

Part I.

War and Sojourn in a Strange
Land

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War and Sojourn in a Strange Land

I am and He is,
swimming across a large body of clear water.
Periodically fainting,
Nearly suffocating,
But awakened
Over and over again
by the fear of death.

We kept swimming because we can't not swim.
Suffering and bleeding many days and nights.
Motivated by the reaper's steady encroachment.

Eventually reaching shore,
we celebrated our arrival with violent shivers
and groans.

Looking back towards the
newly crimson ocean,
We tried to make sense of the journey
and to mourn what was lost,

But we couldn't.

All we could express,
to anyone willing to listen

"My eyes and face
feign ease,
Don't be deceived.

Today, there is no peace in me.

I am bleeding, I am tired.

My soul wanders through the ruins
of collapsed temples.

Full of dread,
Drenched in grief,
Covered in blood.

My only request is
that you do not misunderstand
my disposition. There is no peace
in me, today."

After saying this, we

retreated into a
darkness within.

To pray,

To rest.

To grieve.

To ask for direction and strength to endure the next thing.

Lying motionless on wet sands

nudged by gentle ocean waves.

conscious enough to notice that it is night.

The moon radiant, full, and alive.

Bloody sea foam dissolving on our left arm

And it's cold.

we attempt to crawl,

face dragging through

the softened Earth.

And with a deep sigh, slipped into a dream...

We came to,

fleeing from chaos

into a diner

where poorly lit strangers were

sitting behind wooden tables

on red cushions, inside booths.

Only their eyes moved, and no one ate.

They sat, disillusioned and ashamed and in silence.

They saw us

And noticed the look of a man

running from something.

We noticed their expression of pity.

We watched them

return calmly to their melancholy gaze

towards nothing.

Feeling called,

We sat next to one of the many.

And leaned against one another.

Propping each other up.

Resting intimately,

in ways beyond the ways of flesh.

bonded in soft and gracious torment.

becoming uniform in appearance and philosophy.

And nothing was said,

because there was nothing to say.

Our thoughts merged into one,
“What in me is dark, Illuminate!
Set fire to the desires of my mortal vessel.
Death and everlasting pain
await me in slumber
because I am enslaved!
Clinging to what I know,
And it’s killing me.
Therefore, through starvation,
of many kinds,
I remind the flesh of its
frailty, fallacy, and function.
I silently endure
Suffering and embracing
Suffering and embracing
Suffering and embracing
Suffering and embracing
Alone,
with no one to blame
But myself!
On the inevitable path of true JOY.”

Counterfeit Gods: Love and Death

We exchanged our darkness,
then fell asleep in the comfort of each other's scars.
We met in dreams where we created
altars for ourselves,
becoming one in spirit and flesh.
The sharp edges of our love
cut through reason,
fulfilling our desire to die.
We gouged out our eyes.
We covered our ears.
Falling through poisonous air
We, the counterfeit gods,
Descending into the decay of our own creation.
And I knew before you did
our impending doom.
The thought consumes my heart.
Evoking a peculiar kind of fear.
One beyond my comprehension.

I played with the concept of eternity
until I wept.

Then the wooze crept in.
and wooze rusts joints.

The psyche scraping and dragging
against life itself.

Simple movements accompanied by
faint electric.

Now I pray through static,
carefully listening for the pulse of the day.

Sometimes

I walk outside and
look at the clouds and think...

“My goodness, what an absurd man I am.”

He is, and I am awakened by

The subtle sound
of erosion,

And the wind weakened by a nearby
collage of trees, shielding me

And snow is falling,

dancing in downward spirals
to cool sand beneath me.
Melting swiftly to a grand ending.
the snow's descent is symbolic
The way he and I think,
in downward spirals.
Filled with rebellion
inside the flakes of
cold imagination.
Our cyclical thoughts,
like a black swan
trying to achieve perfection
before they disappear.
But we would never allow it.
That's a good thing.
We let it dance,
It's little dance
until it lands
And melts away.
We caught a few within our hands
to hold for a while
To look at.

