

Amity for the Troubled in Spirit

by Isabel Penraeth

Foreword

Some people have deep spiritual experiences after a long, serious and soulful search for God through prayer, meditation, worship and other moments of communion and spiritual discipline. For others, God seems to break into their everyday life — a life being lived with not much thought for him — to take drastic measures to get their attention and turn them to him. He calls. We feel the something is going on, but cannot identify it specifically, cannot render it subject to our will and desires, cannot set it aside. The Lord's call to obedience can be strangely diffuse, fundamentally scary, entirely overwhelming.

My suspicion is that the Lord's purpose for this pamphlet is to provide an opportunity for those who are under the strain of his call to hear that he loves them and longs for their healing. Hearing the call of God seems to often causes turmoil, confusion, distress and dismay. Something is being shaken loose; something is being rent apart; something enormous is shifting within. Real interior pain is experienced and cannot be denied or ignored or even diminished, but perhaps it will be of some help to thee to know the Lord seeks ways for thee to have companionship and hope in the midst of travail. Even as he is setting painful challenges before thee, in the midst of what feels like punishment, and God-induced punishment at that, know that the Lord is nonetheless with thee.

So Thee is Deeply Troubled

“O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long.” (Psalms 38:1-6)

Greetings to thee, friend or neighbor. I am sorry, truly, that thee is deep into troubled times and dismay of the spirit. The Lord has sent me to be a companion to thee in this difficult time, to offer what solace I may, to offer what of his love for thee I may, to offer reminders of his strength available to thee. I long for thee to know many things about what thee is experiencing. Some things I share may be hard for thee to hear, others hard to believe. May thee feel the presence of the Prince of Peace, resting as a Seed in thy heart, waiting for the proper time and place to grow there, to fill thee with all that the Lord wishes for thee, and all that thee longs for in the depths of thy despair. Heed the hope that is to be born within thee. Find what faith thee has in the mercy of God. Let him soothe the fear that is a barrier between thee and the peace thee seeks.

One piece of solace that I may offer is that thee is not alone. Others have experienced these difficulties, these inward challenges, these agonies and turmoil, and come out the other side to lasting peace and rest in the Truth. Have hope that the love that resides in thee, which thee is sometimes able to feel, and often longs for, is growing, that all this pain is not meaningless and useless cruelty on the part of God, but *needful and necessary* to thy spiritual growth. I would suggest to thee that this painful struggle is a sort of birthing pain, the birth of a new self who is capable of doing what the Lord requires of it in this world, creating a person capable of fulfilling his call.

Whatever the Lord is calling thee to requires preparation. This travail is thy training so that thee may become faithful to the Truth, even as thee is being forcibly separated from self-deception. At this time, the nature of thy call may not be known, but thee feels it, strongly. There is something thee is supposed to do, and thee is not doing it. Take heart, dear one. Thee is not doing it yet because thee is not yet ready. Be faithful, practice patience, build up the courage to wait for the Truth to be opened to thee.

What the Lord has in mind for thee may not be obvious, or grand, or complicated. His role for thee will be as unique as thee is, though it may appear so “common” as to seem unworthy of his notice. Some are called to be doctor, some wife and mother, and others are called to be a dishwasher. No calling is above another. Set aside any notion that a calling must be to vocal ministry or some sort of worldly ordination, the vigor of church planting or the power of faith healing. Truly, thy call feels large because it is large — for thee — no matter how humble it may appear to the world, no matter how humbling it is to thee. The Lord is showing the *Way for thee*, the *Truth for thee* and what faithfulness he requires *of thee* in this life, because it is necessary to thy salvation.

It may be particularly difficult for thee to find peace when thee feels the tug of thy call pulling in one direction and the tug of worldly duty in the other. Thee must make every effort to find the balance the Lord would have for thee: thee cannot do it all. The Lord will make apparent what thee must do to release thy cumber, the unnecessary burdens, so that thee can then carry the burdens thee must endure to become useful to him. He will show thee what is needful and what may be set aside. Neither the world’s opinions nor logic can define this standard for thee. The answer is in thy heart. Thee must become still and allow the Inward Light to guide thee at this difficult time, to discern what is necessary.

Remember Mary and Martha? (Luke 10:38-42) Was thee not one of those who read this story and thought it was easy for Jesus to praise Mary and condemn Martha when Martha was the one who made it all possible: the meal, the comfortable table, the clean room? If everyone did as Mary did, thee thought, what would Jesus have eaten, where

would he have sat? Yet think. Jesus was only coming through for a short time. Indeed, he had a short time on this earth in the flesh. Martha's opportunity to hear the Truth from Jesus' mouth was passing her by, but she could not notice because she was too intent on her duties, too busy worrying about her sister not helping her. Was not that worry as much her cumber as the dishes and meal preparation? It was worry she needed to set aside so she could attend to the one important thing: her salvation.

Thy duties are only as important as the Lord says they are important. If, however, thee needs to be attentive to other things, be open to that. Sometimes the dishes can wait. Sometimes worrying about things makes nothing better. Thee may have children dependent upon thee, a spouse with certain expectations, a boss making demands. Thee will not lightly abandon any obligations, there is no chance of that, but be prepared to lessen the time thee spends on these duties or to let them go from time to time. Practice setting aside worries. If the Lord is saying thy attention needs to be elsewhere, trust that everything will be all right without thee. Particularly if thee struggles to accomplish a simple or ordinary task, consider whether he is trying to set thy attention elsewhere. When the Lord returns thy attention to these duties, it will be right and thee will be able to accomplish them with a lighter heart, indeed with love.

There are times when folding towels is a sacred act. Each movement is filled with love and prayer, the first fold a blessing bestowed on the thee, the second fold a blessing bestowed on the one who will use the towel. There are other times, times when folding the towels is the worst sort of torture. Mindless, meaningless, dreary work that deadens the mind and scrapes the soul with tiny scratches that quickly fester and build into rage or despair or both. At those times, consider whether this sense is ego-willfulness, which can and should be suppressed, or whether it is a hint from thy Inner Guide that there is something more important for thee to do. Although the towels are waiting to be folded, something else more important is waiting for thee. Playing with a child. Speaking with a spouse. Calling a parent. Going out the door to check on a neighbor. Be open to the possibility that thy duty is elsewhere, even in the small things.

Be gentle with thyself and loving. These barriers to the Truth that have been built up in thy heart must be torn down, which is such a painful process. It may appear outwardly that there is nothing much to be troubled or distressed about, but the Inward Light is showing thee thy true condition. Thee does have reason for distress, for without distress thee would not even know that change was required and would have little motivation to make any necessary corrections. If thy neurological system is functioning within healthy parameters, thee feels pain when thee gets a cut. The pain helps thee to notice the wound and to tend it. Thee accepts, at least somewhat, that the physical healing process can also include pain and discomfort. So it is when there is a wound to the heart. Such a wound must be tended to before it can be healed. The Lord wants thy heart to be healed, is healing thee, and will heal thee, if thee will remain open to the process.

There are times when those to whom God is calling will feel heartbroken. The sensation will be that specific, thee will feel thy heart is breaking, yet somehow the sensation also manages to feel vague and unanchored. It can be unclear what the heartbreak is caused by, where it came from. Sometimes thee may, rather desperately, try to assign something to the heartbreak, explanations such as having no partner in life or that thee has no children or that thy children dislike thee. The loss of a parent, thy parents' poor parenting, the state of the world and the people in it, . . . many things can provide a rationale for this painful sensation. Be open to the idea that while the heartbreak is real, the explanations thee is assigning to it may not be the actual source of the pain. Thee may be trying to explain an experience that is inexplicable, render small something that is quite large. It is understandable to assume the emotions come from this or that particular point of distress, but sometimes an overwhelming sensation of heartbreak will seem to come from all the points of distress thee has ever experienced, named and unnamed, acknowledged and unacknowledged, all at once.

Perhaps the Lord is exposing to thee just a little of his own heartbreak, or perhaps he is sharing with thee something of how he experiences the heartbreaks of the world. Perhaps he is tugging at all the broken pieces of thy heart, a shattering that is so complex that no single explanation is sufficient to encompass it. Feel the heartbreak for what it is.

Feel the enormity of it, and know that God is trying to heal thee. When God is healing thee, that healing can be emotionally and even physically painful. He may be trying to heal the full complexity of all the heartbreak thee has ever experienced. He may be trying to help thee learn how to feel it and become the person thee needs to be, a person who has that heartbreak in their awareness, fully felt and absorbed, rather than hidden away in the depths of a shattered heart.

Find a way to be with this pain, this necessary pain, whatever it takes to render it fully felt and fully accepted.

