

Beyond the Blue

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*We do not believe in immortality because we can prove it,
but we try to prove it because we cannot help believing it.*

~ Harriet Martineau

In the winter and early spring of 2007-08, my mother and I spent her last days together.

She was 93 years old, but still mentally sharp. Macular degeneration had reduced her vision and a congestive heart condition slowed her down, but despite those issues she refused nursing home care, and still lived in the same house that my father had purchased for them in 1978 when they had moved to Rhode Island. She hated the thought of losing her independence; when I took over her finances after she received a \$58.00 bill from the gas company and wrote a check for \$5,800.00, her comment to me was that she felt like she had reverted to being “just a silly teenager again with no responsibilities!”

My mother was the person who more than any other encouraged my academic and intellectual growth and development. Of course, such encouragement is often ignored in childhood, and it frequently

takes many years for such seeds to germinate. As a kid, I was a wuss and afraid of other people, and it was not until high school that I started to gain confidence. Even then I was far from being a top student, and eventually gave up on some of my dreams when I realized that I wasn't smart enough and didn't have the necessary gifts. But this was not a permanent discouragement – I began to dream new dreams for the future, and much of the credit for that goes to Mom. It is her legacy.

I am reminded of the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus* in which the protagonist had to rearrange his life, lower his sights, and became a high school music teacher. Along the way he encouraged a young girl who years later grew up to become the governor of Oregon. At his retirement, she and many of his other students returned to celebrate his life:

“Mr. Holland gave up his dream of a career in composing music to teach us lowly high school kids. But we became your notes – we are your symphony.”

My father had died the previous year (2007) at age 92. He had also been in good health but had fallen down a stairway and suffered a severe head injury. Mom blamed herself for his death, and despite the attempts of family members to comfort her, she was lonely and depressed. I had been laid off in late 2007 and was doing contract work, so I had time to spend with her in her last days.

We ate together, I took her out to do food shopping, and we often had ice cream together with Danish fruit sauce. Then I would read to her and we would talk of many things. She had a Master's degree in child psychology and had been an instructor at the University of Minnesota from 1959 to 1967. She was there during the sea-change in American public education, when a new generation of post-modern educators turned the system upside down. Early childhood sex education funded by Planned Parenthood was introduced, responsibility was replaced with permissiveness, phonics was replaced with the “look-say” reading method, and other changes were made that have been largely responsible for the disastrous declines that have occurred in American public education. Mom watched all of this happen and saw that it was not an accident, but rather the result of deliberate policy decisions. She fought it tooth and nail as best as she could. Since she did not have a doctorate and was not tenured, she was pushed aside, and in 1967 she retired in frustration. I have often reflected on the utter poverty of many current psychological theories and counseling methods, as indicated in the following quote: “Practicing psychiatry without faith in God is like meeting a hungry man and giving him a toothpick.”

Most of our conversation, however, was about the family and the future. I was in the process of writing a history of our family, and she provided many details. We also discussed God, life after death, and what heaven would be like. In the months after my father's death in May 2007, she often told me that she was ready to die, that it was time for her to turn the page and move on.

In her book *Mrs. Marco Polo Remembers*, Mary Parker Dunning tells of the death of her husband with whom she had traveled the world:

On June 27, 1960, Harry went exploring in an uncharted country where I could not follow, and with his passing all the candles in the world flickered and went

out, the temple bells were stilled, and the faraway drums of old China no longer sounded in my heart.

On March 3, 2008, my mother passed away in her sleep.

Like mom and many others, such as Allan Bloom, author of the book *The Closing of the American Mind*, I have been concerned about the many social pathologies plaguing our great nation, such as divorce, abortion, selfishness, expanding government, along with the individuals and forces in politics, education, and the media that have deliberately created and/or exacerbated these problems. However, as I have grown older, like my mother I have increasingly turned my attention to God and family. Addressing societal issues and fighting for what is right remain essential duties, along with generating the income necessary to keep the family afloat. But the death of my parents has underscored for me the ephemeral nature of life. As it says in the New Testament Book of James, “Your life is but a vapor that appears for a while and then vanishes away.”