And it said to us,
Through its destruction
“to grieve the living,
is a tragedy”
Held still
In chains of gloomy darkness.
And after years of tears, still
carrying a heavier heart
Free to leave but held
Still
And still
Our flesh,
Is a burial ground
for seeds of war.
Where forgotten seeds
are growing into
tall trees, tall enough to see from the hill
We chose to die on.
Assuming we could forget them over time.
We can no longer look at this deep forest
from a distance
because there are ghosts calling our name

from within it.
And he must tend to them.
So, to you
We give only silence,
space and the truth of his plight.
He knows his task.
to cut down, uproot, and burn
leaving only scorched, cleansed land
for someone else to tread.
Here's to you! The one who heeds the warning
But this is only a half truth
The perpetual act of failure
A continued attempt to reach the exit
Blinded and headstrong
With tears, confusion, and discomfort.
Carrying objects,
With and without life
Heavy and light
He knows
He is not just himself
He is also,
the people he doesn't understand,

the irrational ones
living through them and outside of them
looking and feeling multiple perspectives at once,
the pain of his ancestors and his living bloodline
fully and fused.

What we lack in strength,

We see in others

Our brothers,

keep fighting through the

pain of healing scars

So why is he

The one who remains in the cocoon of dread

Unable, unwilling to move ahead

The perpetual act of failure

The tears and confusion

Stuck in a loop

Like a lost child

Repeating the same things

Talking to the spirit of insanity

Asking it why? Expecting breakthroughs

And new answers.

in a constant state of devastation

too tired
to hear about you and your devastation
but always aware that you might be devastated
or on the way to devastation.

Part II.

The Solace of Paradox

Preface

This is an idea. This is not concrete knowledge. I don't want to offer a specific way of living or thinking. I just have ideas. Through obsessive self-reflection and observation of both my internal and external worlds, I wrote down ideas.

I wrote most of this amid a challenging time in my life. The struggle I faced disrupted everything I thought I knew, and I still don't know anything now.

I can only say with certainty that Jesus Christ is my Lord. I strive to detach from the temporal and to seek God. I acknowledge and recognize the journey and obstacles I have overcome with the help of God. I have suffered and continue to suffer because the weight of my sin is great, but God forgives me and sees me. Therefore, I am thankful, and I strive to be led by the spirit indefinitely. Through prayer, meditation, and faith, I hope to be a vessel for God and His Will.

The idea of the solace of paradox is this: The necessity of dark times. Happiness and sadness. The journey our soul must take to be purified is not an easy one, and it is not comfortable. The idea is to find peace in the suffering. That is the paradox. Dark times can be a mercy from God.

A paradox is a seemingly absurd or self-contradicting statement or proposition that, when investigated or explained, may prove to be well-founded or true. A great deal of the stories in the bible point toward an upside-downness. The Bible is a compilation of books, songs, and letters written by different authors who were tasked with recording and sharing the Word of God. As I read through the books in the bible, I noticed a theme.

On a surface level, the Words of God may seem contradictory and counterintuitive. Many people are distracted and discouraged by the belief that the words in the bible don't make sense and that they are inconsistent. Which I think is an appropriate reaction on an objective, purely linguistic level. The actions, laws, parables, etc., at times, seem to conflict with one another if you have limited exposure to the Word. I had this thought as well. My fear and hesitation to believe in the Word of God, as I've stated before, stemmed from the idea that once I sat down and studied, I wouldn't be able to accept it.

Very few people look for themselves.

The world is filled with evil and unseen forces that manipulate and deceive us. The Christian Religious institutions have been infiltrated and perverted. The stigma or narrative surrounding religion in general, is tainted because of the evil actions of some of the so-called representatives of that particular faith. Many people never take the chance to seek God seriously because of this reality. We have been lied to and deceived. We have been prescribed a false truth. I have been internally critical of religion, especially Christianity because I also held that belief. My thoughts used to be that “most Christians are just fearful and simple-minded people looking for something to have hope in. They are hypocrites and unauthentic”. I had this belief because I made judgments based on very little investigation and surface-level observation/knowledge. **Very few people look for themselves.** People are distracted and possessed by other things. I think the first task of all adults should be to unlearn and question all traditional and prescribed truths.

I speak from what I have experienced and not what I have been told. We are all an accumulation of experiences and happenings. We should take the time to analyze and decipher those happenings. To look inward. To revisit your inner child because he or she is still there and they are influencing your actions and making decisions for you. Whether you want to admit it or not.

You can only meet others as far as you have met yourself.