It was an act of Grace that broke thee open. Look for the ways the Lord is buffering thee and protecting thee even as he is clearly the author of thy current internal difficulties. He has not abandoned thee. He is not a sadist seeking to harm thee. He seeks thy healing, and in the fullness of time, if thee can trust him and his ways, thee will learn gratitude for this experience. If thee can look at things with an open heart, thee can see the loving God at work even in this tribulation. When God called to thee as thee slumbered, thee awoke and said "Here am I, Lord," just as Samuel did (1 Samuel 3:4), not knowing what was going on. When thee heard again God's call and finally knew it to be the Lord, thee said "Speak, Lord; for thy servant hears thee . . ." (1 Samuel 3:10) Thee begged for God to show thee how to be useful to him. He is breaking thee open, the surgeon at work, and though it may be hard to trust, hard to have faith in the midst of such agony, have faith that he will heal thee, and leave thee better than he found thee. It is pain with a purpose. The Truth is setting thee free.

The weary shall have rest, in the Lord's time. Bear the burdens thee has been given with as much grace as thee can. Exercise patience, exercise love, exercise compassion with thyself as much as anyone. Strive to live up to the Measure of Grace thee has been given, and give as thee receives from the Lord, freely and with love (Ephesians 4:7). His love cannot be hoarded, nor spent too freely: it grows only as it is shared in Spirit and in Truth.

The Lord is bringing thee into obedience now because he has need of thee. Thy gifts are called for; thy soul is called to witness to the Truth. Thee must offer to the world thy Measure of the Truth, thy Measure of Grace, for thy own salvation and for the salvation of the world (Mark 4:22-25). Once thee has heard the voice of the Lord in thy heart, thee must obey. Deny the Lord at thy peril (1 Samuel 15:22). All the hope there is for thee in this life will be found in humble obedience to his will.

Please, be gentle with thyself and feel the compassion and tender mercy the Lord has for thee. Do not turn thy face away from these travails, rather face them bravely, trusting that the Lord in his infinite wisdom will bring thee through to wholeness and usefulness. Some might have thee believe that suffering is punishment, but do not believe them. The Lord suffers with thee, companioning thee, supporting thee, loving thee toward healing. He may be trying to correct thee, but he is not trying to injure thee or destroy thee. He is trying to set thee free.

If thee falls into self-pity, if thee succumbs to anger, if thee resorts to avoidance, make note of the weakness, accept thy difficulty, and return to the troubles at hand with as much love, compassion, patience and courage as thee can muster. Feel the power of the Lord strengthening thee. Feel the love of the Lord filling thee. Feel the hope of the Lord offering thee what solace he can. These things are real and present, if thee can only open up to them. The Lord does not abandon those he has called, those whose wounds are being healed, those whose sins are being repented. The Inward Light, Christ, is showing thee what thee needs, letting thee feel the depth of thy errors so thee can repent, be forgiven, and become whole.

Perhaps language such as “repent” is uncomfortable for thee. Yet, thee feels the heartbreak, thee is bearing a longing for wholeness and truth that thee has closed thyself off from. Thee must repent the errors that have led thee to close thyself off from the Truth. Thy longing is the longing of thy soul not only for salvation but also for Truth and love and patience and compassion and all the good things that can only be lived in a life free of these weights and burdens. Thy soul knows obedience is its salvation; thy heart

longs to be in obedience; yet thy mind resists. It makes no sense, this terrible agony tinged with a deep hopeful longing.

It is hard, what thee is enduring: it is such an opaque struggle. No matter how much thee shares of thy sensations, thy desperation, thy longing, thy heartbreak, thy secret hope, no one seems able to comprehend. They recommend therapy and anti-depressants — which may ameliorate but will not heal a spiritual wound. Thee can be healed only by living through thy experience and into it. Thee must feel where thee has fallen into error, see where thee has created strife and discord. Thee must set aside the excuses and explanations. Then thee will find thyself raw and naked in the Truth, the truth of who thee is and the truth of how thee has lived. Thee has lived a life that must be changed; thee must change how thee lives thy life to move forward into wholeness and peace. The Lord will lead thee to the bounty of his love for thee. His power will break upon thee like a lightning strike, his strength will fill thee like rolling thunder. Thee will have clarity and will be able to do what must be done, in his name and for his glory.

Let Christ show the Way for thee. The path is narrow (Matthew 7:14) and each step is treacherous, if thee does not do as thy Guide says to do. Thee may say thee does not know what to do, that he is not telling thee what to do next. Then stop. Wait. Silently. Patiently. Prayerfully. Humbly. Wait. The hard work will come upon thee soon enough (Psalms 27:14).

Thee Is Being Prepared

“For the spirit worketh in us secretly, and we know not at the first what it is; but finding ourselves very uneasy, and in great trouble of mind, being under sorrow and heaviness, not rightly and coolly examining the reason, it is often mistaken to proceed from a natural cause, and so outward means are sought for to relieve from this uneasiness; some by taking their bottle with their companions, others diverting themselves with their sports and gaming, others again take medicines to help them against what they call melancholy; some oneway, and some another, thus mistake, and make merry over the witness in them, and stiffen their necks against the reproof of instruction, which is the way to life . . .” (Prov. xxix. 1)” Samuel Bownas, *A Description of the Qualifications Necessary to the Gospel Minister . . .*

What is the Lord calling thee to? Who is the Lord calling thee to be? Thee is desperate to know. This desperation is a gift, a sign of God’s grace, and the cross thee must bear, the cross thee will hoist thy old self upon, a sacrifice so that the birth of the new self can occur. Thee is not alone in this experience. Not only is Christ with thee, in all his love and glory, but others have also gone through this preparation, this coming into obedience, have survived and humbly thrived, becoming the people the Lord knew they could be. All thee has to do is tackle the daunting task of accepting his love and guidance and learn how to substitute his strength for thy own.

Thee imagines the fog created by this desperation can be cleared by earthly means. It cannot. This is not a test of how resilient thee is or resourceful. It is a labor to bring thee into submission and obedience to the Lord. If thee does not submit, if thee escapes into drugs, television, novels, gambling or other diversions to keep these feelings at bay, thee will never become whole, thee will never become what thee is called to become in this life. The words above from Samuel Bownas were published in 1750, describing how, then as now, those the Lord is calling sometimes try to avoid the call through escapism, or mistake the call for “melancholy” requiring “medicine.” The Lord works now as he did then: by bringing thee to the Truth, if thee will only accept thy place in his plans.

Invariably, the Lord must bring his harshest methods to bear upon those he has most amply blessed with natural gifts such as intelligence, charisma, grit, flexibility, problem-solving skills or physical endurance. Not only does he, quite rightly, push thee to use the gifts he gave thee in his generosity, but he tries to enable thee to use those gifts for the benefit of more than just thyself or thy bank account. He asks thee to use those gifts to do his works, his good, to bring about his Kingdom on this earth. It is also true that these excellent gifts and skills have led thee to rely upon thy own abilities, thy own strength, with plenty of worldly support and positive feedback for doing so. In thy own experience, it has worked for thee, perhaps even worked unusually well, to rely on thy own strength and abilities, but this has been at the expense of relying upon the Lord. Thy strengths and abilities are no longer sufficient, and he is trying to wean thee of thy reliance upon them so that thee may be guided by him and know how to use his strength.

Thee may be putting up a good fight, using everything at thy disposal to keep things in the territory of the safe, the known, and the comfortable, to conform his prodding to thy well-intentioned plans. Thee is working hard on those plans, attractive as they are to thy ego and to thy sense of the way things should be, only now it is becoming apparent thy plans are not working anymore. Thy plans and planning worked, perhaps for years, perhaps for decades, or perhaps they only seemed to work, and no longer is it possible to pretend. Thy reserves are spent, thy problem solving ineffectual, thy coping skills incapable of holding thy pain at bay. His call can no longer be avoided. Thee is being beaten into submission, into obedience, being ground down. Thee longed to be useful, and this is the result. If thee thinks about it with precision, perhaps thee can see that while thee wishes to be of use to God, thee wants that use to be within certain comfortable parameters, yet any comfort is increasingly elusive.

As an example, perhaps thee suspects the Lord wishes thee to leave North America and go to Africa. Somehow that seems impossible. Thee is of poor health. Thee fears the immunizations required. Thee speaks no foreign languages. Thee cannot bear parting from friends and family. Thee cannot imagine leaving thy responsibilities. But, wait, thee thinks, perhaps if I go to Australia. It is a different continent, one that also starts with an

“a” and end with an “a.” One would still be leaving family and friends, thee reasons, one would still be setting aside responsibilities. They speak English in Australia and, thee thinks, no immunizations would be required. That is it, thee thinks, I’ll go to Australia to satisfy the Lord’s call. In thy heart, however, thee knows it does not work this way. Australia is not Africa, and no wishful thinking can make it so.

