



Tim Sawtelle

Hope Unveiled

Stories of God's
Unwavering Faithfulness

Book One in the Unveiled Series

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Dedication

To Sherri

My bride, my love, my sweetheart, my partner, my best friend, my soul mate who loves me unconditionally.

Throughout my journey, you've walked beside me, preferring me and offering encouragement.

It's God, you and me.

Ecclesiastes 4:12

A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

To my children, their spouses and my grandchildren.

May you truly know how much you are loved by God, Sherri and myself!

Chris, Julie, Tristan and Brinley

Heather and Mark

Shannon, Jack, Ian and Oliver

Thera, Trent and Corbin

Sandy, James, Nevan and Austin

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Hope

‘I pray that God, the source of **hope**, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him.

Then you will overflow with confident **hope** through the power of the Holy Spirit.’

Romans 15:13

INTRODUCTION

Throughout my life's journey, I've experienced the unwavering love and faithfulness of God. This book shares some of these special moments I've had with the one I call the lover of my soul.

There are two verses I've held close to my heart over the years, ones I consider to be my life's verses. They touch the core of what I believe God desires for each and every one of us.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

This is what the Lord says: "Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

I long to truly understand and know Him. After all, that's His hearts desire for us as well.

Psalms 32:8

The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you."

I greatly love this promise that God Himself will lead us not just along any pathway, but "the best pathway" for our lives! I've learned it might not always match our expectations, but it's truly the best because it comes from His perspective, not ours. He has given each of us free will. He promises to advise us without forcing us, assuring us that He'll never abandon us but will always watch over us. It doesn't get any better than that.

My hope is that everyone who reads this book will discover encouragement and hope in God's love and faithfulness—remember, you are greatly loved by Him!

May you truly find His Unveiled HOPE along the journey of your life!



Searching

The roller-coaster of emotions I experienced during that ordeal, from the depths of despair to the pinnacle of exuberant joy, was beyond anything I could have imagined.

At some point in our lives, we've all experienced the need to search for something misplaced or lost. Can you recall a time when you lost something truly special to you? Do you remember the emotions you felt and the process of trying to remember where it might be?

I can vividly recall an incident involving my son, Chris, when he was around two or three years old. His mother and I were setting up at church one day, working in separate adjoining rooms while keeping an eye on him. He would move between the rooms as we went about our tasks. We ensured that all other doors were closed, and he was safe. However, at a certain moment, I turned around and noticed he was no longer in the room with me. I hurriedly entered the next room where his mother was, only to find he wasn't there either. Alarmed, I asked if she had seen Chris and if she knew where he was. It was then that I began to consider the possibility that he might have wandered out of the rooms.

As a father, concern naturally swept over me, yet my initial thought was that he might have simply opened one of the doors and ventured down the hallway. Both his mother and I scoured different parts of the building, checking every corner in search of him. Unfortunately, our efforts proved fruitless. The longer we searched, the more intense and anxious my emotions became.

With each passing moment, the fear of the unknown intensified. I started to contemplate the unsettling thought that he might have somehow made his way outside the building, and my heart sank into the pit of my stomach. The church was situated close to a major highway, which only added to my apprehension. The urgency to find my son escalated, and I found myself running outside, frantically scanning the vicinity and the nearby highway. Panic began to grip me.

Nearly ten minutes had passed, and there was still no sign of him. The devastation I felt was overwhelming, and my heart ached at the mere thought of not having my son with me or even worse if something had happened to him. Then, a glimmer of hope emerged. I spotted some close friends of ours driving across the parking lot.

Unbeknownst to us, they had played a prank, scooping up Chris and driving around the block for a few minutes before returning. There, in the front seat between our friends, sat Chris, waving at Daddy totally unaware of what I just went through.

My emotions swung from elated joy to a mix of relief and frustration towards my friends for the prank they pulled. The intensity of these

emotions was indescribable, ranging from utter hopelessness and fear to an overwhelming sense of happiness.

The roller-coaster of emotions I experienced during that ordeal, from the depths of despair to the pinnacle of exuberant joy, was beyond anything I could have imagined. I was immensely grateful to have my son back with me—I can't even begin to put it into words.

Searching for something lost or misplaced can evoke a range of intense emotions, taking us from the depths of anxiety to the heights of jubilation. It serves as a reminder of the profound connections we share with the people and things that matter most in our lives.

The search for something more is something we all share. It's like when you're looking for a lost item, like a puzzle piece that's missing from the picture of life. These days, we often turn to Google to find answers. I recently looked into what people in the United States are searching for the most. Surprisingly, the top search is "Facebook," with a whopping 71 million searches. This gives us a glimpse into what's on people's minds.

Other popular searches include "YouTube," "wordle," "Amazon," and useful things like "Translate," "Weather," "Google," "Gmail," and "NFL." These are the top ten things people are curious about.

Among the interesting questions people ask, some stand out. People want to know things like "What is my IP address?" and "What should I watch?" They're also curious about "How many ounces are in a cup?" and "How many weeks are in a year?" They're even wondering

about “How many ounces are in a gallon?” and “How many ounces are in a pound?” These are just a few examples of the many questions people have.

While some of these questions might seem crazy, it’s also a bit sad to think that these are what people search for the most. Shouldn’t we be looking for deeper and more meaningful things online?

A well known counselor and author, June Hunt, talks about three important things we all desire and have need for:

LOVE - we all want to feel loved. This means to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interests.

SIGNIFICANCE - we want to find our own significance, to know our lives have meaning and purpose.

SECURITY - we want to feel accepted and have a sense of belonging.

We often look for these things in different areas of our lives, like our relationships, work, or money. But no matter where we look, it will never fill our needs in these three areas. Only God, can truly fulfill these needs.

There are so many promises of God found in the Bible that we could fill numerous books with these promises. Here are just a few that can help us understand what God says about these three needs in our lives.

LOVE - When it comes to love, a verse from the book of Jeremiah 31:3 says:

|| *I have loved you with an everlasting love.*

SIGNIFICANCE - For finding significance, another verse from Jeremiah 29:11 tells us:

|| *I know the plans I have for you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

SECURITY - And about feeling secure, a verse in Hebrews 13:5 assures us:

|| *Never will I leave you, nor will I forsake you.*

So, even though we search for these three important things in many places, we can only find complete fulfillment with a deeper relationship with God. It's only then that we will truly and completely find love, significance, and security in Him.

Jesus frequently used stories called parables to help people understand the heart of God and His Kingdom.

Here's a parable about a flock of sheep found in Luke 15:1-7:

|| *Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees*

and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!

So Jesus told them this story: “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it?

And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’

In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!

So don’t you see? God has been searching for you and I all along our life’s journey. Since the very beginning when we took our first breath. We are the one sheep that was all by itself away from the flock of 99. The shepherd - Jesus has come looking for us to rescue us and bring us back to Him.

Let Him love you and pick you up and hold you in His arms and carry you back to Him...

Scripture for thought John 3:16-18:

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son.





Religion or Relationship?

What do you think about when you hear the word “religion”? If someone came up to you and asked, “Are you religious?” How would you respond? Is being religious considered a positive or negative thing?

A lot of people today tend to view the word “religion” in a negative way. Why might that be? I believe this perspective often comes from personal experiences where someone’s faith caused pain or discomfort. Perhaps it stems from feeling unfairly judged by people who are religious. This can make someone feel excluded not only by others but also by God. This could lead some to believe they’re not good enough or their life is too messed up to be accepted by God or religious individuals.

If you've been hurt by someone religious or by a religion, I encourage you to take a moment and search for the genuine truth. Even Jesus himself confronted those who claim to be religious. The main issue he had with them was that they were often blind, selfish, or greedy. Many of them acted like hypocrites.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus wasn't fond of the religious? Were you aware of his feelings toward them? Have you ever thought about this?

In reality, if most people today could truly understand who Jesus was, they wouldn't reject him; instead, they would wholeheartedly follow him. Religion tends to obstruct the clear view of the real God. It often presents a distorted image of God, and that's why I can understand why Jesus would challenge the religious leaders.



At one point, Jesus even referred to them as “whitewashed tombs.” This means that on the outside, they looked clean and polished, but on the inside, they were like graves, full of decay and death. Spiritually,

they were lifeless and didn't truly reflect God's nature. In fact, they didn't even understand the true essence of God.

What these religious leaders demonstrated was adherence to human-made rules, and they would pass judgment. However, they themselves didn't follow the very rules they imposed on others.

Listen to what Jesus said to the religious leaders in Matthew 23:23-28

What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things. Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!

What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too.

What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but

filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.

You get the idea – Jesus spoke truth directly and honestly. Being a Christian isn't about imitating those religious Pharisees. A genuine follower of Jesus, a Christian, resembles Jesus in their actions, their love, and how they behave.

We shouldn't form judgments about God or Jesus based on the actions of certain religions or religious individuals. For you see, God is the most caring father we can know. He never makes mistakes and his love for us is boundless. He desires what's truly best for us and wants to have an intimate relationship with each of us.

He's not looking for a distant, religious rule-based relationship; he seeks a genuine relationship where we understand his character, his nature, his desires, and his heart. He's truly wonderful in every way! When we become Christians, he adopts us into his family!