The Hebrew Bible

The Bible is filled with stories of human failure. The Bible is not a law book, full of rules and peaceful stories. It is a deep analysis of the human problem.

It is filled with stories of trials and tribulations. It is filled with pain and shame; it is filled with mercy and forgiveness. It makes us painfully aware of the darkness we all have within us. It is filled with God's Love and character. It is a text that emphasizes balance and enhances our ability to be open to new perspectives. It is about power reversal, becoming aware of our deep-seated iniquities, internal conflict, discipline, duality/nonduality, and so much more.

“For my power is made perfect in weakness” 2 Corinthians 12

There are stories like Joseph's. The youngest of 12 sons of Israel. His brothers sold him into slavery and told their father that he had been killed because they were envious of him. Joseph was now a slave in Egypt. Over time, Joseph was recognized as a man who was blessed by God and he became a powerful figure who would later decide the fate of his brothers.

The story of David being the chosen one out of the 8 sons of Jesse by the prophet Samuel, who anointed him king of Israel even though he was the smallest and youngest.

The story of the Israelites, a small and weak group of people, overcoming and overwhelming large and thriving empires.

The story of Moses being thrown into a river to die as a baby but ended up surviving and being the man chosen to lead the Israelites out of slavery.

All eventually leads up to the story of Jesus being a man who would fulfill the Words written in scripture. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. He had all the Power and Glory of YHWH, His Father in heaven, and lived humbly and perfectly. He had authority. He didn't use his power to

gain status or material wealth. He used his power to advance the Kingdom. Even being tortured and killed for the sins of the world.

God uses worldly conceptions of weakness to display His power. He uses symbols to explain things beyond our comprehension. True power is having the ability to get ahead and benefit from your own devices but choosing not to use them for yourself. The LORD subverts human traditions and assumptions. This, in my meditation and study of the Bible, has been the central display of paradox in the bible.

Some books and resources explain and elaborate on themes and concepts much better than I can. I will recommend them to you. A lot of my revelations and understanding of the Word are influenced by others.

Empty Yourself, So You Can Be Filled

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature^[b]
of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being
found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—

Jesus emptied himself. Denying the flesh. He makes us aware of our inner world. When I started my journey with Jesus, I was full of idols and blockages. Not only idolatry but pride and hatred. I had too many altars in the way to start building my new temple. I became empty. I was in pain.

The solace of paradox for me is the peace of emptiness. My weakness and vulnerability allowed for a deep excavation of the soul. Just like Eustace in the Voyage of the Dawn Treader, I had to be painfully uprooted so I could be placed upon a stable foundation.

The passage above is also about being humble and aware of your purpose. That's what the Word of God does and did. I sought after God and he granted me awareness. Not only did I become aware; he walked with me through the **pain of that awareness**. But I had to make the decision first. I do believe we as humans have free will. We have the choice to deny God and continue to walk on our own set path. Which in a nutshell is the original sin. Independence or separation from God.

Unravel/Unlearning

There is a step we all must take before we can begin to walk on our true path. We have to unlearn. We are born into this world. We are receptive and impressionable. Things happen to us that we do not understand. We also do things that we do not understand. Although I do believe we can inherit ancestral pain and gifts, we essentially start as a blank canvas. Our environment, the culture we are prescribed, the traditions, our movements and language, and our modes of expression are all taught. Our reality is shaped by the tools we are given. The way in which we shape our reality can be influenced by our experiences.

Until we become aware and start to understand this concept, we live according to what we are taught.

The Unlived Parent

A parent's unresolved trauma and deep-seated secrets will become the child's burden to bear. Your fear is now your child's fear. Your pain is now your

child's pain. Your ability to express will greatly influence your child's ability to express himself or herself. This is the result of the unlived parent. The problems that our parents weren't able to resolve in their own lives are now ours. The child who recognizes this may feel the weight of that burden. The child who chooses to investigate the weight is usually compelled to do something about it. For some, it is a burden that is too heavy and too complex to deal with. For others, it is a gift, or a challenge to overcome. This awareness begins to actualize the potential for true self-knowledge.

As a teacher, I get the unique opportunity to observe a wide variety of adolescent developmental paths. I can see that even at 11 and 12 years old, children can have deeply embedded and unhealthy coping mechanisms. I have observed trauma-driven reactions to stressful situations. I see how certain behaviors can be learned, applied, and reinforced if it not addressed in time. I notice some children don't know why they do things, while others are very conscious and aware. I notice this in adults as well.

