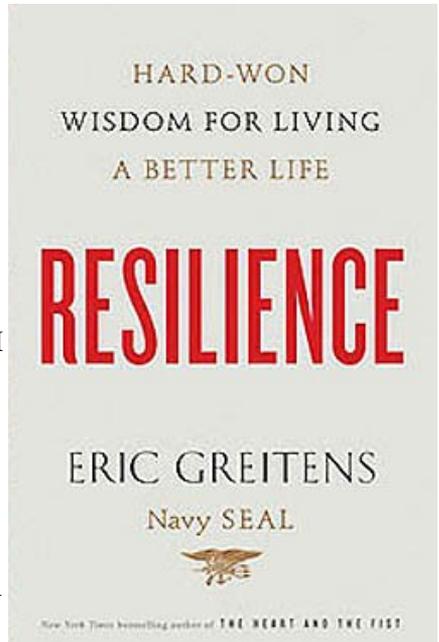
What can we learn about wisdom and life from a 40-year old former Navy Seal with a Ph.D. from Oxford, a Rhodes scholar, the Founder of *The Mission Continues*, named by Fortune magazine as one of the 50 greatest leaders in the world?

A lot!

I was intrigued by the author's unusual background as a distinguished military serviceman with a world-class education. I was struck immediately with his frankness, as he began to share his "hard won wisdom" with Zach, a downtrodden and addicted former Navy Seal in the form of twenty short letters of encouragement - later to become the book's 20 concise chapters.

*Resilience* is a real page-turner. I found myself instantly swept away with Greitens' vast historical perspective drawn from the wisdom of the ages such as; Aristotle, Socrates, Cicero, Augustine, Seneca, C. S. Lewis - as well as his deep compassion for a friend and fellow elite serviceman whose life was shipwrecked after returning home from combat.

Similar in some ways to Richard Rohr's *Falling Upward*, Greitens communicates the truth by using scores of stories which help Zach (and readers) gain a wider 104



and wiser perspective about how to overcome life's greatest paradoxes. Resilience is the type of book you wish you had read and unpacked as a young adult, however it contains so much practical wisdom it's equally valuable to those of us in the second half of life.

## TOP 20 TAKEAWAYS

### 1. RESILIENCE: not bouncing back, but healthy integration of pain and suffering

Greitens begins his letters to Zach with his definition of resilience as a necessary virtue to help build reservoirs of strength founded upon common sense ideas that lead to action. "Pain can either make us or break us, the difference is resilience." Overcoming struggles requires a positive mantra, that is, repeating words of life in our mind. "Those who reflect on their suffering uncover truth."

### 2. HAPPINESS: 3 types; 1) grace 2) excellence 3) pleasure - be all you can be!

Unhappiness is rampant in today's pleasure-driven pop culture. Greitens believes resilience is a virtue required to flourish and become all we are capable of becoming. Happiness and flourishing are rooted in action, not circumstance, and are the result of the choices we make. Drawing from ancients, Eric turns our focus toward the happiness of pursuing excellence and acknowledging God's grace - which are both far above a stunted view of happiness focused on self-centered pleasure.

### 3. MODELS: we all need a hero, someone to help us assemble life's puzzle pieces

Finding a model, either living or dead, is vital. Models bring us hope and show us practical wisdom in action. He gives a great example of how we begin life with a jigsaw puzzle without any picture to show us how all the pieces fit together. A model shows us how we can do as they do, learning skills and ways of being. As first we imitate a model until we learn to build our own model. "Flawed heroes are still heroic," Eric reminds Zach.

### 4. IDENTITY: "Be less concerned with what you have than what you are"

Socrates. Knowing your identity is the first step to making positive choices and taking the actions needed to change. "If you want to feel differently, act differently." Our identity should lead us to action, which is then followed by our feelings - which flies in the face of today's feeling-centered culture. Greitens reminds us we are each charioteers driving Plato's two horses of emotion - the horse of nobler emotions like honor, and our baser passions and appetites - both must be harnessed to move us forward.

### 5. HABITS: thoughts-> choices-> actions-> habits-> character-> lifestyle-> destiny

"Never cease chiseling your own statue," said Plontinus. Your life is built not on 105 dramatic big events, but by accumulation of small daily actions and habits.

“Resilience is the ability to endure hardship and is rooted in our security...children have a greater capacity for resilience due to their sharp learning curve, adults have often forgotten how to fail and are busy protecting what they have accumulated. To learn resilience children must be exposed to hardship, or life will teach them later by harsher means. Protecting children from all suffering insures they’ll later be hurt badly.”