This is explained better in the book of Romans 8:14-16

For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

Now we call out “Abba, Father!” This is a Hebrew word and is much like a child calling out to their daddy. It’s a close, affectionate and intimate term shared between a child and their daddy. I had an understanding of the meaning of this and I grasped this concept in my mind. However, one day, God revealed a deeper meaning to me.

While walking through a grocery store, I rounded a corner and entered another aisle. There, I noticed a Jewish man standing, searching the shelves for a product. Standing just beside him was his young daughter, probably around three or four years old. As I passed by, I heard the little girl look up at her daddy, raise both her arms, and say “Abba!”



She had such a precious little voice. Her daddy immediately stopped and turned to her. He scooped her up into his arms, embracing her tightly, and she hugged him back. Witnessing this scene almost brought tears to my eyes. As I continued down the aisle, I was reminded of the relationship that God offers us through Jesus—a chance to have such closeness and intimacy with the perfect Father, the perfect “Abba.”

That day, something changed within me, and I truly grasped the depth of His love for me as a child of God.

The real truth is that God cares for you deeply. He desires to restore relationship with you and I, just like the one He shared with Adam and Eve in the garden. He values this relationship so greatly that He took action to restore it. He sent His son, Jesus, who lived a sinless life and the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Through Jesus, God made the way for us to return to His family.

In the book of 1 Peter 3:18, we learn about how God and Jesus accomplished this for us.

Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.

We shouldn't judge God based on the behavior of religious people. Take a personal look and discover who the true Father is and how he deeply loves you, along with His Son Jesus. Jesus lived a sinless life for over 33 years and willingly sacrificed Himself for you and me, so that we can have that intimate relationship again with our loving Father!

What's God saying to you in all of this?

If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, I encourage you to closely explore the truths in the Bible. Begin by reading one or more of the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John to learn about

Jesus' life and the life giving relationship that is available to each and every one of us.

You can read online from many resources and here is a great one found at bible.com I really like the NLT New Living Translation version.

If you are a Christian, may we all be encouraged to live like Jesus before others. Love them the way He loves you! Walk in the manner Jesus did when He lived among people on Earth.



Dad

I don't know about you, but there are times in my life when my memory doesn't recall the things I need as quickly as I want. Sometimes it's something I did earlier in the day, and I have to pause and think. If someone asks me about something from a week or two ago, it's hard for me to remember. There are times when I walk into a room with so much on my mind that by the time I arrive, I've already thought about five other things and forget why I entered the room.

I truly believe that our culture today plays a role in this. We're bombarded with so much information that we have to process every second, even when we're awake and asleep. It's like we have too much to remember. I had heard years ago that the average person processes over 35,000 thoughts per day and has to make decisions based on all of that processing. It's no wonder our culture offers various escapes to quiet our minds. Personally, I don't think it was God's intention for us to be so overwhelmed by input.

On the other hand, I've always been amazed at the memories that return to me from my childhood. The vivid recollections feel like

they're happening right now. One fond memory stands out, a moment in time that I can revisit and see so clearly. Not only can I see it, but I can also relive it, as if I'm there all over again.

I recall a cherished memory of my parents often sitting on their back porch, enjoying moments together after their work was done. One beautiful sunny day, I remember finding my dad sitting alone on the porch, and he kindly invited me to join him. He was wearing his white T-shirt, neatly tucked in, which he often changed into after a day's work. I was around four years old, and I can vividly see the scene: I climbed up onto the porch couch and moved close to my dad's left side. The couch gently rocked, and I snuggled up against his chest, resting my head on him. He wrapped his arm around me, and we sat there in a tranquil moment.

I could hear his breathing and catch the scent of his aftershave, his fondness for old spice. The feeling of peace and relaxation while being with my dad was profound. I felt safe, secure, and most of all, deeply loved. Each time I recall this memory, it's as if I'm four years old again, sitting there with my dad experiencing his very essence.

As the years went by and I embraced Christianity, I encountered similar moments of peace and security with God, akin to what I experienced with my earthly dad. But with God, the connection is even stronger. During the toughest times in my life is when I've most often sensed God's nearness.

A mentor once guided me to create a timeline of my life, marking significant events and experiences from my earliest days until the

present. We discussed some of these events, and my mentor pointed to a painful period in my early years in life. He encouraged me to spend time with God, revisiting those memories.

In the following week, I reflected on those past events, the people involved, and the pain they brought. Amid the recollections, something became clear—an aspect I hadn't noticed before. God's faithfulness in my life stood out prominently. He had been there consistently, through both joyful and challenging times.

This realization brought a liberating sense to my life. While I'd always recognized God's faithfulness and encountered it at various points, reviewing specific instances illuminated a new depth of love and faithfulness from a Heavenly Father who genuinely cares for me.

Through my journey with God over the years, He has unveiled the profound significance of Psalms 34:8:

Taste and see that the Lord is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!

I can genuinely attest that I have tasted and witnessed His goodness throughout my life's journey.

My life has been forever transformed. Jesus taught us that the foremost commandment is to love the Lord with our whole being, and the second is to love our neighbors as ourselves. Only after truly understanding this comprehensive love and care I receive in every facet of my life—be it good, bad, or indifferent—can I genuinely comprehend

how to love others. I have found that it's through His unconditional love that I've learned to love others in the same way.

During His time on Earth, Jesus often chose to sit on the Mount of Olives, a favorite place of His for prayer, especially in the middle of the night. The Bible reveals that one night, He prayed fervently for Jerusalem and all its people.

In Matthew 23:37, his prayer is captured:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me.

In this instance, Jesus prayed for a people who had turned away from God, rejecting prophets and killing those sent by Him. Despite their actions, Jesus' heart was filled with compassion and sorrow for them. He wished to shelter them, much like a hen cares for her chicks under her wings. His desire was to protect and love them, yet they chose not to embrace His love. God grants each of us the freedom to make choices, even when He sends people and His written word to guide us. He gives us a free will to love Him or not.

I firmly believe that if people truly grasped the essence of God and His son Jesus, along with the profound sacrifices He made for us, they would not reject Him but would eagerly draw near.

Upon my initial journey into Christianity, I possessed very little knowledge of the Bible. As I delved into it, my understanding deepened beyond simple facts. The Bible unveiled to me a loving Father who remained steadfastly faithful to His children, regardless of their actions. He displayed His unwavering care and love for humanity, extending even to those who were yet to know Him. This divine love prompted Him to send Jesus to die for all—every one of us, including you and me—to forgive our sins.

Years ago, I encountered a negative and judgmental comment about God. Although no specific scripture came to mind at the moment, the comment deeply wounded me, piercing my heart. My immediate response was to reject the notion that this was the true character of God. I spoke out – No that's not my Father - God! That is not who He is nor His character!

I realized that reading about God in the Bible was just the beginning; understanding His character and love came through years of walking with Him—through the ups and downs of my life. Through these experiences, I came to know His love for me and everyone else, including you. Approximately 15 years after becoming a Christian, I reached a point where I can say I truly fell in love with Jesus. This wasn't due to my deepening pursuit of Him, but because He pursued me, despite my shortcomings.

Stop today and seek Him and His beautiful essence...

What is God saying to you? Take a moment and ask Him...

Scriptures to meditate on:

Zephaniah 3:17

For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.

Psalms 100:5

For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation.

Psalms 86:5

O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help.



The Journey

We're all on our own journeys. I'd like to share a story from my life with you and tell you about a trip I once took in the Green Mountains. I'm originally from Vermont, and I used to do a lot of hiking. Just like the journeys we take when we hike, it's important to follow the map and the trails. If you make a wrong turn, you have to figure out how to get back on track.

I remember my good friend Roger and I went up the mountain one night. When we were younger, our parents would drop us off on Friday nights, and we'd hike up Mount Mansfield, the tallest mountain in Vermont. We were hiking along, trusting we were on the right path. Oh by the way, did I mention that I loved hiking in winter, so we had snowshoes and backpacks with us. In winter, it can be tough to see the trail because everything is covered in fluffy snow.

Suddenly, after getting closer to the summit and about halfway across toward the camping area, we realized we had wandered off the trail. We were actually too high up, at the top of a cliff, looking down at the correct trail. So in our youthful wisdom, we decided to go down the edge of the cliff to reach the trail again. It wasn't very far,

approximately a 30-foot drop. We threw our backpacks down first, and they landed softly in the snow, just like on a foam mattress.

We started descending the side of the 30-foot cliff, thinking it was a good idea. But it turned out not to be so great. We slid down faster than we expected. We landed in the thick, powdery snow, just like our backpacks did. Thankfully, there were no rocks or trees to hit. It was kind of like landing on a huge fluffy bed.

Thank God, we made it safely, and I'm here now, many years later, to share this story with you. Just like our hiking journey, life's journey can sometimes be clear and easy to follow, while other times, there are no markers, and we might feel lost or uncertain. We might worry about going off track or not reaching our destination.

As people, we're all on a journey, whether we're aware of it or not. This journey has a beginning and an end. Let me share three possible scenarios that could reflect where you find yourself on this path:

1. You're enjoying the journey, knowing where you're headed, and everything is going well. It can't get any better.
2. You could be feeling unsure, moving forward one step at a time. This might seem a little scary or overwhelming. Fear could be a part of your life, especially when considering what lies ahead.
3. You might have strayed from the right path due to mistakes and regrets. You're seeking to find your way back but aren't sure if it's possible.