Adults Are Just Old Children

My dad said to me one day that when he looks at me, he sees the child version of me. He sees me as his little son. He still calls my little brothers, who are 21, the babies. My grandmother does as well. I'm certain my mother still sees all of her children in this way. Similarly, I try to see that child in everyone. When I see a grown man losing control out of anger, or a drug addict screaming at themselves on the street, or a woman crying in their car at a red light, I see babies. I see divinity. I see a human tainted by the world. I see myself. Even when I hear about people doing heinous and deplorable crimes, I cannot dehumanize these people. I see them as different versions of me.

Those people are "Cortneys" who grew up in a different home, with different parents, different access to resources, different philosophies, and different traumas. I say all this because I want to shift your perspective. The ways in which you understand the world and yourself stem from a foundation you

constructed as a child. Or a foundation that was constructed for you as a child. I think it is important to investigate that foundation as much as possible.

I'm not saying you should abandon the knowledge that you have accumulated throughout your life. I'm saying to assess its credibility and functionality.

Duality – The Book Of Genesis

To begin to see depth and meaning in the book of Genesis we must look at the root language. I suggest reading the Hebrew translation or start to analyze the Hebrew words used, so we can restructure our understanding. Meaning can get distorted and lost in translation. Although I believe that the Holy Spirit can help us see past misinterpretation because God's truth transcends all human language, I think the beginning of deep understanding starts with consuming information and then analyzing that information. English is a limited mode of expression, and the Western spiritual perspective is and has been ineffective for me. I choose to seek out more perspectives.

Transposition

Transposition is the process of exchanging the position of two things. When we are speaking about spiritual things in human terms, we have to take into account the loss of meaning in translation. If you are making a piano version of a piece of music created for an orchestra, the piano will have to make up for the violins that are not present.

People that claim they have a complete understanding of something usually fail to see the inadequacy of their knowledge or they are just ignorant to their limitations.

The book of Genesis sets the foundation for the texts that come after. The story of Adam and Eve is a story of temptation and lust for power. The temptation to become independent and to become our own gods. To be able to make decisions without God in the picture. Adam in Hebrew is pronounced Adamah. It means dirt or soil. Eve in Hebrew is pronounced Chavah/Chayah which means to breathe or give life. God breathed life into the dirt and we are made in the image and likeness of our source. As images of God enclosed in a shell of dirt, the temptation and desire to “be God” leads to death.

The evil one tempts. The consumption of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the beginning of separation from God. We become aware, we become naked. We conclude that we know more than our creator, we rely on self and lean on our own understanding. This is the “foundational melody” of the bible.

“The Bible is filled with humans discerning good and evil. What God is constantly doing is subverting and overturning human assumptions about power and privilege.” A quote from Tim Mackie, a Hebrew bible scholar. God does this with our purpose, with strength and weakness, love and hate, right and wrong.

Supernatural Worldview

I encourage you to read the bible from Genesis to Revelations. There is a narrative that will come together as you make your way toward the “end”. You can think of the bible as a bunch of Wikipedia pages with thousands of hyperlinks that can lead you to other passages in the bible. With this perspective, you can begin to understand the text in profound ways because you will have contextual clarity.

If you know the backstory of a person, you will have a deeper appreciation and understanding of that person's complete story.

As I have stated before, the original texts and scrolls of the Bible were not written in English. It has been translated into English for English readers. Although I do accept the translations; the textual analysis of Hebrew and Greek scripture (by theologians, Hebrew scholars, Historians, and myself) has been enlightening. One view I would like to offer is the Deuteronomy 32 Worldview. Dr. Michael Heiser wrote a book called *The Unseen Realm* that explains this view in much more detail. He suggests that we must see through/past the modern Christian conventions that have watered down the potent truths being shared in the Old Testament. After many years of study and analysis of the Hebrew text, he believes that the bible is a lot more supernatural and concerned with the spiritual realm than we realize (Modern Christianity has demythologized the supernatural aspects of the bible because of many factors that can be elaborated on in Michael Heiser's text, among other places).