Thee is being trained in submission and obedience, not to become a slave to the Lord, but to become free to do what thee is called to do in this life. The Lord knows far better than thee who it is thee needs to become to be truly useful in this life. He is calling thee for thy own good as much as for the good thee may do. There is no slavery here. He is freeing thee from the things to which thee is actually enslaved: thy plans, thy fears, thy family’s expectations, society. He is calling thee to become a servant of the Truth. Answering this call will not only bring thee into alignment with his plans for thee, but will also satisfy that inner longing which has tugged so relentlessly at thy soul — the possibility of living completely the sense of purpose thee has felt in the depths of thy heart. The world would have thee balk at being a servant of the Truth, equating it to slavery and mindless drudgery, foolishness and a waste of talent. Thee knows differently, that this longing that thee has to be of use to the Lord cannot be denied. Truly, thee knows this is the only path worth taking, the only path that will bring thee what thee longs for in thy heart. The world has it wrong. Submitting to the Lord is not slavery, but freedom. For a servant of the Truth is set free, not enslaved. The Truth shall make thee free (John 8:32).

The new task for thee is submitting thy gifts to the Lord’s will. It is time for thee to become well and truly useful to the Lord. Not to use thy gifts for thy own glory, not to use them to improve thy place in the world, not even to use them for another’s imagined good. Whatever thee might try to accomplish as “good” in thy own willfulness can never be the True Good thee would accomplish if thee did as the Christ Within guided thee to do. Thee cannot know every end. He does. He knows what is best; how thee can best participate in bringing about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. He knows the path to thy best future, thy best self, and thy best hope for salvation. He may have thee speak a word

to someone in just the right time, or thy life may otherwise preach to someone thee never speaks outwardly with at all. Thee must trust his Guidance, and let go of needing to know how it all ends.

Examine thyself. Thy willfulness. Examine thy need for worldly gratification — money, meaningful career, admiration and approval. Examine thy need to not look foolish, to seem to be making good use of thy training, to be keeping up with the neighbors, keeping up with family, keeping up with former schoolmates. Thee may recognize something of the toddler's tantrum in thy behavior toward the Lord. Thy plans (that he is trying to show thee must be unplanned) are like a dangerous tool that must be taken away. Thy faith in thy own abilities is being dashed in the turmoil of a reality that thee cannot subdue. The world will tell thee that thee must have a plan, that this plan must strive for worldly goals, and that this plan must be orderly and realistic. Indeed, there are people thee knows for whom this appears to “work.”

Sadly, thy efforts at planning are no longer working for thee. Find what the Lord's plan is for thee. Indeed, learn the lessons that are *on the way* to finding out what the Lord's plan is for thee, for these are the lessons that will make it possible for thee to succeed, as the Lord wills it, in his time and in his way. Find out what use the Lord can put thee to in this life, for it will be the best possible life thee could have, perhaps not in worldly gain, but to gain the Kingdom of Heaven. Beware the trap of believing that thy own striving will bring this about. Be open. Be loving, with thyself and others. Above all else, be patient, for the Lord's time is not thy time, and patient waiting will be a skill of primary importance for thee as thee prepares for a life in the Truth.

If thee had it right, if what thee was doing was the “right” thing to be doing, there would be no stress, no strain. Thee would have no sense of being in the wrong place, at the wrong time, doing the wrong thing. When everything feels wrong, something *is* wrong, and thee needs to take time to find out what that is. Thee needs to become open to what Jesus is showing thee in thy heart, the Truth he is showing thee, the loving if difficult Truth. Thee must find thy way to thy true life, one that will be lived in obedience

if it is to be lived well and happily. Thee begged God to reveal thy duty, and he is trying not only to reveal thy duty to thee, but also to prepare thee for that duty. Let him.

Thee still does not believe that thy feelings of distress, turmoil, and desperation are a gift? Truly, if thee is not desperate enough, if thee has not entirely abandoned all faith in thyself and abandoned all worship of thy own strength to solve thy spiritual “problem,” then thee will not find the solution: faith in God alone. All efforts that hold thy desperation at bay are merely delaying what must be thoroughly experienced, learned, and accepted so that thee can become acceptable to God. Some people seem to learn this lesson quickly, others take a long time, but all experience some pain in the transition. The painful preparations are only over once thee is truly prepared, and not before. The Lord will wear thee down, wear thee out, prove that thee is not up to the task thee has set for thyself: to be ruler of thy life, ruler of thy world. Only he can be that ruler, and as thee is now learning, he is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5).

One of the most difficult things thee may experience is an intense but vague sense of urgency. A sense that there is something that thee urgently needs to be doing, but what that thing is may be either mysterious and unknown, or known but seemingly impossible. This sense can last a long time, years, and thee needs to understand that this is part of the preparation. Thee needs to be able to submit, to be obedient, once the time to act has arrived. No false or premature release is possible. The True Call must be waited upon, as worshipfully as possible. Then, when it arrives, thee will well and truly know that it has arrived.

It is possible that, in this prepared condition, thee may be capable of greeting the news of thy call without the normal trepidation and doubt. Fear and dismay can often accompany the sorts of challenges True Calls offer, but once the Lord has prepared thee, thee is ready, and may in fact be relieved to at last be able to leap off the cliff, trusting God will catch thee. Or perhaps thee will simply be glad it will all be over, and thee doesn't much care if he catches thee or not. That might not be the ideal condition to

arrive at a call in, but that is what some report. However it may be, once prepared, they will quickly and eagerly leap, ready to be obedient, after all this preparatory waiting.

Christ: Thy Inward Light and Guide

“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you”. (John 14:15-20)

Allow Jesus Christ to be thy guide in these difficult times. The Lord wants only thy good, wants thee to be healed, wants thee to be capable of being useful to him. Once thee became open to this, when in thy secret prayers, thee cried out, “Open me Lord, show me my Way, Father,” thee was opened to him and the reality of Christ in thy heart. Perhaps thee sought after him, and thee is in the midst of travail as a result. Perhaps he broke through the cloudy turmoil of thy life and made his presence clear to thee. The results in both cases may seem unfair or even cruel: a sense that something very fundamental is wrong. Thee cannot find peace, no matter where thee seeks it. Know this: God is with thee. He offers thee the loving guidance of his son Jesus Christ, to bring thee through these times and into a new time that is better, a time when thy gifts will be made useful to him. Obedience to the Guidance of the Light of Christ Within thee is key: obedience carried out with love.

Notice how Christ is guiding thee, even in things that seem small. He may have thee turn left when thee would have turned right; he may have thee abandon well-planned projects for what seems like foolishness and nonsense. Thee can feel it, has felt it. Ignore it at thy peril. The Lord has sent his Son, the Light who lights every person who comes into this world (John 1:9), to offer thee the ability to do the right thing at the right time in the right place for the right reasons. If thee will allow, the Inward Light will help thee identify what is important, if thee can still the busy mind and open up thy heart to the Truth. In thy current turmoil and chaos, there is no other choice, no other path to peace. Pay attention to the Inward Light, it will not lead thee astray.

Those whose lives are on an even keel may not notice they have any need of this service Christ offers. They do not necessarily perceive how their path is being illuminated. It is those who are troubled, those adrift, those struggling to keep upright in a turbulent sea, for whom this internal Guidance is most urgently required. Become aware that the Lord offers within thy difficulties an opportunity to return to thy true strength, a path back to a reality that thee could never have known otherwise. He will have thee build up a competency in relying upon the Guidance of his Son in thy heart that thee might otherwise have never learnt, or not learnt so well. These difficulties are a gift to render thee capable of living in the Truth, the Truth who will guide thee out of self-referential self-centered importance into obedience and grace.

Thee might not have been blessed with wise or loving earthly parents, or perhaps they were wise and loving, but thee has always had the most wise and loving heavenly Father who gifted thee his living Word in thy heart to Guide thee, if thee will let him. His wisdom is superior to any of the most loving parents, his Guidance more pertinent and important to thy good. His love is superior — only he knows thee completely and yet loves thee completely, seeking to raise up the good in thee and lay low the bad. He seeks thy obedience not because he is a bully but because thee needs to be obedient to become the agent for the Truth in the world he needs thee to be, knows thee can be, will make thee if thee will let him. Thy only hope of salvation is in obedience to his will. He has sent his Son to thee, the inward spiritual manifestation of Christ, to make it possible for thee to be obedient, for thee to know his will, and to enable thee to carry it out. This power within thee is changing thee for the better, but a more painful change, a more challenging change thee may never have experienced.

Christ is within thee, his Light and his Spirit, the living Word in thy heart. He will guide thee to what thee most longs for: peace. He will enable thee to become what thee most longs to be: useful. He will show thee thy duty and be thy companion through the joys and difficulties that arise. His love for thee is Present and Palpable, if thee can only quiet the mind, calm the internal waters, still thy busy rowing and allow him to speak to

thee, to buoy thee, to pilot thy boat to its proper course. He is available to thee now, in the midst of thy struggles, in the midst of thy pain. He can open the world of hope and Truth to thee, close the door to rancor and Lies. Thee can learn to abandon the false and love the true, through his Guidance.