I have good news for you: No matter which path you are on, God loves you. He tells us in the Bible that He sent His son, Jesus, to pay for our mistakes. Jesus lived a perfect life and died on our behalf. He rose from the dead on the third day, proving He's the Son of God.

Even if we're doing well in life, we still make mistakes. We all fall short. God offers salvation, grace and love through the free gift of Jesus. Turn from your sins, believe in Jesus, and accept this free gift.

He gives us this good news in Romans 5:6-11

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good.

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation.

For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ

|| *has made us friends of God.*

You can say, “Yes, Father, I believe Jesus died for my sins, and He’s the way to You.”

Jesus said in John 14:6

|| *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.*

No matter how you’re feeling during life’s journey, whether things are going really well for you or not, it’s important to note that if you’re not following God’s path, there’s a dangerous situation ahead, a cliff that you will fall off of. Even though it might not be easily noticeable, it leads to spiritual death and being separated from God forever.

I encourage you to read the book of John in the Bible, get to know more about Jesus, and work on building a relationship with a loving Father. If you genuinely seek Him, you’ll discover Him.

If you don’t have a physical Bible, there are many online versions available. I recommend using the free app from Life Church at found at bible.com. You can access it on your phone or computer.

What is God saying to you today?



What Do
You See?

Over the years, I've found the answer
to this cultural dilemma.
I genuinely believe that those who fully
understand it will find true freedom

In a previous job, I lived 44 miles away from my workplace, which meant I had to drive over 88 miles daily for my commute. This journey provided me with a chance to think, listen to online teachings, and some audio books. As time passed, it commute became almost automatic, allowing me to process countless thoughts and ideas during the drive.

During those 88-mile drives, I often wondered about the people in their cars all around me, some moving at such high speed, passing just inches apart. At times I wondered what was going on in their world right now with the day ahead of them.

Over the years, I witnessed some devastating accidents and wondered what had caused them. What distracted the drivers? In some cases, I even saw accidents happen right in front of me, unfolding like a surreal, unexpected event in slow motion.

I have read that the average person processes over 35,000 pieces of information daily, a burden brought by the technology meant to

simplify our lives. This constant mental work starts as soon as we wake up and sometimes continues while we try to sleep.

Statistics show that people spend nearly 2,000 hours per year in front of a computer, plus an extra 1,100 hours on social media. To escape this mental overload, many turn to television, watching around 1,500 hours per year.

We've all experienced moments when we need to focus, but our minds keep bombarding us with thoughts. I remember when I used to program robotic machines; my concentration was so intense that I could block out the world. After work, my mind would still work on solving problems and programming tasks. Sometimes, solutions would come to me in the shower the next morning, as if my mind kept processing even while I slept unconsciously.



Later in my life, I worked as an air traffic controller. I recall one day while working a high volume departure rush east bound from the Dallas Fort Worth airport, I had to process an enormous amount of data, radio calls, computer entries, and communications with other

controllers. At the conclusion of this work session, a fellow controller sitting next to me turned and asked, “Did you notice the school tour group with around 30 kids watching from right behind us during that departure rush?” I replied, “I didn’t see a single person.”

At times, we must be deeply focused to do our jobs or a task at hand. We often ignore distractions or things that appear less important at the moment. Our experiences may vary, but we share a culture that inundates us and overwhelms our minds daily.

I recall simpler days from my youth, like when I was in first grade. Back then, I faced an issue that seemed overwhelming and impossible. But a few years later, in third grade, I realized it wasn’t a big problem at all. It’s interesting how time can change our perspective on things.

As I look back on my various journeys and experiences. I sometimes still wonder what the people around me see and think as they go about their day. Most of us are preoccupied with our daily tasks, like picking up the kids, going to the grocery store, or heading to work.

Over the years, I’ve found the answer to this cultural dilemma. I genuinely believe that those who fully understand it will find true freedom.

When you’re in your car on the road, what do you notice around you?
What thoughts occupy your mind as you go through your day?
What holds significance for you right now in your life?
What might distract or divert your attention?
What are the things that matter most to you?

What is it that you're seeking in your journey?

The Bible, in Matthew chapter 6 says:

Matthew 6:31-33

So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

The Bible, in Colossians chapter 3, guides us on what to focus on in life:

Colossians 3:1-4

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

Start each day focusing on the “realities of heaven” and your mind will be thinking about what really matters. Then all the other things will fall in place.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Unexpected



Around 2005, I had a short 10-minute outpatient surgery. The procedure went smoothly, and the doctor had just finished when the nurses came to move me out of the operating room. I was awake, and everything seemed fine. But then, suddenly, I started feeling very weak and began seeing stars. The last words I remember uttering were, “I feel like I’m about to pass out.”

In an instant, I lost consciousness and found myself in a completely different place. It was as if I were standing in a massive movie theater-like room. There was an enormous screen in front of me, and I stood before it, watching something truly mind-blowing. The scene before me was filled with intensely bright white light, and the images moved at a speed almost beyond comprehension, streaking from the right to the left side of the screen. The perspective from which I observed it made these rapidly moving images appear crisp and clear, containing millions of details which amazed me.

I recall thinking at that moment that there were so many details in what I was witnessing that it would take thousands of books to describe them all. I must have appeared utterly awestruck as I took it all in. My consciousness at that time exceeded what I experience in my everyday life. I had no sense of how long I remained in that state, but I had no desire to do anything other than absorb what I was witnessing.

Then, I began to hear a voice behind me and to my right, calling out, “Mr. Sawtelle, Mr. Sawtelle.” I grew increasingly frustrated because the voice was disrupting this incredible experience in front of me. It felt similar to when you’re half-awake and half-asleep in bed, and someone

tries to wake you up, but you simply want to be left alone. I was annoyed that I was being bothered during this remarkable experience.

The voice persisted, growing louder and more intense until I finally came back. I opened my eyes to see both the anesthesiologist and the doctor peering down at me, urgently asking, “Are you okay?” I immediately responded, “I just had the most beautiful vivid dream I’ve ever had!” The anesthesiologist said, “Tell me about it!”

As I returned to full consciousness, the intricate details of what I had seen on the screen gradually faded away. I still clearly remember the experience I’ve described here as if it just happened, but the immense details of what I saw on the screen I can not longer recall. The doctor informed me that I had undergone a vagal event, which caused my heart to stop, and I had “died.” They had to perform CPR and administer adrenaline to revive me.

I didn’t go in that day thinking about dying as it sure wasn’t what I was expecting, but it happened. It was totally unexpected! Just like the old saying, “The only sure thing in life is death and taxes.”

Many people avoid thinking about or discussing death and dying. But why is that? It’s because no one truly desires to confront the idea of their own mortality. This avoidance may stem from a fear of the act of dying itself, the uncertainty about what comes after death, or even the process of dying.

In my early years, I had an intense fear of death. The first six years of my life were filled with events that I now recognize as the cause of

this overwhelming fear. I was brought up in the Catholic Church, and around the age of 4 or 5, I distinctly remember hearing in catechism about Adam and Eve eating an apple and dying, or at least that's how my 4-year-old mind grasped it. Shortly after that, while eating an apple, I choked on a piece of it, and I was completely consumed by fear.

In my early years, my dad had once shot a deer during a hunting trip in the fall, and I somehow believed he had shot Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. It may sound funny now, but to a 3-year-old, it was a devastating experience.

When I was around 5 years old, President Kennedy was shot and died. As a young boy, I watched the funeral procession on TV, witnessing the entire world pause for this momentous event. I remember thinking that my dad resembled President Kennedy, and I began to worry whether my dad was also going to be shot and die. This only deepened the roots of fear in my life.

When I was in 1st grade, a friend and I were asked to be altar boys and serve at a funeral. This marked the very first time I had ever attended a funeral. I can still vividly recall the image in my mind: standing to the right side of the priest, holding the incense, and being just about three feet away from the casket. It was my first encounter seeing a deceased person so close up. The fear that overcame me was overwhelming.

After the funeral, my friend and I hurried to his house. We closed all the blinds, then sat in the living room until his parents returned from work that day. It was the only day in my life that I skipped school.

During that period, my golden lab dog Princess was my closest friend and was growing old. One day, I came home from school only to discover that she was no longer with us. My parents had her put to sleep, but they never told me before hand, probably wanting to make it easier on me to process. Nonetheless, I was shocked and overwhelmed with fear upon hearing the news when I came home that day.

All of these experiences at such a young age left me with a devastating fear of death. Years later on my journey with God I discovered what He has to say about this matter. It's essential to consider His perspective to truly understand this concept. God's perspective can provide us with valuable insights.

God's teachings mention two deaths. Most people are familiar with the first death, but not everyone has heard about the second death. The good news is that you have the choice to avoid the second death.

You might be wondering, "What do you mean?" If this is the first time you're hearing about this concept, it can be confusing. Let me explain it to you using passages from God's Word.

» The first death is our physical death that every one of us will experience here on Earth.

Hebrews 9:27-28

And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with

our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.