**6. RESPONSIBILITY:** habit of accepting consequences for actions, mastering self

Eric views taking personal responsibility as the single most important habit of resilient people. While our culture is full of professionals paid to help us deflect responsibility, reduce anxiety and eliminate fear, Greitens says “fear is a core emotion and a life without fear is an unhealthy life.” The goal is to redirect anxiety toward worthy ends, such as building courage. “Excellence is difficult, excuses are seductive...excellence requires pain, excuses promise a pain-free life...the solution to worry is to look at things in the moment.” Worry about the future is a form of unproductive self-prayer.

**7. VOCATION:** “where your great joy meets the world's great need.” -Rev. Gomes

“We create passionate purpose by doing consistently excellent work,” says Greitens. Vocation means answering the “call” to work at developing your gifts. *Pilgrim’s Progress* is a great example of the struggle we all face in finding our true calling. He views a true warrior’s purpose as “serving something greater than yourself.” He points to Greek myths such as *The Odyssey* which illustrates a hero’s journey as consisting of a series of trials to be overcome and which concludes by returning home to serve the people using the wisdom gained.

**8. PHILOSOPHY:** discipline about living well, not just thinking well, doing vs. study.

Greitens views our modern life of ease as having lost touch with much of the ancient wisdom about resilience built during harder times. This has created a false expectation of perpetual happiness. The ancients viewed philosophy as meant to be lived out, not just studied. Again resonating with Richard Rohr, Greitens quotes F. Scott Fitzgerald’s statement, “The test of first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.”

**9. PRACTICE:** begins with the will to work, learn how to practice to learn anything

The old saying practice makes perfect is a truism. Greitens encourages the practice of gratitude, self examination and prayer. He finds five variables in practice; “frequency, intensity, duration, recovery and reflection.” Practice and training changes who we are, versus education alone, which only changes what we know. Resilient people have to practice. “Purposeful repetition are what separate an idea of interest in the moment from an idea that becomes part of our character.”

**10. PAIN:** must be worked through, not ended, learning to change how we relate  
Physical pain can be endured, but emotional pain must be transformed. Grietens says “there is pain that we seek and pain that seeks us.” He defines “fortune” as the pain of chance, which are events beyond our control. He says there is a time to be unhappy, hurt, angry, sad and even depressed but we must not stay there long. To work through pain does not mean to end it, but to change how we relate to it and turn it into wisdom. “Pain is God’s megaphone to a deaf world,” -C. S. Lewis.

**11. MASTERING PAIN:** separating pain (no choice) from suffering (our choice)  
The mark of resilience is discerning which pain deserves our attention. Paying attention to all pain leads to whining. Perhaps most striking is Grietens separation of pain, which is often out of our control, with suffering, which is often within our control. Negative self-talk is destructive and divorced from practice can lead to self-deception. “You will either face your fears or they will own into you...we all have pain we’ve mastered and pain we’ve run from,” says Eric. Keys to mastering pain include; taking control of our breath (spirit), keeping perspective on fortune and practicing gratitude. “To forgive is to give up all hope for a better past.” Prayer brings resilience, gratitude.

**12. REFLECTION:** act, reflect, plan, making sense of memories in a larger context. Reflection begins with the possibility that we are wrong. There is no shame in starting wrong unless we stay wrong over time. “Without action thought never ripens into truth,” said Ralph Waldo Emerson. Grietens suggests we act, then reflect, then plan and feels in reflection modern culture is very weak compared to ancients. Quality reflection gives us the ability to respond to hardship, error and pain in a way that strengthens us. Reflection should become a daily habit. Closed mindsets prevent insight, growth and are often the product of our fears and ego protection.

**13. FRIENDS:** “a single soul dwelling in two bodies”, to lean on & struggle for  
“A true friend is a second self,” said Cicero. Friendships often fall into three categories; 1) utility, 2) pleasure, and 3) virtue/excellence. Our deepest friendships are formed when we are moving in the same direction and begin with roots in fellowship, such as studies, serving and suffering together. Friends are people we can lean on in times of trouble and people we can be strong for. The knowledge of God’s love makes people resilient in the face of hardship.