It is often difficult to trust, but thee must. Trust Christ's guidance. Trust that what the Lord wants is what is best for thee, that, though it may be painful, it will be pain with a purpose. Trust that everything will be okay *enough*. Abandon the fear that things would be better if thee hadn't gotten involved with him and his distressing plans. Trust that his aid and his strength will be there when needed, and that thee is coming into a new strength of thy own. Look for the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) in thy life, watch for their growth as evidence that thy life in Christ is growing, that thy nourishment is at hand, that thy peace is available.

It is often difficult to trust, but that is what thee must learn to do. Trust thyself. Trust that thee has accurately discerned his will for thee, and that thee can tell when thee is correctly moving forward — and when thee is not. Trust that thee is strong enough to endure whatever he is calling thee to endure. Abandon attachment to thy own notions of success. All thee can seek now is the Lord's success, a success that thee may never understand fully, but must trust. Abandon thy fear that even with his aid and in his strength, thee will fail. Do what the Lord asks, not to succeed in the eyes of the world but to succeed in thy heart, to succeed as the Lord would have thee succeed. The Seed Within, the Inward Light is showing thee the Truth that must be lived entirely. Thy life will preach, will convert and minister, when thee lives as the Lord requires.

At times, all this may seem so impossible, if not downright inhumane. Christ hears thee. He has been there. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" he said(Matthew 27:46). He had not been forsaken, as thee has not. Love the difficulties? That is for masochists, thee thinks. Thee must remember that these trials and tribulations do have a particular purpose. They are a means to an end, and perhaps the only means to the end thee seeks: peace. Does thee not feel the love of Christ, just a little? Does thee not

feel it growing, encompassing the pain, absorbing it, rendering it powerless? The pains of the world will be powerless over thee, when thee has gained the patience required to live in the Truth.

Settle into the peace of Christ in thy heart, find that Seed that was planted in thee at thy birth. Believe the Lord has a plan for thee and has given thee this inward manifestation of Christ to guide thee and to make it possible for thee to be obedient. All the good he would have for thee in this life is contained within thee. By coming into obedience, thee allows thyself to be of use and frees thyself of the cumber the world would pile onto thee: all the unnecessary striving and acquiring can be released. The loving limits the Lord offers thee are not the boundaries of a prison, but the freedom to live in the Truth. Free of false stories, free of wrong moves, released from selfish motives, free to love with an open and honest heart. Thee will be helping to build the Kingdom of Heaven if thee will only allow the Lord as architect to direct thee, humble carpenter.

Hear him. Hear the loving voice within thee that would show thee the path to thy salvation. Accept his advice and release the doubts that plague and burden thee. What thee knows in thy heart is that the Lord seeks thy good, and the good thee can offer the world. Be the person thee longs to be, the person thee can only be when thee is in submission and obedience to the will of the Lord. Be that person, love that life, and preach the Truth in thy heart to the world in patience, in love, in humility, knowing thy weaknesses and knowing thy True Strength. Sell everything the Christ Within thee would have thee sell and follow him (Matthew 19:21). Take up thy cross and follow him (Luke 9:23). He is thy only hope.

For the Way of the Cross that Christ calls his followers to is unique to each person, and to discover thy Way, thy Path, thee must embrace Christ's Light and Spirit in thy own conscience. Jesus said, "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). And he meant it. Thee must submit thyself to his Guidance to be his disciple. The Lord asks for obedience to his will and provides the

means to know his will. His Son died on the cross for thy sins, and perhaps thee may be able to feel how he is born in thee, dies within thee and is risen again within thee each day. His followers will suffer, as he suffered, thee knows this and fears it. But he will strengthen thee to endure what must be endured for thy own salvation. He will strengthen thee to bear what must be borne, and he will guide thee away from those things that need not be suffered, need not be endured. His love for thee is boundless, and his Guidance sure and true. Become attuned to the witness of the Truth in thy heart, and thee will become a true servant of the Prince of Peace.

Thy hope is within thee. Thy greatest possible good is within thee. The ability to move out of thy own will and into the will of thy Heavenly Father is within thee. Thee has all the Guidance thee needs within thee, all the Strength thee needs within thee, all the Love thee needs within thee. Do not doubt this power is available to thee, in its entirety, if thee will only accept the Truth that already resides in thy heart. Do not close off from the Truth, do not bury the Truth, do not avoid the Truth. Embrace the Truth. Embrace thy hope. Embrace the peace that is available to the entire world, that gracious gift, that generous sacrifice, that enduring love.

“That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:9-14)

Needful and Necessary

“. . . If we center down and live in that Holy Silence which is dearer than life, and take our life program into the silent places of the heart with complete openness, ready to renounce according to God's leading, then many of the things we are doing will lose their vitality for us." Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*.

The thing that is most needful, and the thing that is most necessary, is to figure out what is needful and necessary. By needful, I mean nourishing, and by necessary, I mean essential. So, necessary is probably food, but needful is healthful food. Necessary may be the dishes, but needful may be doing the dishes later to enjoy the sunset that is passing by the window. What is needful and necessary is most clear by the fact that the Lord requires it for thee and it brings about thy growth in the Truth. Thee will notice, if thee pays attention, that the Lord teaches thee in the small things, in the everyday experiences. God teaches thee in the world, through thy experiences in the world, what thee needs to learn in thy heart, what thee requires for thy salvation, what thee must know to be of use to him. In books, yes, in the Bible, certainly, and through ministry and prayer, but most powerfully through our experiences in the world.

He will show thee, through thy experiences, what is needful and what is necessary — and what is not.

Thee may be surprised by what falls away, what is shown to thee to be cumber and detritus, what must be sloughed off, released. Become aware of the thing thee is clinging to tightest, for this most likely must be the first to go. Fears. Objects. Belongings. Responsibilities. Jobs. Relationships. A certain level of income. Health insurance. A car. Friendships. Assumptions. Excuses. In thy time of desperation, the Lord is offering thee the gift of winnowing. Thee must winnow things down to what is most needful and most necessary, because, as thee is learning, thee cannot handle it all anymore. Thee cannot keep all the balls in the air, all the expectations cannot be met, all the goals cannot be

accomplished. His expectations are reasonable and his goals are accomplishable: thee must set aside thy own measuring stick and take up his.

The Lord, in his wisdom, is only offering thee so much strength, and no more. Thy own strength is fully spent after years, or decades, of trying to do it all thyself. Let go of those things that can be let go of. Release what can be released. Thy fingers cling to what must be let go, and God is removing them, forcibly sometimes, one by one, until thee is clinging with just one finger, frozen. Let go. It will be okay. If thee is to be of any use in this life, these are the things that must be left behind. These things are poison to a life in the Truth, and it appears the Lord wants thee whole, healed and unburdened. He is therefore giving thee this gift of weakness. Too weak to continue on alone, thee must release it all, so that thee is at last open to the gift of strength he is offering.

There are all sorts of things that can be what thee is called to release. Perhaps thee needs to release certain habits of thought, release certain habits of behavior, or release certain obligations or commitments. One of the things that can make releasing something most difficult is that it will signal to others that something is changing with thee, and such signals invite attention, comment, and challenge when thee does not feel up to handling attention or comment, much less challenge. The judgments of others can be extraordinarily difficult to endure. It can be almost physically painful to believe thee is disappointing this or that person. These judgments can make thee doubt thyself, thy call, thy discernment. Try to find the most loving response thee can muster, for thyself and for others. Remain silent in the face of criticism, unless thee feels enabled to respond lovingly by the Lord. Thee is making these changes for thy own peace. That it may disrupt another's false peace (for it must be false to be so easily disrupted) is not thy concern unless the Lord makes it so.

Thee will know, in thy heart, when thee has successfully discerned the Lord's will. Thee will know when the thing that must be left behind has well and truly been left behind. Blessings will flow from thy obedience, perhaps not worldly blessings, but the eternal blessings of the Spirit. Thee will find thyself becoming more loving, more patient,

more kind, and conversely less angry, less selfish, less perfection-seeking. The only perfection thee need seek is the perfection of the Lord. His perfect will. His perfect love. His perfect grace. Thee is working thy salvation, and indeed thee is meeting it each day. Thee has an appointment with the Lord; he is preparing thee. The time is coming when thee will find the Truth is part of thee, and thee is part of it.