It's because of our sin.

Romans 3:23

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

» The second death is being separated from God for eternity. He describes it in the book of revelation.

Revelation 21:8

But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

Also Revelation 20:13-15

The sea gave up its dead, and death and the grave gave up their dead. And all were judged according to their deeds. Then death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire.

This lake of fire is the second death. And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Matthew 10:28

Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

The second death is described as the “lake of fire,” and it is reserved for those whose names are not written in the book of life.

The good news is that through Jesus’ sacrifice, freely offered by God, we can be made right in His sight when we believe in Jesus as our savior. Those who believe will have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Romans 3:22, 24-26

We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate

his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

There are currently over 8 billion people alive on Earth, and this number continues to grow daily. The reality is that in 100 years from now, more than 8 billion people will have passed away and be buried. I recently had a conversation with a young lady who believed that



when she reached Heaven, God would assess her good deeds against the bad things she had done in her life. She hoped that her good actions would outweigh the bad, granting her entry into Heaven. Many people share this belief. Some even question, “Why would a good God send someone to hell?” The truth is that God doesn’t send

anyone to hell. In fact, He tells us that hell was never intended for humanity but was created for Satan and the fallen angels.

It's our choice to believe God or not.

John 3:16-18

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him.

But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son.

We can never be good enough to earn our place in Heaven. It is only through believing in the free gift of Jesus, which is offered to each of us, that we can find salvation. The choice is ours to make, and through this belief, we can escape the second death.

Ephesians 2:8-9

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

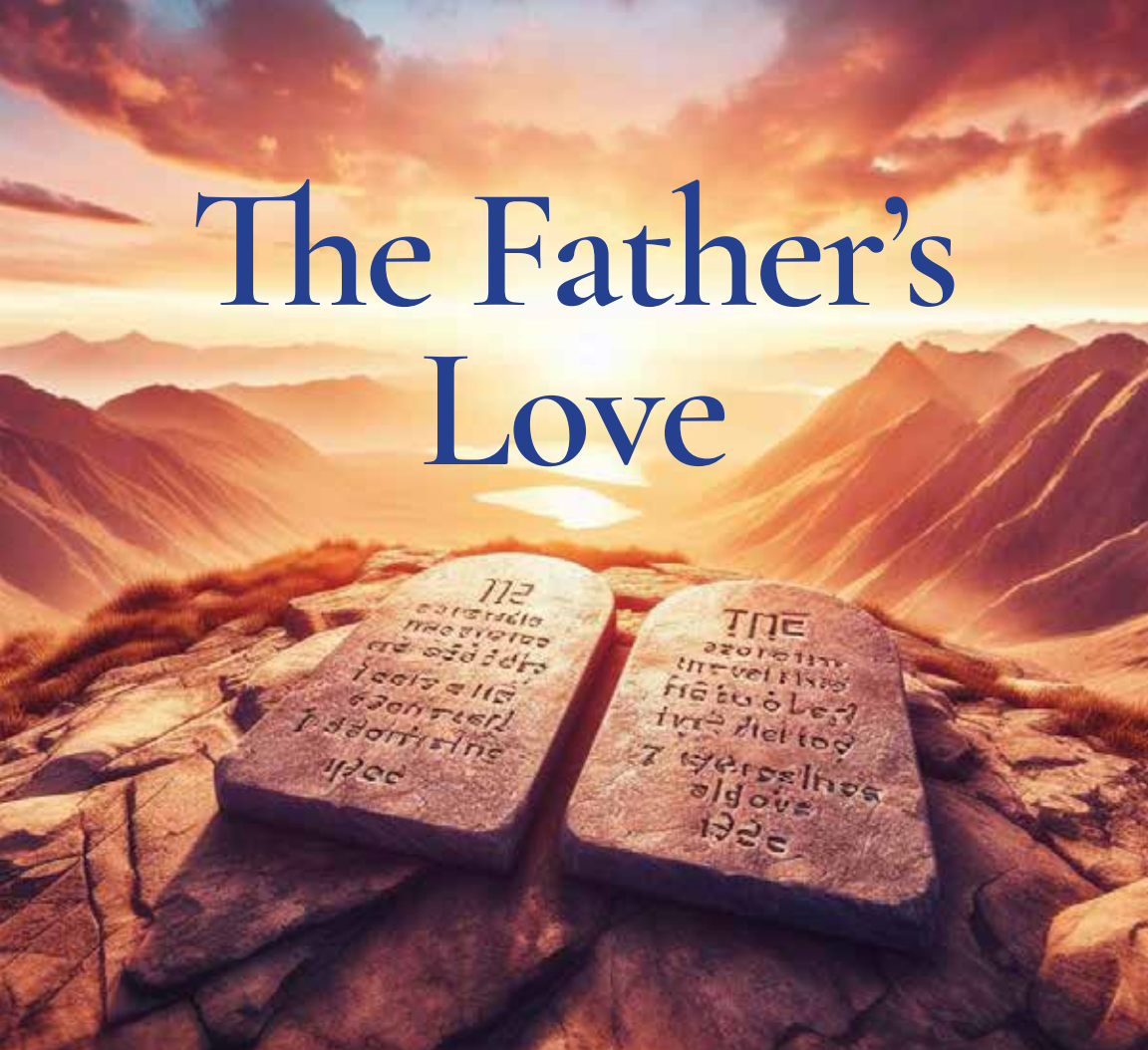
Consider this:

If we could earn our way to Heaven through good deeds alone, why would God have sent His son, Jesus, to be the perfect Lamb of God and endure a painful and agonizing death on the cross to atone for our sins? He lived the righteous life we should have lived and died the death we deserved to wipe away our sins.

It all comes down to what we do with this gift. Have you made the choice to turn away from your sins and accept the free gift God offers you today? If you have, God promises that you will never face the eternal second death but instead gain eternal life with God in Heaven forever.

I no longer fear death!

The Father's Love



I recently had a conversation with someone who had never heard of the Ten Commandments. This led me to reflect on the state of awareness regarding these fundamental principles. I came across a poll that suggested more people could list the ingredients in a Big Mac hamburger than they could name any of the Ten Commandments.

In my generation, we were taught these commandments from a very young age. Most people of that time could easily recite all ten. They were displayed on posters in some schools and in most churches. We

didn't view them as something negative; rather, they served as a moral compass for both society and individuals.

It's disheartening to see that many in today's culture lack knowledge of these commandments, and this lack of awareness is evident in the way we treat one another. I've encountered people who believe that the Ten Commandments reflect a God who restricts our enjoyment or seeks to discipline and control us. This saddens me deeply.

Some individuals argue that the Ten Commandments belong to the Old Testament and that we no longer live under the old testament law. However, when you carefully read them, you'll see that they remain relevant to our daily lives, even in our current culture and generation.

During those years, we have the opportunity to
help prepare them for their life's journey

As I reflect on this, I find myself asking why so many people haven't heard of God's Ten Commandments or, for those who have heard of them, why they struggle to name more than just a couple. It seems to me that we may no longer value these commandments or view them as important, or perhaps we are simply unaware of their existence.

Now that I'm older and have experienced being a dad, I have gained a much deeper appreciation and understanding of why God gave us these commandments. I recall moments when my children were young, and it was my responsibility as a father to love and protect

them. In doing so, I also had to teach them the distinction between right and wrong.

I embraced this process and responsibility, learning as I went along. I succeeded at times and faltered at others, but I was committed to trying to do the right thing. One principle I always tried to uphold was to be consistent and ensure that every time I imparted these values to my children, it was done out of love.

Depending on their age and their capacity to comprehend and learn, I had to adapt and adjust my approach as they grew. I believe that raising children is a blessing and a joy, and our responsibility extends until they reach around age 18 or a bit beyond. During those years, we have the opportunity to help prepare them for their life's journey.

God gives us insight into how to do this and it is found in:

Proverbs 22:6

Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.

There were moments when my children needed to understand the importance of listening to what I said and obeying. It wasn't about wanting to control them; it was about instilling crucial lessons at a young age. I would offer them examples to illustrate why obedience was necessary.

For instance, I would tell them if they were about to run into the road without noticing the car about to hit them, I would call out to

them to stop. It was essential to protect them from potential harm, especially because they were unaware of the road's dangers. After all they were shorter, unable to see beyond the car as I could. Regardless of their willingness to comply, their safety and well-being required them to obey when I asked them to stop. It all stemmed from my deep love for them and my desire to keep them safe.

Jesus replied,
“You must love the Lord your God with all your
heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’
This is the first and greatest commandment.

A second is equally important:
‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’
The entire law and all the demands of the
prophets are based on these
two commandments.”

Matthew 22:37-40

As they entered their teenage years, the foundational values I had instilled in them would be tested. They had more freedom and room to make choices on their own. However, as a father, my heart remained steadfastly focused on them and their protection, always desiring the very best for them.

One remarkable thing I've experienced as a father is that my love for my children remains unwavering, whether they obey and do the right thing or make mistakes. Even when they choose wrongly and get hurt, my love for them stays just as strong and focused. As a dad, when my children made the wrong choice, I often wished I could have shouldered their pain, taking it upon myself instead of on them.