I have returned to the basic questions of existence:

1. Where did I come from? (the past, and the question of origin)
2. Why am I here? (the present, and the question of purpose)
3. Where am I going? (the future, and the question of destiny)

For me, the answers are simple:

1. I was created by God.
2. I am here to do the will of God.
3. I will eventually return to God.

Of course, these simple answers involve incredible complexities:

1. Like everyone else, I was the biological child of a man and a woman, but also have a soul and spirit from God. How does that work? I have no idea, but it is true.
2. There are no pat answers to the question of what I should be doing with the time that is given to me. The Bible provides principles for how we should live, and the parents of each child should guide and help him or her to determine their gifts and calling. But it is ultimately left up to each individual to figure out what he or she should do.
3. After I die my spirit will go to God. How does that work? Again, I have no idea, but it is true.

There are, of course, many skeptics who see this as “crude faith” and deride it as “pie in the sky.” Karl Marx called religion “the opiate of the people,” and critics routinely cast Christians as ignorant and intolerant boobs. But as an intellectual with a BS degree in biology, an MS in internet engineering, and working on a PhD in Psychology, who has carefully considered the alternatives and is painfully well-aware of the conundrums and unanswered questions about God and the Bible, I am convinced that Christianity is by light-years still the best, the most comprehensive, and the most satisfying answer on many levels to the questions of human existence. There are at least as many, if not more, ignorant, bigoted, and boneheaded non-believers as there are believers, and the notion that non-believers are “smarter” and more “scientific” is pure poppycock and wishful thinking on their part.

That being said, I am also painfully aware that “Christianity” can be empty and soulless. We always tend to paint ideological opponents with a black brush, like the contempt which liberals feel for Rush Limbaugh and the disgust that conservatives have for Bill Maher. Likewise, we attempt to excuse and dismiss the foibles and failings of the ideas and people on “our side,” whatever that side happens to be. So there have been many throughout history who identified themselves as Christian, and of whom I am ashamed. They brought disgrace to the name of God, and I feel no desire whatsoever to defend them, other than to point out that calling yourself Christian, or having a position in a religious organization, does not guarantee anything. As I have said, “We are human first, and Christian (or anything else) second.” Beyond that, there has to be more to Christianity than just philosophy and ethics. Important as those things are, they are human and earthly; we need something that goes beyond this world, that transcends death, and is able to reach all the way to God in heaven. But despite centuries of trying, we cannot prove or disprove God, nor, assuming that God exists, can we prove His nature. Whatever position/religion we take or is taken for us – Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, atheist, humanist, or whatever – can only be done on the basis of faith.

The most prominent religion in contemporary western society is humanism. Being the religion and the worship of self with no pastors, priests, or religious organizations, people do not typically think of it as a religion, but it is so nevertheless, as it provides the moral and philosophical foundations for its adherents, and requires significant faith to believe that it is true. Humanism is the belief that “what you see is all you get,” in other words, the only things that actually exist are what can be sensed with our five senses. Humanists claim that there is no evidence for God whatsoever, because God cannot be touched or experienced. I find that argument to be ridiculous; we cannot, for example, see or touch electrons, but that does not stop us from believing in their existence because we can see their effects. Likewise, we can see the effects of God all around us, but a true humanist rejects that idea, and believes everything just evolved by accident, an idea which I and many others likewise reject. Humanism teaches that people have the same intrinsic nature and value as that of animals, insects, and trees. When you die, life is over, and therefore there is no overarching purpose and no basis for morality beyond what is contrived and enforced by society and its leaders. Guilt is therefore a figment of your imagination, and there is no ultimate love, justice, or purpose.

However, most people cannot accept the amorality and purposelessness of a thoroughgoing humanism, so they commingle it with elements of Buddhism, Christianity, and/or others to create their own version – a syncretistic “designer” religion. For many this is not a conscious or a well-thought out

process; they live for moment with little or no thought for the future and are in denial about death. Religion is “caught” by absorbing what parents or friends believe, taking on the color of one’s surroundings, and then adapting it to fit one’s biases. Our era is steeped in the romantic movement of the 19th century which taught that feelings are all-important. Truth and morality are therefore to a large degree self-defined according to a person’s feelings, with the result that religion and logic are considered to be incompatible (logic is supposedly “too cold,” and “too male”).

It may be cool to design your own religion and to think that God can be shaped into a mold of your own making. But the problem is, what appeals to you may be simply a fantasy, and like the flat-earthers, and what you believe may be a lie. What assurance do you have that your designer religion is actually true and real? It may make you feel good, but what happens when the real God shows up, calls each person to account, and blows away the stupid and selfish notions that people have about Him?

IMHO, there must be more to life than we can see, there must be a true basis for morality, there must be life after death, and humans must have been created in the image of God, which explains our passion for love, romance, meaning, understanding, justice, purpose, and immortality.