There is a difference between being called *to* something and being called *through* something. Try to be aware of the difference. An example would be if thee felt strongly led to drive to another town and visit a new friend that requires taking the highway, though thee never drives on the highway due to fearfulness and lack of skill. So thee struggles somewhat to be faithful. Yet thee feels strongly led to visit this friend and so thee drives to this other town, regularly and often. Thee assumes that the point of the exercise is the visit to the friend, and that it was all to some purpose of the Lord's. Indeed, it probably was, as he wastes no effort and is miraculously efficient. Eventually, though, it becomes clear to thee that the Lord wanted thee to be capable of traveling on highways, and this was the exercise that accomplished the task. Thee has been building up a skill and an ability that was required of thee to be useful, though thee did not know it at the time.

Perhaps thee has fallen into unhealthy behaviors. Perhaps thee feels trapped by the past, by choices thee has made that have been outside of the Lord's will for thee. Allow thy inward Guide to show thee thy errors, large and small, and allow him to show thee the way out, the way to freedom, the way to love. Beg for forgiveness, as need be. Accept solace where it is offered. Love the Truth thee is shown, bear the true and just burdens the Lord has ordained for thee, but let go of the burdens of thy own making. The burdens the Lord calls thee to carry are enough. There is no need to invent burdens or to unthinkingly accept the burdens the world will (try to) place upon thee.

It can also be a matter of repeated winnowing. Over and over again, thee finds some new thing that thee is clinging to that the Lord would have thee release. Over and

over again, thee struggles to submit, struggles to let go. Can I really quit that job? Can I really stop smoking? Can I really eat more healthfully? Can I really leave that church?

Sit with it. Contemplate what the Lord is showing thee in thy heart. Observe what seems to lead to peace and what seems to lead to discord. Observe what brings hope and what brings worry.

And then there are the things that must be added. This necessity can seem equally daunting. Impossible really. The Lord, perhaps, is calling thee to a daily retirement, waiting for his Word in thy heart. The Lord, perhaps, is calling thee to a weekly worship, a commitment to a faith community, when thee had really rather not. Perhaps the Lord is calling thee to dress more modestly, spend more frugally, or drive less frequently. He is calling thee to smell the flowers, listen to the birds, to get stung by a bee if need be. He is calling thee to life, and the details are important. The Way will be shown, the Way will open, the Truth will be lived each moment, if thee can release thy cumber and embrace thy true duty.

Perhaps thee has need of time to thyself. Recognize that. Find that time. Perhaps thee has need of time in nature. Recognize that. Place thyself there. What may seem trivial in the world's eyes may be pivotal to thy growth in the Truth. Listen to the yearning in thy heart, pay attention to the signs the Lord brings thee in the world, and make the changes thee needs to make. Keep thy heart open to where he would have thee be, rather than where thee wants to be, or where thee believes thee should be, or where thy mother or father, husband or wife or children want thee to be. They can have expectations that are counter to the Lord's will for thee. Or they may see clearly what thee refuses to see. Love the Truth more than thee loves comfort or ease.

Beware of self-aggrandizing interpretations, as well as over-simplifications, of the Lord's guidance. Thee is on a narrow path, and it is crucial to be faithful to the guidance thee is given, to take each step as it comes and reach no further. Thee can leap to a conclusion too early in the process and be taken off track. For example, the beauty of a

particular church building may attract thee, resonate within thee at a deep level, but this experience does not necessarily mean thee is called to worship as a member of that congregation, or to become a minister in that denomination. It may simply be the medium the Lord is using to reach out to thee, not the message itself. A nun in habit may strike thee to the core, and yet thee many not be called to the vowed religious life. A landscape may enlarge thy heart and bury thy pain, but that does not necessarily mean thee is being called to live there. These gifts of resonance, these openings of access to God, can be powerful. Be careful of placing more meaning in the experience than the Lord is actually offering.

Jesus' pronouncement that one should render unto God what is God's — and unto Caesar what is Caesar's (Matthew 22:19-22) is more than a parable about taxes. That thee cannot serve both God and Mammon is flatly true, and inescapably basic (Matthew 6:24). Thee must learn what is important to God and what is not. It is important to God that thee find the Truth and the Way, important to him that thee be saved. It may not be important to God that thee have a big house, or an important job, or an obedient dog. He may have thee simplify, or he may have thee do things that do not seem simple or simplifying at all — but when they are needful and necessary to thee, it will be clear, and it will be important, and it will be required of thee to submit if thee wishes to find peace.

God is not a bully. Thee has free will; thee can refuse to do his will. But do not doubt that there will be consequences: he may press thee hard to do what thee needs to do for the good of thy soul and the good of the world. Trust that he has thy good at heart, trust that thee can discern his will, trust that thee can identify what is needful and necessary as it is needful and necessary, and be prepared to re-define needful and necessary as he calls thee to new life.

Heed that which is nourishing and make note of that which is diminishing of thy life in the Spirit. Sometimes it will be obvious. Alcohol makes thee grumpy and morose. Caffeine makes thee anxious and overly chatty. Too much sugar causes thy heart to race and thy thinking to muddy. Time spent in silence, waiting upon the Lord, is rejuvenating.

Walking in nature, fruitful companionship, petting a cat can be satisfying and help thee feel complete. Sometimes it is more subtle. Too much novel-reading leads thee to desire a world that does not exist. Too much perusal of television shows causes thee to desire things thee cannot obtain, causes thee to imagine relationships with people who are figments and phantoms, rather than building relationships with real people in the real world. Thee spends hour on the Internet only to come up for air and find the house empty and the hearth cold. The wrong companionship leads thee to behave in ways thee later regrets.

Let the Lord hone thy discernment to a razor-sharp edge that cuts out the unnecessary and allows thee free and easy access to the needful. Any obstacles to what is needful must be identified and removed. While there is room for error, and the Lord will guide thee even in the midst of error, it is not helpful, it is not necessary and it is not needful. Excise it from thy life if thee wishes to achieve the peace of Christ in thy heart for more than just a moment here or a moment there.

He is calling thee to break the patterns of thy life that are not working to bring thee peace. He is calling thee to begin new patterns that will bring thee life and fulfillment. He is calling thee to be useful, to him, to the world, to become a servant in the Kingdom of Heaven: a capable, eager, joyful servant. It is impossible, thee says. Nothing is impossible for the Lord. The only limiting element is thee, thy faith, thy faithfulness, thy ability to discern his will and be obedient. It is one of the miracles of obedience that our submission not only changes us, but invariably changes the world as well. Become obedient, and thee will be molded into a powerful servant for the Truth, a witness to his glory and a credit to thy generation.

Obedience

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Romans 12:2)

“. . . I exhort and invite thee to embrace the reproofs and convictions of Christ’s light and spirit in thine own conscience . . .” William Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*

It is a gift from God, the call to obedience. The ability to accomplish it is purely Grace, and not thy own strength. Yet thee is the instrument God is using, and to be a useful instrument, certain things have to come into alignment, among them: the Lord’s call, thy love for the Lord and thy desire to be in obedience. It is not unusual for this last piece to be missing. It may take a very great deal for thee to actually desire to be in obedience. Obedience isn’t easy. Willfulness is a much more familiar habit of mind. Living in our own will seems safer. So when the Lord deems it important to thy imminent salvation, he will set in motion the circumstances required for thee to become able to submit to his will.

Sometimes it is only during a “down” period, such as extended illness or unemployment, where thee has time to experience the true depth and power of thy desperate seeking after the Lord — the overwhelming nature of thy experiences of desperation. Thee finds thyself deep into the seeming futility of all thy efforts, thy truly fundamental desperation for something that thee longs for, something that is calling for thee and yet always seems just out of reach. Thee may have experienced this fundamental desperation and then have been given a taste of the Lord’s Guidance in some large thing. This first taste of the Lord’s direct guidance initiated thy senses to the experience and made thee become more capable of greater obedience. This fundamental sense of desperation is the emotional manifestation of a conversation taking place between thy soul’s longing for salvation and a loving Father who wishes to save thee. He is giving thee the tools, giving thee information, offering thee the path and longing for thee to take it. Thee feels that, deeply. Now thee must find a way to become obedient.

When life is pressing in upon thee, it may feel impossible to render time unto the Lord sufficient to become obedient. For that is what is required: thee must become quiet for regular periods of some duration. The Lord can and will break through in the big things when he must, but to become fundamentally and completely obedient requires a commitment from thee and a trust in the worthiness of the pursuit. Convalescence aids some. For some, entering a cloister or monastery works. But notice that not every person who experiences illness or the cloister is given the grace of obedience that leads to peace. Thee may be able to find it in the pursuit of silence each day, without the cataclysm or melodrama that some seem to require to become obedient servants of the Truth. It is available to all, but only a few become open to it. Enough desperation. Enough time. Enough lessons in thy own helplessness. Enough room for God in each moment to hear it when he speaks.