My mom used to say something that she shared with me as I grew older, and now I fully grasp its meaning. She would say that when your children are little, they might step on your toes at times, but as they get older, there are times when they step on your heart.

Reflecting on my parents, I consider them incredible individuals. They faced their own trials in life, and as a dad now, I thank God for everything I received from them, both in their good times and not-so-good times. Looking back, I understand the love they had for me, and I love them in the same way.

Looking to the Ten Commandments, I now more fully comprehend that God gave them not to be harsh, but because He is the most perfect and loving Father. He gave these commandments not to restrain us but to protect us because He genuinely loves us. And in that we find true freedom.

Now, as a Christian, I understand a much deeper reason behind the gift of the Ten Commandments. As I honestly examine them, I recognize that I have, at many times in my life, fallen short and have sinned. It's through this realization that I see God's free offer of redemption

and salvation, which I so desperately need. I consider it the greatest gift bestowed upon all of humanity.

In the scriptures God teaches us that He gave us the law so that we would recognize our own shortcomings as sinners. However, God didn't stop at merely revealing our sins. He provided us with a solution, and that solution is His son, Jesus—a free gift to all.

This is why the law “10 commandments” were given.

Romans 3:20

For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

Abraham's faith and understanding this truth is described as this in the next chapter:

Romans 4:2-5

If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way.

For the Scriptures tell us, “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned.

But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners.

Jesus gave us the answer as this:

John 14:6

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

Imagine if we never knew that we had sinned then we would not have known that we need a savior.

Jesus gave His life for each of us so that if we believe like Abraham did in faith we are made right with God and our sins are forgiven.

Not by our works but by His love!

The Ten Commandments

Just like a great Father He even explains the “why” in some of these to help us understand.

Exodus 20:1-17

1. “Then God gave the people all these instructions : “I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. “You must not have any other god but me.
2. “You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.
3. “You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name.
4. “Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes

you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

5. "Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you.
6. "You must not murder.
7. "You must not commit adultery.
8. "You must not steal.
9. "You must not testify falsely against your neighbor.
10. "You must not covet your neighbor's house. You must not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor."



Prisoner of War

My father served as a soldier in World War II, fighting in both France and Germany. He held the rank of Master Sergeant in artillery, operating the 105 Howitzer, and led a group of about 100 men. Despite my curiosity, he rarely spoke about his wartime experiences. Throughout my life, he only shared a couple of stories with me.

My generation, one of the last to have firsthand connections to the people who fought in that war, encountered veterans who, like my father, didn't often discuss their wartime memories. Despite the challenges, these young men recognized the importance of stepping up to fight in a war they didn't start but knew they had to finish to preserve the freedom we enjoy today.

After my father passed away, I discovered a movie series called "Band of Brothers," depicting the European part of World War II. Watching the 12 hours of the movie, I found myself crying through much of it. The reenacted scenes of the cities and battles my dad mentioned brought his experiences to life. It made me appreciate the sacrifices made by the heroes who gave their lives and those who returned home, having paid the price for our freedom. Reflecting on history, I feel

grateful for their courage, especially considering the unimaginable hardships they endured.

In addition to the fallen heroes, I've encountered stories of those captured and held as prisoners of war. Many never made it out of the prison camps, and those who did share tales of the unthinkable things done to them. These individuals, too, are heroes deserving of our honor, respect and gratitude.

Recently, I joined a group of men from our church on a visit to one of our state prisons. The journey to get there took us about 2 1/2 hours. Paperwork and background checks had been completed a month earlier to ensure our visit. Upon arrival, we navigated the meticulous process to gain access. We left any valuables in our vehicle, only carrying our IDs. Passing through metal detectors, we underwent manual searches, removing shoes and belts. Once cleared, we gathered outside the barbed wire fence, awaiting the prison staff's welcome.

The first gate opened, and we entered, the gate closing behind us. We lined up between two tall, barbed-wire fences as the second gate opened, allowing us to walk through before closing again. It was then that the surreal feeling of being confined in prison, unable to leave, struck me. A sign indicated that we were now under the responsibility of the prison system.

Walking across a beautifully landscaped lawn and shrubs towards a large building, I reflected on how the prisoners likely contributed to this well-maintained environment. They seemed to take pride in their work.

Gathering outside another door of the building, it swung open, revealing a large room with hundreds of men dressed in white prison outfits. As we walked through the crowd, shaking hands and exchanging greetings, I wasn't sure what to expect. Working my way to the next door, we were directed outside into the hallway. I greeted and was greeted by many, looking into each person's eyes as if I could see into their hearts, and it deeply moved me.

The organization working with these men was called Pathway to Freedom (PTF). The head of this organization met us and gave us a one-hour tour of the facility. This program had a maximum capacity of 200 men.

Many who desired to be part of it had to enroll and be placed on a waiting list. They didn't have to be a Christian to be in program. We found out that only 21.7% of those that graduate this program ever return to prison so the fruit of lives changed is huge!

He admitted that in the past, he wouldn't have talked to someone like me, as he only trusted those who had been in prison.

In the hallway, we were given an overview of PTF. We then entered some of the barracks, there were about 75 beds and various chairs. Men filled the space, occupying beds, chairs, and standing by the door. All eyes were on us, and our gaze reciprocated, taking in each individual.

The leader of the ministry addressed both the inmates and our group, sharing the ministry's goals and the positive outcomes of their work. Occasionally, he invited inmates to share their perspectives, and I was impressed by those who stepped forward, speaking deeply from their hearts. I began to witness the trans-formative work that only God could do in the hearts of these men.

As we delved into the intricacies of the ministry and how they invested in the men, I marveled at the attention to detail and intentionality in every aspect. In the computer room, two inmates presented the purpose and training offered to help men in the program. The overarching goal was to prepare these men for success upon their release into what they referred to as the "free world." They not only provided practical skills but also walked with the men through their personal journeys, evaluating past mistakes and imparting God's guidance to overcome future trials and challenges. The leadership recognized that only God could bring about the profound change in a man's heart, and the program was a vessel for that transformation.

Eventually, we all gathered in a large meeting room that accommodated all 200 inmates as well as us guests. Very few open seats remained, and we were instructed to find empty seats and sit with the inmates. The only available seat I found was on the very back row, with one seat between two guys. I greeted them, and they told me their names. The service promptly began with worship. From my vantage point in the last row, I could see the entire room. About 90% of the attendees stood during worship, but some of those toward the back, just sat there with their heads down, appearing uninterested.

As the service unfolded, I observed some of the men, and even those who initially appeared to have checked out starting to look up. I could see them beginning to sing the words of the songs. Although most of the songs were not ones I recognized, the men there were familiar with them. As the worship service continued, I noticed that they began to sing with such intensity, making the words of the songs their own. They truly grasped the message conveyed by the lyrics, which spoke about God and His trans-formative work.



After the worship time, a man stood up and shared some teachings from the Bible. Following a short break, we transitioned into small group time. I returned to the computer lab, where around 12 inmates were gathered. I sat down with them, and a couple of other visitors

joined us. During the hour, we discussed the day's teaching, which focused on being a servant.

Everyone in the group opened up and shared their hearts. It was an incredible time with these men, hearing about their journeys that led them to this place and how God was transforming them from the inside out.

I had the opportunity to share a couple of things, and the man sitting directly behind me, one of the inmates, expressed appreciation. He admitted that in the past, he wouldn't have talked to someone like me, as he only trusted those who had been in prison. He shared how God was changing his heart.

The Apostle Paul, around 2000 years ago, wrote a letter while he was in prison to a man named Philemon. Paul shared his imprisonment with another man named Onesimus. During their time together, Paul told Onesimus about Jesus and taught him about the Kingdom of God.

As a result, Onesimus became a Christian, a believer, and his life was transformed from the inside out, much like many of the men in the prison I visited.

Listen to what Paul writes about his heart towards this changed man.

Philemon 1:8-11

That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do.

But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me—Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus. I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus.

I became his father in the faith while here in prison. Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us.

Onesimus was in prison because he had committed a crime possibly even against Philemon. Paul's heart towards this man was so beautiful! Let's continue reading the letter he wrote.

Philemon 1:15-18

It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever. He is no longer like a slave to you.

He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me.

Paul says that this man is now a beloved brother and no longer a slave he is a brother in the Lord. What a true transformation that only God can do. I saw the same thing at the prison that I visited and these men that I had the privilege of walking together with that day.

At the end of the service, once again, I found myself sitting in the very back between two men. As we all stood up to walk out, we began to talk. Looking into their eyes, I sensed kindness and compassion. We shared what God had done in our lives, and as we opened up, tears flowed. It was a beautiful moment of genuine connection and shared vulnerability.

What struck me the most was the profound intimacy that many of these men had with God. Their knowledge of Him and their walk with Him were evident in their lives. I witnessed men inside who might never set foot outside the prison again due to their sentences, but now they knew Jesus. I saw them dedicating their lives to share about Him and to break cycles even within the prison walls by investing into the lives of the others.

On that day, I witnessed the purest form of freedom, and it was found behind the walls of this prison. What I saw and experienced that day was a vast family, the true family of God!

My hope is that not only America but the entire world would come to know and experience the kind of freedom that only God can bring. There are many people on the outside of those walls in America today who are in a prison without even realizing it. Many are trapped in

various things, and they are nowhere near as free as the men behind those bars.