God has an assembly/council. Heavenly beings that we do not consciously interact with on this physical plane assist in ruling with God. The word Elohim is used in the bible many times, but it does not always refer to YHWH, the Most High. Elohim can refer to any disembodied member of the spiritual world. Heiser suggested that the division of all mankind at Babel is the result of a disinheritance of man, but God would keep a portion of humanity for himself in Abraham.

Moses says in Deuteronomy 32:

When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the Sons of God/Israel. For the LORDS portion in his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance.

He set boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. This has also been translated to the sons of Israel, which means Moses could be possibly referring to Jacob and his descendants but during the events at the tower of Babel, the covenant with Abraham was not yet made.

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (which supports the translation of Sons of God) and the many references to the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) by the New Testament authors, the notion that Moses is talking about Elohim/Sons of God and not humans in Deuteronomy 32:8 makes sense. Sons of God, throughout the bible refer to non-human or spiritual beings, like Nephilim, or the angelic hosts in God's heavenly court/assembly. So, this means that there was a divine transgression that happened, and the Sons of God, who were given authority to rule over the nations, began to rule unjustly. Not only is the story of the bible about human rebellion, but it is also about spiritual rebellion. I think it is important to know about this worldview because there are things outside of human comprehension that we need to be aware of. Ephesians 6:12 says, "For the struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evils in the heavenly realms."

Divine freedom resulted in rebellion. The kingdom of God cannot be built with human hands alone. The presence of God is required. The Love of God dwelling in the hearts of the people is necessary to fulfill God's original plan. Through Jesus Christ, that plan was fulfilled at the Resurrection, and through us, Jesus Christ will continue to add to his kingdom, with the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit that we receive when we believe in Him.

We are in spiritual warfare as we speak. Arm yourself with the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Paradox of Salvation

“Until you see who you are in Christ, you will not be able to admit the worst about yourself” Tim Keller

Diving into the Word of God gives birth to an awareness that begins to convict us. A common belief that people have about salvation is that to be saved, you have to be “good” and earn your spot in heaven through works. In my understanding, this is not the case.

Romans 10:9 says, “If you believe in your heart and confess with your tongue, that Jesus is your Lord and Savior, you will be saved.” Once you believe you are already saved.

The change happens when faith happens. “The very thing that ensures you, will now convict you”. (Keller) Sin confronts with fear and punishment. God confronts with love and mercy. Recognizing this can be a key step to enlightenment. This has played out in my life. I am not bored. I am not self-righteous. I do not believe that I am better than anyone. I am compelled. I ask for wisdom, and I have no choice but to share. I’m not selling this work. This is a gift I want to share. This is a reflection on my experiences and a meditation on the knowledge I’ve retained. This is an invitation into the Kingdom of God. Jesus has given us a way to follow so that we can be made complete in our humanity.

My Second Temple

The temple is my inner world. My temple is my body. My temple is my home. The temple I previously had no longer exists. We together are God's Temple. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. In the same way, we shouldn't defile a manmade temple devoted to God; we definitely shouldn't defile a temple created by God. At all costs, don't let impure spirits within your body.

⁴³ When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. ⁴⁴ Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation." Matthew 12:43.

The important part here is the word empty. The temple must be filled with something, or your old evil spirits will come back with something even more chaotic and evil.

The temple is where the Holy Spirit dwells, if you let it in. The Holy Spirit has to have space. The temple I built in my adolescent years left no space. So, it had to be destroyed. I believe there are things outside of us that can affect, alter, and influence our inner world. Jesus teaches us to steer clear of the things that dilute and poison our temple. In the book, *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis states, "Divine demands lead us to where we need to be." We need to love Him, and to love Him, we must know Him, and to know Him, we must seek Him. Our foundation can be built upon our faith in Jesus.

Even though I consider myself to be born again with a new foundation, just like the ground on Earth, the ghosts of my past still haunt me. My flesh is still a cemetery for all the things I've been through. I am still in pain.

This is also a result of the revelation of the Solace of Paradox. Developing an openness to embrace life's weirdness. Embracing and accepting the changes in society and within myself, the beauty of pain and discomfort, the shade of the trees, the heat of the sun, and the fear that I feel.

Mindfulness.