The Lord is calling thee to him — it is such a blessing that thee has heard this call. Perhaps all thee can feel in this moment is thy own longing for him, for the Truth that will set thee free. But know that deep in thy heart the Lord is calling to thee and thee is responding as best thee is able. This is such a good start. To hear the call, and desire what is good, to desire what the Lord is calling thee to, is a grace in itself. The difficulty with obedience for thee may be willfulness. It may be fear. Thee may have to learn that it is okay to disappoint people; thee may have to learn that thee need only concern thyself with disappointing God.

Thee may think that when the Lord calls someone he is calling them to ordination and paid ministry, but perhaps the Lord wants thy life to preach not from the pulpit but from the sidewalk. Thee may think thy life should preach from a job with an established company offering benefits and a 401K, or a good union job and pension, but perhaps the Lord wants thy life to preach from self-employment. Perhaps thee thinks thy life should preach from a sedentary desk job when the Lord wishes thee to engage in the physically-demanding work of child-care. Perhaps the Lord wishes thee to work from home, or to make the home and family thy work. Thee must be open to the idea that the Lord is

calling thee to something that thee dreads, and that thy resistance is built of fear and not reason.

Abandon self-worship, self-guidance, abandon lies and half-truths. Love the Truth. Love the strength of the Lord that thee has experienced, and pray for the ability to use that strength as he wills. Love the trials and tribulations that the Lord has placed before thee. They are the opportunity to bring love and hope into thy life and into the lives of others; they are the brick and mortar of thy salvation. Endure not in slavery to the rules of this world but freedom in a life in the kingdom.

Thee may feel entirely alone, or worse, on the very edge of sanity. Desperate for options, thee may bounce from search engine inquiry to library book to spiritual authority to church experience and back to Internet queries. Deep into the night, thee seeks the Truth where it is least likely to be found. Desperate for resolution, thee may seek high and low for a truth that will bring peace, a truth that will settle thee, a search thee is unable to set aside and unwilling to end with a false arrival. Or the false arrival may bring so much more internal agony that it must be abandoned despite whatever logic or reason may recommend it. Can thee not feel it, the difference between striving with the Lord and striving against the Lord? Has it not, at least occasionally, been palpable to thee that the Lord was asking thee to leap, but that thee was resisting with all thy strength?

Know that these false steps and desperate strivings, while completely understandable and lovably human, will not bring thee what thee seeks. Perhaps for now, the Lord is letting thee know exactly what “wrong” choices and options feel like, letting thee know clearly. It may feel as if thee is getting no after no from the Lord, when thee longs for even one yes. It may be hard to believe right now, but the yes will arrive, and thee will hear his yes as clearly as thee is now hearing each no. Trust that. That thee will hear his yes as clearly as thee is now hearing each no. The no upon no upon no are piling up, but eventually there will be a yes.

How does thee know when thee has correctly discerned the Lord's will? Entire books have been written on this question, none of which I feel free to recommend to thee. The ones I have read treat discernment as a decision-making process, one where the discerner tries to bring the Lord into their decision-making process, to get his answer to their stated problem. Invariably, these books envision discernment processes around deciding where to live or what job to take, with the real-life discerners offered as examples needing to pick between one of two really good options. Any peril is to their worldly life, and the consequences are discussed squarely in the world's terms. I am not talking about that kind of discernment. I am speaking to thee about discerning the Lord's will for turning thee from error to Truth, and the peril is thy salvation.

Finding a way to include the Lord in our decision-making about things that concern us — jobs, relationships, moves, jobs — is not true discerning. True discerning is discovering what the Lord's concern in thy life is, what his will for thee is, and finding how he wishes thee to proceed. Thy concern for the right career path may not be the Lord's concern at all — for his primary concern in thy life is for thy salvation, not thy ego, pocketbook, or savings account. Does he want a roof over thy head? Possibly. Sad to say, possibly not, but if he wishes this obedience, indeed sacrifice, from thee he will strengthen thee for it; thee will find it both duty and desire.

So often people seem dismayed when they feel they have received no Guidance from the Lord on some “big decision,” but that never should surprise thee. This “big decision” may have no impact on the Lord's plan for the person one way or another, and so he offers no Guidance. The Christ Within is not needed in such a situation. Discern what the Lord is concerned with, and then thee is discerning something important and fundamental. Thy task is to discover the next step, the next obedience. He seems to only ever show one step at a time, but then once thee arrives at some larger piece of obedience, some sort of a Big Step in his reckoning, thee will be able to look back and see how all the other minute steps led there, and how deep inside thee, thee felt a call to this moment. The Spirit moved thee, Jesus Christ guided thee, and the Lord called to thee from further down thy path. Trust that.

Loneliness

“Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.” (John 16:32)

It is so easy to feel alone, to imagine no one knows thy pain, that no one can help thee. It is so easy to abandon reality for despair, to abandon hope for anger, to abandon love for grief. It can feel too late. It can feel impossible. It can feel broken beyond repair.

Do not believe these tales the dark places of thy heart whisper. They are not true. The pain is real. The loneliness is real. But hope is alive, in thy heart. Peace is available, in the world, yes even in the wicked world the Lord brings peace. Even in the most hollow places of thy heart that seem filled only with the unbearable echo of thy own weeping, has thee not felt something or someone was at the edges? The pain would seem to be rending thy heart to pieces, but it does not quite accomplish it. Someone was listening; thee felt it. Something was there, something not dark, something not empty, something . . . Warm, inviting, soul-filling. Thee felt it, I know thee did, just at the boundaries, defining the boundaries of the cold empty aching, hemming it in, refusing to yield to it, limiting its power, limiting its scope. It is more powerful than thy pain, and it can conquer it.

Concentrate on that. Concentrate on that sliver of warmth, that living Presence. Concentrate on nourishing that. The loneliness is not entirely real. Thee is not entirely and utterly alone. Thee may be substantially alone; thee may be alone in the world, but in thy heart thee is not alone. Thee has a secret companion who will comfort thee, listen to thee, offer thee sweet advice and peace, true peace, if thee can find him, nourish thy connection to him, and grow into a new life in him.

I tell thee the pain thee feels is real, and the world is often not the place to take it, not the place to find healing, sometimes not even a safe place to acknowledge it. The Light Within can overcome this darkness. It can build within thee a safe island of repose,

of rest, of release from thy burdensome striving. If thee can find that hope-filled molecule, that Seed, and nourish it, love it, pay attention to it, offer it food, water, sunlight. If thee can, just for a short time, give it more attention than thee gives the pain, it will grow, it will become stronger, it will overcome the pain and fill thee with joy, fill thee with hope, fill thy heart with courage and warmth.

Thee does not believe me. Thee is afraid to trust any such thing. Thee is afraid thee is not welcome in the world, that there is no place for thee. That thee is alone because thee deserves to be alone, that thee is being punished. Thee is afraid that companionship is denied thee because thee is fundamentally flawed.

It may be true. There may not be any place for thee in the world, by which I mean the world created by men for men. That world is not friendly to the wrong sorts, to the broken, to the weary, to the ill. That world is not the Lord's world. It is not the world he created; it is not the world he is creating. Thee has access, in thy heart, to the Lord's world, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. He is building it here; he builds it in thy heart; he wants thee to assist in building it. He has need of thee. He wants to heal thee and bring thee into his building project. He is investing everything he has in thee: if thee can only find the Seed of hope he has planted within thee. Nourish it and be nourished by it.

Anger and Grief in the Midst of Hunger

“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.” (Romans 12:18-20)

Beware of anger. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord (Deut 32:35, Rom 12:19, Heb 10:30). Anger is not mentioned as a Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) that tells thee when thee is acting in Spirit and in Truth. Jesus threw the money changers out of the Temple, yes, but his anger is the Lord’s anger. The Lord has anger, but also love and mercy in an abundance thee cannot equal. If thee has not love, thee is not in the Spirit. No anger of thine will ever compare to the Lord’s — thee has not his mercy. Search out the root of the anger — be it fear, jealousy, a sense of injustice. Look to that, not to thy own angry thoughts nor to the target of thy anger — they are not the cause, truly. Look to thyself and thy need to control another, destroy what thee dislikes in another, diminish another. Thee can feel the energy-draining quicksand that thy anger is to thee — unproductive at best, destructive at worst. It makes thee less useful to God. He wishes thee to abandon it. “Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?” (Jonah 4:4). Abandon the fear — trust in him. Abandon the fury — let him guide thee into a life lived in true justice.

A vigilante is someone who takes the law into his or her own hands. Do not be a vigilante in regards to the laws the Lord has set down. In thy heart, thee knows this anger is a trap, a deep hole that thee wishes to escape. The Lord can free thee, can lift thee out of darkness and into the light, if thee lets him. He is showing thee, even now, how he would transform thee. He is showing thee, even now, what thee needs to do to become useful to him. Anger can be an illness that requires healing. Pay attention. Listen. Wait. Observe. Love. Find the love. It is within thee and it is without thee. It is there, if thee can only open thy heart to it, and it will heal thee.