Jesus reveals the heart of a generation that I believe is talking to America and the world where we are right now in history. What he describes is a people that are in prison and are prisoners of a war that they don't even realize that they're in. Jesus is the only one that holds the key to open the door to freedom!

Revelation 3:14-20

Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. This is the message from the one who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's new creation:

I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!

You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed

by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see.

I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference. “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.

No matter what circumstance you are in on your journey of life, may you truly find the freedom that only God can give.



Eyes Wide Shut

When I was younger, my mom worked as a seamstress and often sewed for people who needed her expertise. She was incredibly skilled at it, and I found her sewing machine fascinating for its smooth operation and precision. However, there was one aspect of sewing that posed a challenge for her, and she would frequently ask me for help.

You see, I had young and sharp eyesight, so she relied on me to thread the needles for her. I completely understood that as people age, their vision may not be as keen as it once was. Now even more so at my age.

The ability to see is of immense importance, and I can't fathom the challenges faced by someone who is blind, trying to accomplish daily tasks. I have a friend who lost his sight later in life, yet he remains remarkably active and capable. His normal daily achievements fill me with awe and wonder, considering how he manages to do things. He exudes joy and happiness even in the midst of being blind.

In the book of John, Jesus made a profound statement that has always resonated with me. Jesus had just performed a miraculous healing, restoring the sight of a man who had been blind from birth.

It's truly an incredible story that you can revisit, it's found in John chapter 9. However, the religious leaders, instead of recognizing the miracle, focused on the fact that Jesus had done it on the Sabbath, which infuriated them. They had totally missed the miracle before their eyes.

Later on, Jesus had a conversation with the man whom He had healed, the man who could now see.

John 9:35-41

When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "The man answered, "Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him." "You have seen him," Jesus said, "and he is speaking to you!" "Yes, Lord, I believe!" the man said. And he worshiped Jesus.

Then Jesus told him, "I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind."

Some Pharisees who were standing nearby heard him and asked, "Are you saying we're blind?" "If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty," Jesus replied. "But you remain guilty because you claim you can see."

Jesus's statement carries intense spiritual significance. He came to offer spiritual sight to those who are spiritually blind and to reveal to those who believe they see spiritually that they are, in fact, spiritually blind.

The essence of God's love extends to all of humanity, including those who may not yet see the truth spiritually, even individuals like the Pharisees. God's desire is that they, too, may come to understand the spiritual truth Jesus is teaching.

What is the truth? This is the crucial question we should all contemplate. The pursuit of truth is a noble endeavor because who would willingly choose to embrace falsehoods, which are lies, when the truth is attainable?

During the time of Jesus, the religious leaders, the Pharisees, frequently attempted to trap Him and even planned His death because of His teachings. Jesus devoted time to ministering to people, healing them and proclaiming the Kingdom of God and salvation, but this didn't fit their religious guidelines.

The Pharisees often attended Jesus's teachings and sought to deceive Him. They projected themselves as more knowledgeable than anyone else. Yet, Jesus, with His deep understanding of their hearts and their evil intentions, openly addressed their pride and arrogance.

There were instances when Jesus performed miracles and healed individuals in synagogues on the Sabbath, which enraged the Pharisees because working on the Sabbath was considered unacceptable.

They remained blind to the miracles occurring before their eyes due to their pride and arrogance, even though they were expected to be the spiritual leaders of their time. Jesus didn't hesitate to call them hypocrites and rebuke them directly.

Here is a brief excerpt from a larger passage, which you can explore in the book of Matthew.

Matthew 23:1-13,15

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses. So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach.

They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden. "Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear robes with extra long tassels.

And they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the seats of honor in the synagogues. They love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi.' "Don't let anyone call you 'Rabbi,' for you have only one

teacher, and all of you are equal as brothers and sisters. And don't address anyone here on earth as 'Father,' for only God in heaven is your Father. And don't let anyone call you 'Teacher,' for you have only one teacher, the Messiah.

The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces. You won't go in yourselves, and you don't let others enter either. "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you yourselves are!"

And also:

Matthew 23:16-17,24,27-28

Blind guides! What sorrow awaits you! For you say that it means nothing to swear 'by God's Temple,' but that it is binding to swear 'by the gold in the Temple.'

Blind fools! Which is more important—the gold or

the Temple that makes the gold sacred?

Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!

What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Indeed, Jesus had a direct and uncompromising teaching style, addressing the religious leaders, like the Pharisees, and others with clarity and frankness. He didn't hold back when it came to conveying His message and exposing hypocrisy. His teachings were meant to guide people into the Truth and challenge those who were contrary to the Truth.

Once again, Jesus confronts the Pharisees, and He gets to the heart of the matter for those who are spiritually blind. Take a look at the conversation found in the book of John:

John 8:43-47

Why can't you understand what I am saying? It's because you can't even hear me! For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do

the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning.

He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.

So when I tell the truth, you just naturally don't believe me! Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin? And since I am telling you the truth, why don't you believe me?

Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God. But you don't listen because you don't belong to God.

We come to understand that Satan is not only a liar but is also referred to as the “father of lies.” He is the source from which lies originate. The scriptures also describe Satan as a deceiver.

Deception can be defined as when someone believes a lie to be the truth and fails to recognize the lie. This is called a stronghold.

Revelation 12:9

This great dragon—the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—was thrown down to the earth with all his angels.

*John 10:10**The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy.**My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.*

The truth is that we are all engaged in a profound and often unnoticed spiritual battle. Some people may be aware of it, while others are not, but the depth of this ongoing spiritual conflict over us and our families is not fully comprehended by any of us.

In ancient times, strongholds were places fortified and strengthened to shield themselves from potential attacks by enemy forces. For instance, in biblical times, they constructed substantial walls around a city that attackers had to overcome before they could reach the people within the city. This defensive structure also provided them with an advantage, as they held the high ground when dealing with their assailants.

God instructs us in His Word to utilize specific weapons to dismantle these strongholds.

2 Corinthians 10:4

*We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons,
to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning
and to destroy false arguments.*

Pay attention to the verse's description of the stronghold, which is labeled a "stronghold of human reasoning" — it pertains to the way we think and what we believe. The directive is to eliminate false arguments, meaning we should confront and dismantle falsehoods.

The enemy's strategy is to deceive us into accepting a lie as truth, preventing us from recognizing it as a lie, and then we are spiritually blind.

In order to truly see we must recognize the lie that has blinded us to the truth. To dispel a lie, we must run after a quest to uncover the genuine truth.

Here's what Jesus had to say about truth:

John 8:32

And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

In various passages throughout the Bible, we are assured that God cannot lie, and His faithfulness is unwavering. This emphasizes the trustworthiness and reliability of God's word and promises, underscoring the importance of seeking and abiding in His truth.

Titus 1:2

This truth gives them confidence that they have eternal life, which God—who does not lie—promised them before the world began.

Jesus describes Himself as found in this verse:

John 14:6

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

So I ask you this, do you know the real truth about the Kingdom of God and His heart for you personally? Or are you believing a lie as truth and not realizing that you're believing a lie – a stronghold?

A man once shared with me that the Bible is God's love letter to mankind, written expressly for each of us and containing everything He desires for us to know Him.

In some of the scriptures we just read, we discovered that God cannot lie, and that Satan is the father of lies. We all have to be awake and aware of the ongoing spiritual battle, with Satan's aim being to steal, kill, and destroy each of us.

It is so crucial not to remain spiritually blind but to open your spiritual eyes and perceive the reality of God's love and truth.

So keep your spiritual eyes wide open!



Joy

Walking through the halls filled with stunning artwork, I found myself captivated not just by the art itself but by the history it depicted.

Sometimes, when I'm on Facebook or Instagram, these things called Reels pop up, and suddenly, an hour of my life disappears! Have you seen the one with a baby in a high chair, where the mom or dad makes a clicking noise with their tongue, and the baby bursts into laughter? They keep doing it, and the baby just can't stop laughing. Before I know it, I'm laughing just as hard as the baby! It's so funny that I feel the need to share this new found joy with my family by sending them this cute video.

My daughter, Heather, is so precious and really patient with me, even though she probably receives more of these videos from me than any one else. Sometimes, she kindly tells me, "Dad, just a couple are enough." Followed by a smiley face. But I just can't help it—it's too much fun!

Remember what King Solomon wrote in the book of Proverbs?

Proverbs 17:22

A happy heart is like good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.

Having a good laugh truly feels great. There have been times when I've been so tired that I've ended up uncontrollably laughing at the silliest things—it's what they call being "slap happy."

What is your definition of joy?

Have you ever thought about it?

What does joy mean to you? Take a moment to really think about this.

People often say, "It brought me great joy." But what does that really mean? Does it mean joy is something given to us, suggesting we didn't have joy until it was given?

Think about the word "joyful." It means full of joy! Are you full of joy?

When was the last time you felt so joyful that it overwhelmed you?

If you're like most people in America, recalling such a time might take some effort. Why is that?

Dictionaries define joy as a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.