Pain and Fasting

Following Christ is not about escapism. There is solace in pain. I seek the approval of God and to live with the understanding of the Gospel. To surrender. C.S. Lewis says “We are rebels who must lay down our arms”. The sin we are slaves to can be masked and hidden. Pain can be unmasked evil, alerting the sufferer to a deeper truth. Pain can be God’s megaphone. Pain can be a teacher. By no means am I saying that people deserve pain and that people are in pain because of evil within them. I’m sure there is a case where there is a blameless child who goes through the pain of cancer, for example, and it can be tough to try to understand the meaning of that sort of suffering. I do not claim to understand that kind of pain. I would just direct you to the Book of Job and ask that you meditate on the Word for understanding. I would also respond to the question concerning the “injustices” of other people’s pain and suffering in the same way that C.S. Lewis suggested God might respond, by asking, “What is that to you?”

Fasting has been a common practice in my life. During these fasts, I gain clarity. In my experience, my mind became focused on the purpose of the fast. Hunger is a constant reminder of the purpose while eliminating other forms of distraction. My fasts are for God, so my mind is constantly centered on God when I’m fasting. It also teaches discipline and develops spiritual strength. Paul says in Romans, “I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave.” To be governed by the spirit is an important step in the quest to obedience and receptivity to the Will of God.

I want to share some insightful thoughts I recorded during my fasting. I completed two 3-day water fasts with about 3 days in between. I ate no food for 3 days and meditated on the Word of God. I was made aware of the anger that I carried within me.

I started living in my car in North Carolina.

My grandma told me before I left to figure out why I felt the need to take this trip. Initially, I told her it was because I wanted to create art and explore the country, but in truth, it was because I was lonely. I had a deep and hidden desire to show others that I was sufficient. I was angry because I felt overlooked, I felt unappreciated, I felt stuck, I felt like I was superior. I have spent a good portion of my life trying to make myself more acceptable to other people. While I have been living in my car, I have had to face these feelings. I have gotten used to the stares of judgment and slowly but surely shed the idea that I am better than anyone. I am “homeless” and unemployed but I am not better or worse than any other man.

I choose to forego worldly pleasure in this life because there is nothing for me. I know my complete reward is in the Kingdom of God, through Jesus Christ. This is where my longing for complete and true happiness resides. I want to be face-to-face with love.

The Mind

My mind is a **place**. The concept of the aforementioned temple is a description of the structure of my internal world. I believe it is God-given insight into my spiritual infrastructure. My mind is the medium through which I receive information. It is a center of receiving. It is the place of interpretation and a space for creation. The knowledge that is being received and interpreted is from an alternate source.

What is the source?

The lamp of the body is the eye, if your eyes are clear/healthy, your whole body will be filled with light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be filled with darkness. If then the light within you is darkness how great is that darkness!

The things we consume with our eyes are interpreted by our mind and then sent to the body. This becomes the material we use to build our temple. Some of the knowledge we receive comes from the world. We observe, we analyze, and we internalize. Over time we develop the skill to filter out or ignore our interpretation of the images and information we receive. The unconscious consumption of information can inform, influence, and determine our actions and decisions. This causes us to do things that we may not be consciously aware of.

It doesn't take much imagination/thought to understand how potentially dangerous this can be. Our body receives, interprets, and reacts to information. The mind does the same thing.

Spiritual Receptivity

But just as the world can be a source of knowledge, God can be a source of knowledge as well. Something you begin to develop when you seek God is spiritual receptivity. The Holy Spirit helps to interpret not only worldly information but spiritual information. The Holy Spirit grants the gift of discernment. The intuition to dissect a situation for your benefit. Your previous experiences and new worldly information can now be observed with a new eye. With that awareness comes pain and growth and peace and joy and newness.

God in Nature

One of the major perspective shifts I had, was about nature. I see trees and plant life and animals as expressions and evidence of God's glory. The cloud formations and the sound of the wind through the leaves, the color of the flowers, the ripples in the water, and the birds in the sky are sacred and important happenings in life. I look upon nature with reverence because God created it and He is within it. Whether I am present or not plant life will grow and dress this planet. This will happen regardless of my interference. This was a humbling revelation for me.

Carl Jung – Psychotherapy/Connecting the Dots

I began to gain interest in how the mind worked on a psychological level. I was drawn to Carl Jung, a psychologist who made many breakthroughs in academia by sharing his unique perspective on the mind. He tried to make sense of the inner spiritual world with earthly psychological vocabulary. He attempted to blend two worlds that were previously and (probably) purposely kept separate from each other. His psychotherapeutic strategies and analysis are something I find very interesting. With my new perspective of nature and the introduction to Carl Jung's work, I received new ways to articulate the experiences happening within me.