These are all statements of faith – I can’t prove them, but neither can you or anyone else disprove them. Whatever we believe is always based on faith. It takes faith to be a Christian, but in my opinion, it takes much more faith to be a humanist; see [The Darwinian Emperor is Naked](#) for a critique of Darwinism, which forms the metaphysical and theological basis of humanism.

C.S. Lewis in his essay *The Weight of Glory*, describes the problems with humanism as follows:

And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness which has been laid upon us for nearly a hundred years. Almost our whole education has been directed to silencing this shy, persistent, inner voice; almost all our modern philosophies have been devised to convince us that the good of man is to be found on this earth.

But do what they will, we remain conscious of a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy. However, is there any reason to suppose that reality offers any such satisfaction? “Nor does being hungry prove that we will have bread.” A man’s physical hunger does not prove that that man will get any bread; he may die of starvation on a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man’s hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating, and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist. In the same way, though I do not believe that my desire for Paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I think it a pretty good indication that such a thing exists and that some men will. A man may love a woman and not win her; but it would be very odd if the phenomenon called “falling in love” occurred in a sexless world.

Moving on from the questions of origin and purpose, and given the shortness and fragility of life, it seems to me that the most important issue is that of destiny, because the future is more important than the past. There are stages in life: baby, toddler, child, teenager, adult and senior; as we reach the end of each stage we seek to turn the page and move on. We are always reaching for what comes next, and we want more—more things, more money, more satisfaction in relationships, more health, more sex, more life, and so on. Many view God as the slogan on the sweatshirt: “The National Bank of Dad – Closed,” but the Bible says the opposite, “He gives us richly everything to enjoy.” As songs have expressed it:

When we have exhausted our store of endurance;
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done;
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources;
Our Father’s full giving is only begun.

His love has no limit,
His grace has no measure,
His power has no boundaries known unto man.
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.
Annie J. Flint

No great success to show, No glory on my own,
Yet in my weakness He is there to let me know:
His strength is perfect when our strength is gone;
He’ll carry us when we can’t carry on.
Raised in His power, the weak become strong;
His strength is perfect, His strength is perfect.
Stephen Curtis Chapman

C.S. Lewis explains God’s perspective on our desires:

I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. By God Himself, it is not! How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of Him is of no importance except in so far as it is related to how He thinks of us. It is written that we shall “stand before” Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.

Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires,

not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink, sex, and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

Of course, there are many who have prayed for this thing or that, and didn't get what they wanted, so they concluded that God is either a cheat or a myth. What they have failed to see is that like a wise parent, God does not pander to our selfishness or feed our greed. Rather, he treats us as his children, loving and caring for us, but also disciplining us so that we can share in his glory. Becoming a soldier, a leader, a parent, or anything else of significance requires discipline which to some degree involves pain, privation, humiliation, and abandonment of self. Having created human nature, God knows it very well; He understands how easily we rationalize and even "religionize" self-centeredness, which IMO is unfortunately what postmodernism in Western society is all about. God is preparing us to share in ruling his universe, and so demands that we be worthy of such a high position. He answers prayer, but in ways that are often mysterious to us, because we cannot see things from His perspective. For example, we may pray for the recovery of a diseased relative, but the person may instead get worse and die. Perhaps there was some fault in us or in our prayers, or perhaps God chose not to answer in the manner that we asked? There are often no clear answers, and this is a test of faith – to see if we truly will trust God or not. Everyone dies, and it seems that death is the ultimate failure, but life and death are in the hands of God:

And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did **not** receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect. [Italics, mine] *Hebrews 11:39-40*

There are a number of problems that people have with God, such as "If God is good, why does evil exist?", "Why doesn't God just get rid of evil?", and "Why can't we have heaven on earth right now?" We may not like God's standards or His ways, but like gravity, that is the way things are. Unlike religion, believing in the God of the Bible is far beyond philosophy and ceremony. Rather it is entering into a relationship with the divine where ritual is replaced by love and communication. If we want more than this life and this world can offer, then we are not alone – many others have felt the same, and some have given expression to their feelings:

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed, if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.
Hebrews 11:13-16

And the ship went out into the High Sea and passed on into the West, until at last on a night of rain Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing that came over the water. And then it seemed to him that as in his dream in the house of Bombadil, the grey rain curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores, and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise. *The Return of the King*, by J.R.R Tolkien