Many years ago when I worked as a software engineer in Texas, my company gave me the opportunity to work in Plymouth, England for

a few months. Towards the end of the time there, I took a vacation to Paris. I remember how much planning went into every detail, from organizing travel to crossing the English Channel by boat and then hopping onto the high-speed rail to Paris. I had booked a small hotel right in the middle of the city and relied on walking or public transportation to get around.

I made sure to visit landmarks like the Eiffel Tower and the Arc De Triomphe, but one of the places I was most excited about was the Louvre Museum. Even though I'm not an artist myself, I was eager to explore this famous place. Walking through the halls filled with stunning artwork, I found myself captivated not just by the art itself but by the history it depicted. It felt like I was getting a glimpse into moments from hundreds or even thousands of years ago through the eyes of the artists.

As I continued exploring this vast building, the excitement of seeing one of the most famous paintings ever painted was almost overwhelming. Finally, I entered the huge hall where the painting was displayed. However, a massive crowd blocked the view at first. When the crowd dispersed, I managed to approach a roped-off area that still felt too distant to properly see the painting.

When I caught a glimpse of the Mona Lisa, my initial feeling was one of disappointment. I couldn't get close enough, and the painting, secured behind glass, wasn't well-lit. It seemed too dark to appreciate and it was much smaller than I had thought. This painting, one that I had anticipated to be thrilling and joyful to see, turned out to be a huge letdown.

Have you ever been really excited about something only for it to fall short? It can leave you feeling empty and frustrated because what you expected was completely different from what happened.

Sometimes, people believe that becoming a Christian means everything will be flawless, and they won't face any more challenges in life. However, that is not entirely true. When you become a Christian your life does change. But it's your whole perspective as to how you see life, that changes, in an incredible way!

The Kingdom of God is often described as an upside-down Kingdom, meaning it's the opposite of what the world typically presents.

Take a look at how Jesus explains this:

Mark 9:33-37

After they arrived at Capernaum and settled in a house, Jesus asked his disciples, "What were you discussing out on the road?" But they didn't answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest.

He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, "Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else."

Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, "Anyone who welcomes

a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me.”

He also said:

Matthew 6:33-34

Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

We’re often informed that troubles might come our way during our journey on Earth. As a Christian, our perspective on these things changes entirely. We don’t view these challenges in the same way as we did before knowing Jesus; now, we understand and see how He can transform these challenges into something remarkable.

Here’s a promise I’ve personally witnessed in my own life, experiencing first hand how God accomplishes this for many others as well. Take a look:

Romans 8:28

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

It's crucial to grasp that our perspective on challenges differs from how the world sees them. The apostle Paul had a clear understanding of this, as he shares with us in 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 12:9

Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.

James offered his perspective on the troubles that might arise in our lives and how we should see them.

James 1:2-4

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

As Christians, we should adopt an attitude towards troubles that we may experience and see them not just as moments for joy but for great joy! Through my own experiences over the years, I've come to believe that as Christians, we're meant to look beyond the trouble. I hold firm to the belief, based on God's word, that everything is possible with Him.

Matthew 19:26

Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible.”

Therefore, I don’t solely focus on the trouble but instead anticipate what God will accomplish through these circumstances. Through faith, I’ve witnessed God do the seemingly impossible time and time again in my life.

I strongly believe that joy is a choice. The Bible tells us in the book of James to regard troubles of any kind as opportunities for great joy. Thus, the responsibility to experience joy lies with us.

Many people seek joy and happiness from things or people, but as Christians, we’re called to choose joy even in the face of trouble. Our ultimate joy comes from understanding and knowing our Father, ABBA, and His incredible attributes.

Ultimately, Jesus sets the perfect example for us on how to navigate our own journeys and find joy amidst challenges, regardless of how difficult they may seem.

Hebrews 12:2

We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.

Because of the joy awaiting him He endured the cross! He saw beyond the troubles set before Him and had joy!

Imagine being stranded alone on a mountain cliff, unable to move up or down, hanging on with just your fingertips with your feet hanging out over a 3000-foot drop. It seems hopeless with no way out, and to make matters worst, no one knows you're there needing rescue.

Then suddenly, a voice from the top of the cliff yells down to you, offering help with a rope to rescue you.

What would you say?

Surely, everyone would say "yes, send me the rope and rescue me."

Imagine the immense joy and relief once you're pulled up and safe on solid ground at the top of the cliff. You'd be overwhelmed with gratitude towards the one who rescued you!

That's precisely what God offers to anyone who has yet to meet Jesus and chooses to be born again. Jesus is the one who rescues us all!

All you have to do is say yes and grab the rope He's offering you today!



The Love Letter

Many years ago, when I was in junior high, I experienced a kind of love that felt almost overwhelming. I lived in a small town in Vermont with around 2000 people, while my nieces, who were a bit younger than me, lived 1800 miles away in Texas. They had a neighbor, about my age, who started writing letters to me. It was surprising because she confessed her love for me, even though we had never met. We began exchanging letters, and it was a time in my life when I had to figure out how to communicate with this girl.

I eagerly anticipated and felt excitement, knowing that a letter would arrive in the mail any day. I kept a keen eye out for it! I can still recall the feeling of holding one of those colorful envelopes in my hand and opening it. As I pulled out the letter and held it, I could smell the perfume she had lightly sprayed on it. It was a piece of paper she had touched and written on, pouring her heart out to me. I remember how it made my heart beat faster and my stomach fluttered with anticipation about what she might say. Back in my day, they called this

“puppy love.” But what an incredible experience! I can still remember it vividly, as if it happened just yesterday.

I recall the times when people would take the effort to sit down and handwrite a letter, carefully address it, buy a stamp, seal it in an envelope, and then take it to the post office to mail. As I grew older and eventually went off to college, my mom would write to me frequently. Just like when I was in junior high, I eagerly awaited these letters, knowing that my mom had dedicated her time to write them especially for me. Her love for me shone through the pages of these letters, and it meant the world to me. Those moments of love conveyed through those words will forever hold a special place in my heart.

I’m now reminded of another letter that was written as a love letter to you and me. It’s called the Bible.

What do you think about the Bible? Do you consider it a history book or do you consider it divinely written? Let’s explore some known things about it to better understand what the Bible really is.

Did you know the Bible contains 66 books written by 40 authors from three continents, using three languages over a span of 2000 years?

Compared to other ancient manuscripts, the Bible stands out for its vast evidence of accuracy.

For instance, Aristotle’s “Poetics” has over 1400 years between the original and the copy, with only five copies available for comparison. Plato’s writings span over 750 years from the original to the first copy,

with just seven copies for comparison. Similarly, Caesar's "Gallic Wars" spans over 1000 years from the original to the first copy, with only 10 copies available for comparison.

The New Testament has a span of less than 100 years between the original and the first copy. There are 5600 copies available to compare for accuracy.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls yielded over 950 manuscripts, covering nearly all the books of the Old Testament except Esther and Nehemiah. Another recent discovery has added more manuscripts, further strengthening evidence that supports the accuracy of the Old Testament.

The manuscripts forming our Bible of today, totaling thousands of copies, maintain an incredible 99.5% accuracy when compared to each other. These texts were meticulously written and scrutinized for precision. Unlike any other ancient manuscripts, the biblical texts underwent an exceptional level of quality control. If a scribe made even one error in copying the original manuscripts, that copy was completely destroyed, ensuring the preservation of accuracy across thousands of manuscripts.

If those facts aren't convincing enough about the Bible's accuracy, consider this: no other book, religious or otherwise, has provided the kind of proof found within the Bible.

We're fortunate to live in an age where we can examine the Bible's accuracy more clearly than people could thousands of years ago. Nearly

one-third of the Bible consists of prophecies, written by various authors over a 2000-year span under the guidance of God through the Holy Spirit.

Consider the prophecies about Jesus alone; there are over 300 of them. These predictions, written thousands of years before his birth, are incredibly specific, making the likelihood of their fulfillment incredibly remote. The intricacy and precision of these prophecies regarding Jesus surpass comprehension, yet every single one was accurately fulfilled through his life, death, and resurrection!

I met a man in my early twenties named Josh McDowell. He shared his life story, which he chronicled in a book called “Evidence That Demands a Verdict.” McDowell had a difficult upbringing in a home marked by abuse with an alcoholic father.

Initially an agnostic and feeling disillusioned with Christians, McDowell, known for his intelligence, set out to investigate what set Christianity apart from other religions. He concluded that the distinctive factor was the Christian belief that Jesus was buried and, on the third day, rose from the dead—leaving an empty tomb. This aspect, the empty tomb, became a pivotal point in his exploration of Christianity’s uniqueness.

In his pursuit, McDowell aimed to gather evidence not only from biblical sources but also from historical documents and factual accounts that could potentially disprove the belief in Jesus rising from the dead. His quest was to find the decisive proof, the magic bullet, that would conclusively debunk the Christian belief.

However, the more he delved into this investigation, meticulously gathering, and examining evidence, the clearer it became to him. Instead of disproving Christianity, the evidence overwhelmingly supported the narrative of Jesus as the Son of God. He found indisputable proof that Jesus indeed suffered, died, was buried, and rose on the third day. McDowell's research revealed that Jesus walked the earth for 40 days after his resurrection, witnessed by over 500 people, before ascending into heaven, where he is now seated at the right hand of God.