**14. MENTORS:** love what they do, sense what really matters & make pass it on.  
Mentors exercise authority, they “author” ways to grow, enrich and increase our lives because they are willing to take responsibility. “The mark of a mature man is the ability to excel under hardship... through hardship a boy is taught to become a man who is community-oriented rather than self-oriented,” says Eric. Mentors  
107 love to pass on what really matters. How do you find a mentor? “When the

student is ready, the teacher will appear,” as Jackie Chan once said, ‘how can you fill a cup when it’s already full?’ Keep yourself humble and a mentor will find you.

**15. TEAMS:** ability to manage many interests while serving a larger purpose /mission. Great teams are built when we place our mission above personal differences. Clarity of purpose creates perspective. Team leaders are magnanimous; generous, eager to serve, quick to forgive insults, independent-minded and brave in the face of danger. “Purity of heart is to will one thing,” said Soren Kierkegaard. Deep bonds and strong teams are created by those who serve together and form a shared connection.

**16. LEADERSHIP:** earned devotion by taking action, multiplying what is working Beware of leaders who have not suffered or been forged in the fire. A true leader earns followers devotion by showing devotion through their consistent actions. Leaders are able to listen, counsel and at times be friends and fans. Leaders are resilient by choice and have learned the trick is not to repair what’s broken as much as to multiply what is working. “It is better to be led by hardworking resilient failures early in life than by those of privilege or luck without putting their souls into a task.”

**17. FREEDOM:** won by devotion, self-mastery, vision of excellence at work/play Meaningful, fulfilling and purposeful work radiates to all areas of our life. Rather than viewing work and life as a see-saw balance, Greitens sees it as a symphony. “A master in the art of living sees no distinction between work and play, viewing labor as leisure, pursuing his vision of excellence, whether working or playing, he always appears to be doing both,” said James A. Michener. Like riding a bike, the balance comes when we are in motion, not standing still.

**18. STORY:** we're not alone, without a past - lost in present, fearful of future “All sorrows can be borne, if you put them in a story,” said Boris Cyrulnik. Stories are at the heart of all religions and philosophies. As long as we are part of a story we are not alone. Storytelling gives events meaning and help build resilience. “Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutters in their actions as in their words,” says Alasdair MacIntyre, one of Greitens’ college professors. “A quest is a journey with meaning... on a quest we discover the true nature of what we’re after only by going on the journey.” The best stories start at the point where things get interesting. If you’ve lived well you hope to become part of a story others are proud to tell.

**19. DEATH:** time is limited, disciplined reflection adds meaning/urgency to life. Resilient people learn to live with the knowledge of death without being overcome by it. Disciplined reflection on death adds meaning to the days we live. Death provides us with the urgency behind our greatest efforts. ‘At the

moment we go to sleep, let us say in joy ‘I have lived well,’” said Seneca. “We strip death of its greatest advantage... come to know it, get used to it...Practicing death reminds us our time is limited. Premeditation of death is premeditation of freedom,” said Montaigne. What lives on is not what’s engraved in stone monuments, but what we have woven into the life of others. We honor the dead by living out their values.

**20. SABBATH:** the realm of time to be, give, share - rest + resilience = a whole life.

After 273 pages of explaining to readers the many virtues of resilience, Greitens reserves the last four pages to discussing the importance of resting from resilience, at least once a week on the Sabbath. “Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth, on Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul,” said Rabbi Abraham Heschel. “The Jews built a palace in time, a realm where the goal is not to have, but to be, not to own, but to give, not to control, but to share, not to subdue, but to be in accord. Sabbath is less about rituals we follow and more about changing our frame of mind to find holy space in time that God created and commanded humans to keep. Sabbath is the counterbalance to resilience...Sabbath comes without our help, celebrate it!” Sabbath makes our life whole. Notice that man and woman were created on the 6th day - illustrating that our life is meant to begin “at rest” on the Sabbath. The world says we should work first, then rest, but our Creator says the opposite: we are to REST first, then work.

## CONCLUSION

This overview is just the tip of the iceberg of the keys to building a resilient life – which is a life-long process we can choose to engage in. I tip my hat to Eric Greitens for writing a book full of such encouraging letters to his friend Zach.

All may learn from his wise counsel. I also thank him for simplifying my Christmas gift shopping this year - as I will give copies of *Resilience* to my family and friends. Don’t miss this valuable tool to sharpen your ability to live above your circumstances.

Exit your comfort zone today. Realize your life mission and then press onward and upward. (For a free printable poster summary of this great book below, visit: <http://myideafactory.net/gallery3.html> )

For the latest news please visit [www.blissfull.org](http://www.blissfull.org) and/or [www.myideafactory.net](http://www.myideafactory.net)

Until next time ... *blessings to you all!*