Orion thought of the glories of Elfland, dimly known by magical memories that he had from his mother. The little cries of the early evening behind him he heeded no more, nor heard. All this was lost to him – the ways and the needs of men, the things they plan, the things they toil for and hope for, and all of the little things their patience achieves. In this new knowledge that had come to him beside the glittering boundary that he was of magical blood, he desired at once to cast off the his allegiance to Time, and to leave the lands that lay under Time’s dominion. *The King of Elfland’s Daughter*, by Lord Dunsany

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

II Timothy 4:6-8

The world is passing away, and also its lusts, but the one who does the will of God shall live forever. *I John 2:17*

As this knowledge fills our soul, the world begins to lose its grip on us. We still struggle with selfishness, sin, and failure, but like a flower turning toward the sun, our lives turn toward God and doing his will, which involves serving others and giving our lives for them. The formerly strange perspectives of individuals such as Mother Theresa and Tim Tebow then start to make sense. Those who have self firmly enthroned at the center of their hearts cannot understand this – living for God seems to them to be completely stupid and bone-headed, as Paul tells us in I Corinthians: “The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them.” But as we move closer to Him our perspective changes. We begin to realize how far we fall short of the ideal, but nevertheless we also begin to understand that this is the future, and the way things will be. Even more so, we start to realize that far from being a distant grumpy judge, God wants the best for us, and cares for us, because we are his children. Like a good parent He both disciplines, encourages, and rewards us. As a child growing up to discover that the real world is different than his or her immature selfishness and fancies, we discover that God’s ways are the “the new gravity.”

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him;

and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’

Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. *Matthew 25:31-46*

We start to realize that the entire economy of heaven, which is our future, is based not on what we can acquire, but rather on how much we love and give, and that God is the best example of this principle. This is true to an extent even in our current economy, as success requires providing products and services that others want and need. Christian concepts such as “dying to self” which formerly seemed so crazy and unthinkable, and which, if we thought about them at all, would be considered impossible and stupid, now attract us in the light of our future existence and the judgment to come.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. *Revelation 20:11-12*

But judgment is no longer a threat, because if we truly belong to Christ and put our trust in Him, then we are covered by his blood. Jesus is the ultimate lover and romantic – he died and gave his life away so that we could live.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. *John 1:12*

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. *Romans 8:1-6*

The words “judgment,” “condemnation,” and “death” are negative and strike fear into the heart. Perhaps fear is necessary in some cases to get a person’s attention, but these negative things are swallowed up by the love of God. He loves us with a passionate and desperate love, like a mother for her babe or a grandfather for his grandkids, but much higher and deeper. God never abrogates our free will or forces us to seek Him, but nevertheless He is “the hound of heaven” who pursues us and tries to break through our indifference. As we come to understand and bathe in God’s love we gain a security and a peace that is beyond what the world can give us – “Perfect love casts out fear;” and “If God is for us, then who can stand against us?” Many years ago, Bill Gaither wrote the song “I am loved, I am loved; I can risk loving you. For the one who knows me best loves me most.” Being loved by someone who knows all your warts and still loves you anyway is powerful medicine for the soul.

Is it then necessary to give up everything, wear a hair shirt, become a monk, and live in a cave or on the top of a flagpole? Not at all, and for most people it will be the opposite – to live with others and bless them using your gifts, talents, and resources. The important thing is to be sensitive to the Spirit of God, who will then guide you and lead you to the destiny for which you were created.

What follows is a celebration of our immortality and the love relationship we can have with God:

The Past

A voice said, “Call out.” Then he answered, “What shall I call out?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers and the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows upon it. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever. *Isaiah 40:6-8*

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. *John 1:10-13*

I've heard that a man would climb a mountain just to be with the one he loves.
How many times has he broken that promise? It has never been done.
I never climbed the highest mountain, but I walked the hill of Calvary.
Just to be with you I'll do anything, there's no price I would not pay;
Just to be with you I'll give everything. I would give my life away.

I've heard it said that a man would swim an ocean just to be with the one he loves.
But all of those dreams are an empty emotion – it can never be done.
I never swam the deepest ocean, but I walked upon the raging sea.
Just to be with you I've done everything; there's no price I did not pay.
Just to be with you I gave everything. I gave my life away.
Just to be with you.