It's disheartening when people dismiss Jesus and God without examining the facts. Many make this decision without even reading the Bible. There's an abundance of evidence available for anyone genuinely seeking the truth about Jesus.

Even historians, both Greek and Jewish, who weren't followers of Jesus, documented his life, death, and resurrection. Notable figures like the Jewish historian Josephus and the Roman historian Tacitus wrote about these events.

Here are a few scriptures about the Word of God:

2 Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

The main idea of this verse is that all scripture is God breathed. This helps us see why the Bible stands out from every other book in history.

John 6:62-63

The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. Then what will you think if you see the Son of Man ascend to heaven again?

Hebrews 4:12-13

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.

Why did God write the Bible? He gave us this book to reveal who He is and to show His love for us. In its pages, God displays His love for each one of us and helps us understand our spiritual condition. Like a caring father, He warns us about the consequences of our mistakes but also provides a solution, out of His immense love for us.

God sent His son to offer us eternal life, a gift we didn't deserve. Jesus sacrificed his life to pay for our sins, showing us God's endless love.

He tells us in the Bible that our sins are forgiven and separated from us as far as the east is from the west.

The Bible is like a love letter from God to us. We're not just physical bodies but also spiritual beings living inside these bodies. Just like our physical bodies need food to survive, our spiritual selves need nourishment too. That nourishment comes from reading the Bible. Have you ever read it? When was the last time you picked it up?

The Bible is more than just words on a page; it's God's living message to us. Sometimes, I've read a verse hundreds of times, but on one day, the Holy Spirit sheds new light on it, making it exactly what I need to hear at that moment. It's like God speaks directly to me through those words, making them come alive and relevant to my circumstances. Through this, I've gained insights into God's heart and wisdom. Then, it's up to me to choose whether to follow that wisdom or ignore it, which would be foolishness or disobedience.

Reading the Bible is having a personal conversation with God. He's sitting with us, speaking from the depths of His heart. Every word is filled with truth and love. It's incredible to think that the infinite, all-powerful Creator of the universe took the time to write a book for us, to help us understand Him and build a close relationship with Him.

God, being infinite, could have filled countless volumes with the contents of the Bible, yet He chose to give us a specific, finite book. This deliberate choice is remarkable—the unlimited God intentionally offering us precisely what we need, no more and no less. It's a perfect revelation of His identity and boundless love for us.

In our daily lives, we often spend time on various activities like social media, watching TV, or reading books. Perhaps it's worth considering adding Bible reading to this routine.

In today's age, we have unprecedented access to the Bible, offering numerous ways to explore and understand this incredible book.

Let's take the opportunity to delve deeper, to immerse ourselves, and uncover the immense love God has for each of us, revealed in this personalized love letter written just for you!

Life Church created a free online Bible program and you can find out more about it at the following:

GreenMountainJourney.com

Bible.com

JONES STADIUM



My Journey with God

I was fortunate to be born into a family that introduced me to God. Both my parents were devoted Catholics, and we regularly attended our nearby church. I can still recall going to catechism classes when I was young. After a few years, I had my first communion and confirmation. I even became an altar boy, serving at mass several times each month. During my early teenage years, I also assisted in ringing the church bell before Sunday services. It was just like what you see in movies! I'd tug on the rope, and the heavy bell would gradually begin to sway until, with more pulls, it would finally ring out for the whole town to hear. And here's the fun part - if you held onto the rope after it started ringing, the bell's force would actually lift you off the ground. It was a blast!

Reflecting on my childhood and teenage years, I'm incredibly grateful for the values and teachings my parents instilled in me. Their guidance laid the foundation for my spiritual journey with God. I consider myself truly blessed because of their influence.

Both my parents were incredible examples of genuine love for others. Despite facing their own challenges in their journeys, their love shone

through. They were the kind of people who would selflessly offer help, even giving away their last shirt if someone needed it. I witnessed love in action countless times. They always prayed for all us kids and I have continued to pray the same for my children and family, that we would know God, love God and serve God all the days of our lives.

Our monthly gatherings with grandparents, uncles, and aunts are some of my fondest memories. Dad and mom would grill burgers and hot-dogs while us kids played in the yard. Meanwhile, the adults sat around the table chatting. It was a beautiful display of family being together, supporting one another, and loving on each other.

That evening, for the very first time,
I comprehended the message
of the good news—the gospel.

When I was 15, my parents retired and relocated from Vermont to Texas. During that transition period, I stayed with my brother Charlie for a semester until our parents sold the house and made the move. I'm immensely grateful for Charlie and the love he exemplified. Like our parents, he had a deep compassion for people just as they were. His influence in my life was profound, continuously demonstrating how to genuinely love others.

Throughout our individual journeys, we cross paths with various people, presenting opportunities to put aside our own concerns and love them unconditionally. In my brother Charlie, I witnessed this

selflessness firsthand. His actions served as a constant reminder of the importance of reaching out to others with love and empathy.

In my senior year, my friend Rick and I had lengthy conversations about Jesus that stretched late into the night. To be honest, I often found myself frustrated with him. He was relentless, talking about salvation and the need for Jesus in my life. I believed I already knew about Jesus from my Catholic upbringing - that God had a son named Jesus and that the Bible was authored by God. However, despite having a big family Bible at home, I couldn't make sense of it. The only parts that caught my interest were the fascinating drawings, especially the one depicting John the Baptist baptizing people in the river.

Just before starting college, my older brother Ray suggested I check out something happening during the first week at Texas Tech University. It was a Billy Graham crusade at the football stadium. Since there wasn't much to do during that initial week after registration, I decided to give it a shot. Coincidentally, Rick and I were going to be roommates during our freshman year, so we both went to this event together.

I vividly recall walking to Jones Stadium that first night, wrestling with the fear of my parents' reaction if they found out I was attending a non-Catholic event. In the Catholic tradition, attending such gatherings often raised concerns. Nevertheless, I attended all five nights of the crusade. It was on the third night that Billy Graham spoke about a new movie, "Jaws," talking about hell and Jaws the movie.

That evening, for the very first time, I comprehended the message of the good news—the gospel. I finally understood that there was a God

and that He had a Son named Jesus. I realized my own sins against God had separated me from Him, yet I also felt and experienced His immense love for me. He offered me salvation, a debt-free release from my sins through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Jesus had given His life to settle the debt I owed to God. The free gift He offered me and that I received by faith in Jesus.

That night, I made the decision to step forward and surrender my life to Jesus. It was a moment that forever transformed me. My journey since then has been incredible. I've witnessed God's unwavering love for me, even in my failures and mistakes—both in the past, present and in the future.

I'm incredibly grateful for my brother Ray; he was the one who urged me to attend that crusade that week. Shortly after he introduced me to the Navigators, a group that played a crucial role in my early years of understanding the Bible and deepening my relationship with God. Ray continues to be a pillar of love and encouragement, constantly guiding others towards Jesus. There are countless ways he's impacted lives, things only God and Ray truly know. I feel immensely blessed to have him as my brother, encouraging and loving me throughout the years.

Shortly after getting saved – born again, I attended a gathering of around a thousand people meeting to worship God. It was during the Jesus Revolution of the 1960s and '70s, and this assembly of individuals had been involved in that movement. While waiting for the event to start, I found myself in a room designated for welcoming people. Engaging in prayer, I experienced something extraordinary—what I now recognize as the presence of God. A profound peace enveloped

me, and an overwhelming sense of love and joy filled my being. It was the first of many intimate moments between just God and I.

In the mid-1990s, I encountered something even more profound within my heart. I can only describe it as falling deeply in love with Jesus. It felt like He was pursuing me like never before. I'm still on this ongoing life journey, deeply grateful to Him for rescuing me.

My hope and prayer is that everyone who reads this book will open their hearts to the incredible love God offers and accept His free gift of salvation. You will forever be changed in a way that only He can bring!

John 3:16

“For this is how God loved the world:
He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone
who believes in him will not perish
but have eternal life.”

ENDNOTES:

Chapter One

June Hunt, *Counseling Through Your Bible Handbook* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2008)

Chapter Eleven

Josh McDowell & Sean McDowell. PhD, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Thomas Nelson, 1999)

Embark on a remarkable journey alongside Tim Sawtelle as he shares events from his life in "Hope Unveiled: Stories of God's Unwavering Faithfulness." This captivating book chronicles Tim's life, a amazing testament to God's steadfast presence through every twist and turn, through moments of triumph and adversity.

Discover a narrative woven with the threads of Tim's experiences, where the journey of faith meets the embrace of the most faithful Father. Through these compelling stories, witness the profound ways God revealed Himself, transforming Tim's life and illuminating the path with hope even in the darkest hours.

Join Tim on his quest for meaning, purpose, and truth, as he unveils the intimate relationship he experienced with the greatest Father of all—God. "Hope Unveiled" invites you into the heartwarming journey of one man's life, a testament to the enduring faithfulness and the unending love of a Father who never lets go.



Tim has worked in various career fields such as robotic programmer, Air Traffic Controller, Live production Video Director and as an adjunct professor at The King's University.

Tim and his wife Sherri are retired and now live in Arkansas where they enjoy being with family as well as opportunities to be with people sharing life together.

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