“Just as the Earth puts forth plants and flowers, the imagination puts forth images,” Jason Smith

The process will happen without our intervention. I started to make the connection between nature and how God communicates with me, and how God helps me interpret the knowledge that is already within me. If we don't have an intentional relationship with the images and thoughts in our minds, we can miss out on opportunities to grow. I started to tune into the concept of seeing with the eyes of the spirit/mind. To be open to receiving and engaging with the images that float into our minds. To realize that there are

images that are not produced by us or the world. To be okay with not knowing and trusting in God.

Power of Belief/Faith Unlocks Power

This takes a great deal of faith. It is faith and belief that unlock the doors to new perspectives. It is leaning into the unknown. Jesus heals by having faith in Him. It is the emptying of self that makes that possible. Once you let go of the reality you have constructed for yourself, you can then begin to build upon a solid foundation and you will see that a rational mind can be enhanced and utilized with Jesus as a foundation.

Faith is the key to power. There are real-world examples of what belief can do for someone and to someone. Believing in something can literally alter your experience on Earth. Placebo effect studies, manifestation, the medicine men of many native American tribes, hypnotists, mediums and spiritists, alchemists, people who use witchcraft and practice sorcery. These powers are things that people give their full attention and spirits to. There are more than enough resources available to see the validity of these practices and the powers they use. These powers are usually used with evil intent. The Books of Genesis and the Book of Enoch (Which Peter references) explain more about the origin and consequences of such use.

In Deuteronomy 18, God says, “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, practices divination or conjury, interprets omens, practices sorcery, casts spells, consults a medium or spiritist, or inquires of the dead.”

In today’s world, people have given their spirits over to darkness and demonic entities that grant them power and access to “forbidden knowledge”. God has allowed them to do so. But these practices are detestable to the LORD. When you involve yourself in a spiritual world of which you have no knowledge or covering, you open wide the gates of demonic possession and ultimately spiritual death. You are like a fly on a window trying to get outside. You have

no concept or understanding of what you are dealing with and like the fly on the window, you may end up place you have no power to escape.

Jesus had authority and power. He was YHWH in the flesh. The Word of God made human in Jesus Christ. When he was healing people during his time here on Earth, he would ask the people before he healed them, if they actually believed he could do it. Faith is power. Belief is powerful. It is difficult to have faith with a clouded eye and a body full of darkness. It is especially difficult when you are unaware that your eye is clouded.

Dream Analysis/Synchronicity

I started to pay close attention to my dreams. That was how God communicated with me during my first temple demolition. When I started to take my dreams more seriously, I would learn things about myself that I was previously unaware of. I began to understand my emotions and my experiences in deep ways. I could apply the insight from my dreams to my “awake” life.

I started to experience a phenomenon called synchronicity. My inner life and outer life were mirrors of each other. A simple occurrence like a bug on a window or a text from someone, or the way a tree looked, suddenly had more meaning. The same insight I would receive in my dreams would be the type of insight I would get in those outwardly mundane but inwardly meaningful moments.

I had a dream in particular that I want to share with you. It has been a reassuring pillar of light for me in times of uncertainty and doubt. This dream is something that I think encapsulates one of the most important lessons I have learned over the past year. I wrote this in my phone notes right after I woke up from the dream.

“We all received the knowledge of God through what seemed like large tapestries or art walls. There were people around and everyone seemed to have their own wall. These walls were too big to make sense of. The only thing similar to the wall’s art style was Kanye’s Watch the Throne Album Cover. I could tell by looking at the God-given knowledge that there was no way to put a timeline on it. I could not discern a beginning or an end. In the past, I have tried to claim to understand God. I have tried to condense God’s glory into digestible conceptions. Many people try to do this. This is another attempt at trying to get on equal footing with God. It is a useless pursuit. This dream reinforced the idea that our understanding/experience with God is unique and that the tapestry is too large to put in a box.”

This dream humbled me. It taught me to be more open and accepting of other’s journeys and experiences. We all walk a different path. My experiences and the lessons I’ve learned may not resonate with you. There are multiple answers to the same question. I only have one version of the truth. The way God communicates with me may not be the way God communicates with you.