Releasing anger, allowing the Lord to heal anger, can be extremely difficult and can take years. It is vital, during thy infirmity, as thee suffers from this emotional disease called anger, that thee hew closely to thy Guide. He will show thee thy duty. This Seed will keep thee from allowing thy anger to drive thee, if thee can instead let the Spirit of the Lord guide thee in thy heart. He will prevent thee from acting upon the error of anger, but thee must find a way to be cool and calm and in obedience. Thee does not have to be perfect to be useful, thee only has to be in obedience, for then the Lord's perfection will be at work within thee and through thee in the world. Obedience is never about thy perfection, but the Lord's. Desiring perfection is like desiring humility — doomed to failure. Seek the Lord, to do his will, and the Fruits will come as they should, in his time and not thine, in his Way, not thy way. In Spirit and in Truth, not limited by thy small human capacity.

Consider what angers thee. Contemplate it. What disrupts thy sense of peace? Look to it, not as a good thing to be savored, but as a troublesome thing to be rooted out. There are things to be condemned in this world, but thee cannot be useful to the Lord unless thee can look to these things from a place of love and peace. If they cause thee to be fearful, antagonistic, hyper-sensitive, choking with grief, if they cause thee to close thyself off from the Truth, then they are not helping thee; they are hindering thee in being useful to the Lord. Perhaps thee is not being entirely honest with thyself about the roots of these high emotions. Perhaps thee is not able to look at them squarely because they make thee feel helpless, powerless. Thee **is** helpless and powerless, but that should not make thee angry. It should make thee curious. It should make thee cautious. It should make thee aware that this is an area of weakness to be treading very carefully, to be traversed with as much love as thee can muster. Keep to thy Guide. He will keep thee from going too deep into error and distress.

Anger from fear is entirely understandable. Fear of change. Fear of what is different. Fear of facing thy own weakness, powerlessness. Fear of mortality. The anger arising out of this fear can be aggressive, antagonistic, blind. It can be debilitating fury that nothing can burn off. It can be almost its own living thing in thy heart, choking back

joy, hiding peace, preventing the Truth from growing and becoming a part of thee, preventing thee from becoming obedient to the Truth. Thee can release this fear. Thee can learn to trust God, to know what God is handling — without thee.

God trusts his children to find their way; thee is free to fall into error and then return to him renewed in thy faith. Thee should trust the Lord to Guide others into the Truth, and know that it is not thy job unless he particularly directs thee. Unless God is calling thee to a loving witness, which will be free from fear and anger, thee is in error to be witnessing at all, no matter how much thy mind is wrapped up in it. Thee must trust that the Lord has the salvation of the world in hand, that the salvation of the world is not in thy hands, the salvation of other people is not thy responsibility (Luke 6:42, Matthew 7:3). Thy responsibility is limited to the witness the Lord gives thee. Thy responsibility is limited. Thy fear betrays lack of trust in the Lord to act in thy life, to act in other people's lives, to act in the world. Faith can help thee bear this burden, and God's grace can help thee release it. He will show thee how, if thee will let him.

Anger out of grief is entirely understandable. The world changes. We don't like change. People die. Places become unrecognizable. Illusions are destroyed. Attachments to things of this world are broken. Permanence is an illusion. Worldly comforts are illusory. Stability is a myth, though thee seeks it nonetheless. When these myths, stories and illusions are destroyed, the grief can be overwhelming. The sense of loss becomes everything. Thee thought thee had one more day. Thee thought thee could go see that person next year. Thee thought the letter could wait until the holidays. Then thee gets angry. Angry at the loss. Angry at thyself for not anticipating it, not recognizing the fragility of things in this world. Angry at things for being fragile. Angry at attaching thyself to fragile things. Angry at God for causing every bad thing. Nothing can be counted on that thee had counted on. That is true. None of these things can be counted on. People will die. Places will change. Old comforts will be gone, and new comforts hard to come by.

If thee can place thy faith in the guidance Christ shows thee in thy heart, thee will know what it is right to attach thyself to, and what is to be attached to with an encompassing love that accepts its impermanence. The Truth will not abandon thee. The peace of Christ will not be foreclosed upon. The burden of death is not what thy grief believes it is. Understand that death is not necessarily a punishment, and life is not necessarily a reward.

Perhaps if thee looks closely to thy anger, whether it be from fear or grief, at its depths thee will find a hunger. A hunger for justice, a hunger for the Truth, a hunger for the world to be right, to do right, to be fair, to be honest. A hunger, perhaps, for the world to be not only better than it is, but to be better even than thee is capable of being. A hunger for the world to be better than thee. Thy own weaknesses thee finds ways to forgive and forget, but the weaknesses of the world, the weaknesses of others, these are harder for thee to forgive or forget and certainly cannot be ignored. Thee is passing judgment; thee is condemning; thee is denying that the saving hand of Christ is at work in any of these things. Thee is wrong. He is at work, and if thee can set aside high emotions, and find his peace and love in the midst of trouble, thee will find thee might be of use to bring about the Kingdom of Heaven.

Perhaps if thee looks closely at thy anger, thee will find behind it stories. Stories about people, stories about events, stories about what others were thinking about thee, what others were thinking about events. Mind-reading. Prognosticating. Made-up stories. The Truth is not in these stories. The Truth is in thy heart, in peace and in love. It is not bound up in knots, circumlocution, mental gymnastics. The Truth is both easy, in that it is accessible, and hard, in that it does not show itself easily in the midst of lies. “They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy” (Jonah 2:8).

Do not doubt the appearance of Christ in thy heart, and do not doubt that this will make thee useful to the Lord, even in thy infirmity. But also do not doubt that the Lord wants thee to be healed. He has given thee, in his great mercy, his Word in thy heart to guide thee into the Truth and the Way. Without the Light of Christ within, we are lost in

an ocean of darkness. Heed the Light Within and thee will be led, measure by measure, into an ocean of light, into the glorious love of God, into thy full Measure of the Truth.

For this ocean of darkness that thee can feel swept up in will not only point thee to outward anger, but to inward anger — anger toward thyself. Self-loathing and deep self-hatred may be what poisons thy mind and makes thee un-useful to the Lord. In fact, beware of any strong emotions: consider them warning flares to become cautious and attentive. Emotions aren't bad in and of themselves, but how thee acts upon them bears attention. Not only may strong emotional flares be a barrier to obedience, but they are often symptoms of wrong thinking and wrong feeling in general that deserve attention and probably correction. They may lead thee to act in ways that hinder thyself or others in their growth in the Truth.

When thee feels strong emotions are overtaking thee, try to remove thyself from the situation or otherwise find a way to return thy attention to the witness of the Word in thy heart. This witness will show thee how to act, or not act, and can help thee subdue these emotions and return to the peace of Christ Within for nourishment. If thee notices that certain situations or people disturb thy ability to remain faithful to the witness in thy heart, consider how to limit these situations or people until thee can be strengthened. Consider how thy thinking about these situations or people is contributing to these high emotions. Perhaps thee is thinking things are not fair, or perhaps thee believes someone is putting thee down. Thinking or believing a thing does not make it true, or even if true, does not make it as important as it might feel — not important enough to prevent thee from finding a loving response to that situation or those people.

I know thee feels a hunger, a deep longing, that nothing seems capable of satisfying. If thee can turn aside thy anger, overcome thy fears, accept thy grief, love the truth of these feelings without letting them rule thee, thee will discover what thee longs for: the Peace of Christ in thy heart.

It will be hard. Thee will fail many times. Succeed a few times, though, and thee will see how important this discipline is. Thy faithfulness to the witness of God in thy heart may waver, but thy only hope is to return to the Seed of God within thee, to nurture thy relationship with it, to seek out what nurtures that Seed and learn what hinders it. Learn what separates thee from the Truth in thy inward parts and render those things powerless in thy life. Accept that thee is weak, and those who are weak have limitations. Recognize, acknowledge, name, and accept thy limitations as shown by the Truth. Then thee will learn to live in peace.

Healing: Thee is the Blind Man and the Lame Beggar

“And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (John 9: 1-12)

I feel the need to remind thee, friend or neighbor, of the reality of thy position. Thee is in need of healing. Thee is the dependent blind man and the destitute lame beggar of Jesus' ministry. He will heal thee, as thee is meant to be healed, overturning all the traditions of men, if that is what is required. He will heal thee on the Sabbath and break whatever law he must break, if that is what needs to happen to bring thee to thy salvation. He will make a salve with spit and clay and apply it to thee, though thee considers dodging the application of the concoction for being bacteria-laden and disgusting. He will bring thee into the Truth thee is meant to live, through means that cannot be bound by anyone. Thee cannot limit the workings of the Lord. Men cannot limit the workings of the Lord. Laws cannot. Thy interpretation of the Bible does not. Thy interpretation of the Bible does not bind the Lord. He is the Truth that will set thee free.