Third Day

O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become his counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be repaid? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. *Romans 11:33-36*

The Present

Some people think of Christianity as just “pie in the sky, by and by.” In other words, it is useless and even a hindrance. For example, a popular conception of prayer is “a waste of time”, with the only benefit being “creating a meditative state.” Faith in Christ supposedly takes away our fun and squelches our individuality because we are called to obey God and not just do our own thing. However, the Old and New Testament both affirm that following God is the best, highest, and coolest thing we can do: “You will make known to me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy and at your right hand there are pleasures forevermore.” *Psalms 16:11*; “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.” *1 Timothy 6:17*. So rather than being a hindrance, following God and doing his will is the pathway to life, peace, true success, and hope for the future.

When my heart was embittered and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you have taken hold of my right hand, with your counsel you will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And besides you, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. *Psalms 73:21-26*

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?
Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? *Matthew 16:26*

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and will dine with him, and he with Me. *Revelation 3:20*

Who is this that appears like the dawn? Fairer than the moon, brighter than the sun, you're the lover of my soul. Draw me near to you.

Who is this that beckons me to come close? Beauty beyond words surrounds me when you're near, you're the lover of my soul. Draw me near to you.

Who is this that wipes the tears from my eyes? Just one glimpse of you steals my heart away, you're the lover of my soul. Draw me near to you.

Vineyard Music

You will make known to me the path of life, and in your presence is fullness of joy. In your right hand there are pleasures forevermore. *Psalms 16:11*

I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces will never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him and rescues them. Taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! O fear the Lord, you His saints; for to those who fear Him there is no want. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing. *Psalms 34:4-10*

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord gives grace and glory. No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. *Psalms 84:11*

“I am with you at present,” said Gandalf, “but soon I shall not be. I am not coming to the Shire. You must settle its affairs yourselves; that is what you have been trained for. Do you not yet understand? My time is over; it is no longer my task to set things to rights, nor to help folks to do so. And as for you, my dear friends, you will need no help. You are grown up now. Grown indeed very high, among the great you are, and I no longer have any fear at all for any of you.”

The Return of the King, by J.R.R. Tolkien

Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your

way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday. *Psalms 37:3-5*

Then the rainstorm came over me, and I felt my spirit break.
I had lost all of my belief, you see; and I realized my mistake.
But time threw a prayer to me; and all around me became still.

Through the rainstorm came sanctuary, and I felt my spirit fly. I had found all, my reality; I realized what it takes.

I need love—love’s divine. Please forgive me now I see that I’ve been blind.
Give me love. Love is what I need to help me know my name.

Love’s Divine, by Seal

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. That I may know Him, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings; being conformed to His death in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. *Philippians 3:7-14*

“My body is broken. I go now to my fathers in whose mighty company I shall no longer be ashamed... A grim morn, a glad day, and a golden sunset!”
Theoden, King of Rohan, dying in the defense of another land, from *The Return of the King*

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou thinkst thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow
And soonest our best men with thee do go
Rest of their bones and soul’s delivery.
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,

And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppies or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke.
Why swellst thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die!
Death, Be Not Proud, by John Donne

The Future

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. *I Corinthians 15:51-57*

And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and he who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness he judges and wages war... And he is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and his name is called The Word of God... And on his robe and on his thigh, he has a name written, “KING of KINGS, and LORD of LORDS.” *Revelation 19:11,13,16*

The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.
Deuteronomy 33:26

But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will arise with healing in his wings. *Malachi 4:2*

And there arose loud voices in heaven saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he will reign forever and ever.” *Revelation 11:15-16*

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling place of God will be with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away

every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new!” *Revelation 21:1-5*

It is done! I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. To him who thirsts I will give from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be my son. *Revelation 21:6-7*

I can only imagine what it will be like, when I walk by your side. I can only imagine, what my eyes will see, when your face is before me; I can only imagine.

Surrounded by your glory, what will my heart feel?
Will I dance for you, Jesus? Or in awe of you, be still?
Will I stand in your presence, or to my knees will I fall?
Will I sing “Hallelujah!”? Will I be able to speak at all?
I can only imagine. *Mercy Me*

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no night there, and they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God Himself will illumine them. And they shall reign forever and ever. *Revelation 22:1-5*

When He cometh, when He cometh to make up His jewels,
All His jewels, precious jewels, His loved and His own.
Like the stars of the morning His bright crown adorning,
They shall shine in their beauty, bright gems for His crown.
William O. Cushing

And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the one who does wrong still do wrong; and the one who is filthy still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy still keep himself holy. Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”
Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the

sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.” *Revelation 22:10-16*

The Spirit and the Bride say “Come.” And let the one who hears say “Come.” And whoever is thirsty, let him come and let him take the water of life without cost. *Revelation 22:17*