All I can do is embrace you and love you. I have no right to judge.

I don’t know anything for sure. I know what I’ve been through and I have an interpretation of my experiences. I hope this does something for you. I hope it inspires you.

Voyage of The Dawn Treader

This is an explanation of C.S Lewis’s story, Voyage of the Dawn Treader from Timothy Keller’s book Counterfeit Gods.

In C.S. Lewis's book *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, one of the main characters is a young boy named Eustace Scrubb. Eustace has a lust for power, but he expresses it in the mean petty ways that only a schoolboy could, in teasing, torturing animals, tattling, and ingratiating adult authorities. He was a Nebuchadnezzar in training.

“One night Eustace found an enormous pile of treasure in a cave. He was elated and began to imagine the life of ease and power he would now have and fell asleep. When he woke, however, to his horror, he had turned into a hideous dragon. Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself. Because he thought like a dragon, he had become a dragon. When we set our hearts on power, we become hardened predators. We become like what we worship.”

Eustace was now an enormously powerful being, far more powerful than he had ever dreamed, but he was also fearful, hideous, and completely lonely. The shock of his transformation humbled Eustace and he longed to be a normal boy again. As his pride faded, the idolatry in his heart began to be healed. One night Eustace met a mysterious lion. The lion challenged him to undress, to try to take off the dragon skin. He managed to peel off a layer but found he was still a dragon underneath. He tried repeatedly but he made no further progress. The lion finally said, “You will have to let me undress you”. I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So, I just lay down flat on my back to let him do it. The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt.... Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off, just as I'd thought I'd done it myself the other three times, only they hadn't hurt, and there it was lying on the grass: only ever so much thicker, and darker, and more knobbly-looking than the

others had been. And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been.... I turned into a boy again”

The Man in the Ocean

A man is struggling in the ocean and needs help because he is having trouble staying afloat. He calls out for help but no one comes. A boat comes along and, on that boat, is a very strong and experienced swimmer who sees the man struggling. The strong swimmer watches the man struggle for a while and bystanders on the boat with the stronger swimmer ask him, “Why won’t you jump in and save him?” He responds “If I try to save him while he is panicking and fighting, he will bring me down with him and we will both drown, He has to stop resisting so I can save him” He has to surrender.

Christ is the only exit from this world all other exits like sexual rapture, political utopia, and economic independence are but blind alleys that rot the corpses of the many who have tried them.

How to live continuously with the passions
Tend to the garden of the heart

July 2022 - Courtney’s Note

“I have spent a great deal of time alone. Sometimes it seems as if I am forced into solitude or companionship. I have seasons. After my last surge of companionship, I reached an all-time low. A space of dense darkness. It was a familiar feeling but this time it made itself known to me in a deeper way. I am desperately trying to swim back up to the surface to rid myself of this feeling. I’m exhausted. Although this feeling is uncomfortable and at times borderline unbearable, I am grateful for this time. I have grown and I am growing....

I have gotten closer to understanding myself. I don’t think I have improved upon my old self. A better expression would be I have shed my skin or reconstructed my perspective. I am in a better position to improve. Currently, I am in a space between new and old. A limbo period. This is a space in which I am tasked with making choices that will decide my fate.

I have been given the opportunity to choose the way I will go. My current take on my situation is this...

I have decided to trust God. To rely on Jesus Christ’s teaching and to embrace the Gospel that I have had mental and emotional battles with up to this point. I am in a nearly constant state of pain and sadness. This has been a cyclical state of being since I was a child. What is the root cause of this problem? If I venture into the secret parts within myself, into the repressed and nearly forgotten memories... I recognize that the issues I have now have been there for a long time. I look for solace. I do not find it. Lust has been the sin/spirit that has fueled the worst moments in my life. I have been a slave to my flesh for many years. Before I even knew what that meant. I do not see the world as a place I want to be in and thrive... well at least not in the way most people mean when they want to thrive in this life. I hate this feeling and I hate my life in this world....

The Word of God is alive. In order for me to cope with life and continue to live faithfully, or at all, is through daily death. To deny myself and to deny this life because there is nothing for me here. And I currently do not see the purpose of the worldly life. I am stuck with a few questions. My faith has gotten stronger because of my hatred of this world and how I feel. Is my “love” sufficient?

In weakness, God’s strength is revealed. God’s Love.”

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