Do not imagine thee was never meant to experience hardship or pain. Do not fall into believing others deserve pain, but that thee does not. The Lord loves thee, but he does not prove this love by preventing distress. He proves it by aiding in the midst of distress, aiding thee in preventing unnecessary distresses, moving thee onto thy path where necessary pain is felt but unnecessary pain is released. Concern thyself with thy own condition, find the healing there is for thee, and grow in the Truth. The Lord will heal thee, but only if thee can acknowledge the need for healing. He will not heal thee if thee denies thee needs it. He will not heal thee if thee childishly insists thy spiritual illness is unfair, undeserved.

I cannot say it strongly enough. Thee has a form of leprosy. Thee has a malignant growth. Thee has a cancerous wound in thy soul that must be excised, irradiated, starved

for nutrients. The Lord is waging this battle, bringing the healing that must be. If thee does not know this, then thee is in for a longer travail. Thee will be buffeted by the seas, swallowed by a whale (Jonah 2:10). There are no shortcuts, and yet the Lord works with miraculous alacrity, infinite mercy. Thy spiritual healing will come in his time, not thine. Slower than thee wants, but sooner than thee dares hope.

Know that the Lord wants thee to be healed and is actively providing opportunities for that healing to take place, such healing as will make thee most useful to him in this life. The Lord heals through many means, but a primary one is through experiences. Christ will heal thee even as he guides thee along thy path. He wants thee to be healed, but he also wishes thee to follow the path that has been laid out for thee, and the Lord will sometimes send difficult experiences to get thee onto thy true path. Healing in spiritual matters is, perhaps without exception, painful. The only comfort I can offer, and it is a cold comfort I freely admit, is that Christ is with thee and this pain has a purpose. If thee is able to stay with it, feel it fully and not close it off or shut it down, it will end and the healing that needed to happen within thee will be started, if not completed.

Thee doesn't want to be the blind man or the lame beggar. When thee read these stories in the Bible, thee did not identify with either of them. Thee identified with the disciples or one of the Marys. The disciples were often slow on the uptake, yes, but they were chosen. Thee identified with the chosen. Instead, in this moment, realize thee is not a disciple. Thee is the humble blind man, the beggar with leprosy. Thee is dead, like Lazarus, waiting to be brought to life. Thee has the potential to be one of the chosen ones, to be a disciple. Thee has faith. Thee has the Seed of Christ within thee. Thee has hope for a new life and reason to believe it can become real. Christ will heal thee, but first thee must acknowledge that thee needs healing, that he can heal thee as thee needs to be healed. Trust that his love for thee is real and that thy purpose is to bring some of that love into the world.

Trust and Gratitude: Lessons in Building a Hope-filled Heart

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5)

Thee has looked for hope in the wrong places. Thee has looked for hope where it does not live. It lives in thee and is always, always, always available to thee, if thee can quiet the mind, quiet the world, quiet the false and hear the Truth, hear the Peace, hear the Love that lives in the deepest place in thy heart.

Thee wants to believe. Thee wants to trust. Thee wants to feel hope. Thee doubts, perhaps not like doubting Thomas, forthrightly and purposefully, but as Martha doubted. Distracted doubting. Busy doubting. Caught-up-in-the-world doubting. Thy hope is in Christ, but thy thoughts are on thy daily bread.

If thee is able to start becoming obedient in the small things, then trust will come a little easier, a little faster each time. Believe it or not, thee can practice obedience. And with this practice, thee will see, now and again, some of the fruit of thy obedience. But if this grace is currently escaping thee, then the best hope thee has is to find thy faith. Not in the ways of the world, or in money, or in thy abilities, but faith in the Way that Christ has shown thee in thy heart. There is thy hope. Focus not on what thee lacks, or what thee longs for, focus on what thee has. Thee has the Bible, thee has the Word in thy heart, thee has the ability to give time to the Lord in patience and in love.

Something ties hope to gratitude. Something within thee must find the gifts the Lord has given thee, for he has given thee something, even some small gift that thee can be grateful for. Express that gratitude. Recognize that gift. Within that gratitude is the seed of hope, nurture thy gratitude, nurture thy ability to see the gifts the Lord is currently offering thee and thee will be able to feel a hope for the future. Let that hope be expansive. Don't hope for a car. Don't hope for a new job. Don't hope to win the lottery. Hope to feel the love of Christ every day. Hope to become useful to the Lord. Hope to

become capable of expressing Christ's love for the world, embodying his message in peace and in truth.

Notice what there is in thy life to be grateful for, and acknowledge that it is a gift from God. Savor the good that has been offered thee. Smell the scent of sunrise when thee has been unable to sleep. It is there, for thee to notice. The mysterious, the haunting, the unexpected are gifts. The mundane, the ordinary, the everyday are gifts. The unlooked-for compliment. The surprise connection. The happy toddler. The grumpy spouse (yes it is good to be grateful for a grumpy spouse). The well-cooked meal. The faithful friend. The bubbling tea kettle. The hope for a better self.

Trust that the path the Lord has set out for thee, one where hope is alive and thee is capable of obedience, is being built in thy heart. Trust the path is being built into the world. Trust the Lord is laying the groundwork for thee, if thee can only be faithful. Hope is not an empty dream. It is trusting that fulfillment is possible. Gratitude is not a fool's errand. It is only acknowledging what is true but can be hard to recognize. Trust that enough will be given, and become grateful for having enough.

Afterword

Many people seem to experience a God who breaks through and brings them in, despite fears, doubts and a desire to do anything else in the world than believe in him or submit to his will. And yet I wonder if we delve deeply enough into our own longing, we may find that God has called us at our own behest, answering a barely articulated but deeply felt desire to be of some use in the world. That this use ends up being a painful growth into becoming useful to God's plans may not have been fully understood originally, but the truth of the longing really only finds its answer here, in the call of God to his people.

I am going to go so far as to say that even in the event of thy death, which perhaps thee fears, the Lord is with thee, and with whoever must move forward on earth without thee. Remember that death is not necessarily a punishment and life is not necessarily a reward. After a tragedy, survivors often feel led to share how they believe the Lord was with them, guiding them, saving their earthly lives, but I am reminding thee that the Lord was also with those who died. Death is not evidence of abandonment, and pain is not evidence of cruelty. The Lord is with thee, loving thee, and he offers thee the most powerful and effective means to be healed: the love of Christ within thee. I hope the reader of this book will hear the love of the Living God in these words and be comforted, if only for a moment. I hope that these words may be a bit of a companion in the midst of spiritual challenges and outward hardships.

My heart is full as I offer my condolences that thee is hearing the Lord's call. It is a wonderful gift, but that is often difficult to feel, so condolences feel more appropriate than congratulations. The Lord is offering thee comfort, if thee can open thy eyes just a bit to see it through the pain and confusion. Indeed, my heart has been full to overflowing as I wrote this to thee, unknown child of God. I can say this with complete honesty, for I have not picked up my pen until required by the overflowing love of Christ in my heart to speak to thee something of the Truth the Lord would have thee know. I have no authority in myself, no wisdom of my own. I am a weak vessel whose only strength is the Lord, my only message the love of Christ for thee.

My heart is full of Christ's love for thee as he shows me thy weariness, shows me thy pain, shows me thy turmoil and despair. He wants thee to turn to him, deep in thy heart, and feel the hope there is for thee there. God cherishes thee and would see thee content, see thee at peace in the Truth. He has sent his Son, the precious gift of Love in thy heart to Guide thee and keep thee safe. Heed the Word in thy heart and love the Truth thee is shown there. Commit thyself to the Lord, to do his will on earth.

Sometimes it is easy to forget the fragility of life, the short span of years thee has on this earth, that change and death will leave thee behind, baffled and surprised. There is no need to be that person, undone by change. Accept that thy time is short, thy fate unknown to any but God. Remember that friends and family could be gone tomorrow, and their familiar presence once so taken for granted reduced to memory. If thee has kept to thy Guide, he will show thee thy duty and thee will have no reason to regret thy choices, thee will not have to bear the burden of lost opportunities. Thee will not have chosen a television program over calling thy mother, when thee knew that thee should. Thee will not have turned left, when in thy heart thee knew thee should turn right. Patient, obedient submission to the Truth is thy path to salvation, thy path to usefulness, thy path to healing and wholeness.

Whatever hardness is in thy heart, let him soften it. Whatever fear grips thy belly, let him soothe it. Whatever condemnation thee finds in thy heart, let him forgive it. Be loved, be loving, be free.