JANUARY
Oswald Chambers

God’s Spirit continually reveals what human nature is like apart from His grace.

Everything or Nothing?

Who are we apart from God? We are everything, or we are nothing. Everything (or so we think)—if we tell ourselves we don’t need his help and can rely on our own strength and power. Nothing—if we realize our utter dependence on him and our place in the created order. Are you willing to admit that you are nothing so that Jesus can be everything to you? Or are you holding on to areas of your life you think you can handle without him?

Believing in God doesn’t always mean we trust him fully. But he is there for us, if we will accept his grace and appreciate how lost we are without him. Don’t hold onto your life. Let it go, into the loving arms of the Savior.

—Read John 15:5.
Thomas Merton

There is only one unhappiness: not to love God.

Ultimate Happiness

At face value, we might disagree that there is only one unhappiness. Why, we can recite a litany of things that make us unhappy! Unhappiness seems to come in significant doses every day of our lives.

But when we look deeper, beyond our outer circumstances and into the inner recesses of our hearts and souls, we have to ask: what do we do with the deep secrets that cannot be solved by any human intervention?

When we do not love God, we have nothing to cling to; we have no hope. That is why not loving God is the only true unhappiness. Without him, we have nothing. The converse, however, is that in loving God, we find everything we need for this life and the life to come.

Read Matthew 6:25–34.
Bernard of Clairvaux

Dignity is nothing without knowledge, and knowledge can even be a stumbling block without virtue.

HEAD AND HEART

Few people like a know-it-all, but we are happy to have an expert in the IT department fix our computer, an expert plumber fix the leaky pipe, an expert surgeon perform an appendectomy, or an expert accountant handle the books for our business. Their knowledge is invaluable to us.

Yet knowledge can be a stumbling block if it is without virtue. You want experts to fix what you can’t, but you also want them to be honest. That experienced but dishonest accountant could siphon funds from your account without you even noticing. Knowledge loses its dignity and becomes an obstacle if it is used for evil rather than for God. Paul wrote that “Knowledge inflates with pride, but love builds up” (1 Corinthians 8:1 HCSB).

Pursue knowledge, but let your knowledge be used for God’s glory. Let holiness be your guide.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1–3.

JESUS, I WANT MY KNOWLEDGE TO BE SEALED BY VIRTUE AND USED FOR YOUR PURPOSES.
Billy Graham

Faith is not a blind leap in the dark! It is instead based squarely on what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

A Blind Leap?

Certainly faith involves making an intellectual assent to the truth of God revealed in creation and history. And yet, we can have an intellectual belief in the historical life and death of Jesus, but not have saving faith—a faith that promises eternal rescue from sin.

Saving faith comes down to Jesus. What do we believe about Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the dead? Do we say with our minds and our hearts, “Yes, I believe in Christ and receive what he has done for me”?

At some point, we all have to answer that question. For some, saying yes may feel like taking a leap, a wild jump, in the dark. But it isn’t.

We can trust our souls to God because of what Jesus has done for us.

We can say, “Yes! I believe” without fear.

Read Romans 5:1–2.
Donald S. Whitney

As sleep and rest are needed each day for the body, so silence and solitude are needed each day for the soul.

Too Busy?

How often has someone responded to your question, “How are you?” with the answer: “I am so busy,” followed by a verbal list of tasks completed that day? Somehow, being busy has become a marker of success in our culture. We have come to believe that busy is a synonym for productive, useful, and important.

What happens, however, when our very busyness not only affects our physical rest but our spiritual rest as well? Are we so focused on our tasks that we miss the soul-strengthening moments within a day—sitting quietly before God in silence, enjoying creation, being thankful?

What if we adopted a new way of living, reflected in a new answer to “How are you?” What if we learned to say (and live out) these words: “I am giving myself permission to slow down and find moments of silence and solitude in each day”?

Might we have healthier hearts? Might we be closer to our Father?

Read Isaiah 30:15.
Lessons from Losing

Failure. We don’t like the word anywhere near us. We don’t want it in ourselves, in our children, in our home, in our workplace. We all long for success.

A study of top university athletes revealed that more than 60 percent came from wealthy families. After extensive interviews, researchers discovered that these students became involved in a sport because it provided a venue in which they could succeed or fail, and their parents’ money would have no influence. They couldn’t “buy” a sports record; they had to earn it. Losing and coming back for more led to better focus and greater discipline.

The Bible tells us Peter failed. Thomas failed. John Mark failed. From failure, they gained humility and perspective and, as a result, became heroes of the faith. Have you failed? Don’t let that stop you. Ask God to teach you the lesson he has for you in the failure—and then get back into the game!

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

As I grow older I am pleasantly surprised at how relevant theology has become in my perception.

 SEEK AND FIND

We may laugh at the irony, but it’s true: the older we get, the smarter our parents become. When we move into our own lives, experience a few knocks, and then have children of our own, suddenly we begin to understand our parents’ worries and fears for us. We understand their rules and restrictions, for now we are far too aware of what’s “out there,” and we want to protect our children from those threats.

Similarly, as we get older, we may discover that theology increases in relevance as well. Our knowledge and understanding of God grows deeper and wider as we willingly engage the greater issues and study the teachings and writings of those who came before. As we advance in years, we must continue to make it a priority to know the Lord more fully, for he will continue to make himself known.

Read Isaiah 46:4.
Teresa of Avila

If you should at times fall, don’t become discouraged and stop striving to advance. For even from this fall God will draw out good.

Move Forward

It is ironic that what seems like failure to us can be turned into a monumental step forward by God. Bodybuilders know that muscle must be broken down by stressing it; only then can it rebuild in a much stronger form. Musicians know that the minor notes in a symphony can add a mysterious tone to the concerto that major notes cannot evoke. Bakers know that when they pinch off a section of dough and let it become “sour,” it can serve as yeast to raise a dozen future batches of sweet rolls.

The Lord can advance us in similar ways. Peter denied Christ three times, but this led to all-out devotion. John Mark was sent home from a mission trip, but he matured and became invaluable to Paul. If you fail (and you will), know that God can draw good from the situation. Don’t become discouraged. Move forward. God is with you.

Read 2 Timothy 3:10–17.
Whenever the Lord touches a raw nerve in us, it means that He is ready to heal it.

The Cleansing Pain

The very day after a person has surgery, nurses get the patient on his or her feet for a walk. It’s agonizingly painful, but it keeps the blood circulating, lessening the chance of clots and hastening the healing process. Similarly, if someone comes to the emergency room because of an accident, that person’s wound is first cleansed of all dirt, then is doused in antiseptic. This cleansing process is frightfully painful, but it assists the body in warding off infection.

Often in our Christian lives, we must endure some pain in order to be healed. Saul (soon to be the apostle Paul) was made blind for three days before God restored his sight, thus giving him a lesson in spiritual blindness. Jesus made Peter tell him three times that he loved him after Peter had denied Jesus three times, thus helping Peter see that Jesus was fully forgiving him.

The pain is part of the plan. God is there, holding you up. Lean on him.

Read John 21:15–19.
**John of the Cross**

This dark night is an inflow of God into the soul that purges it of its habitual ignorances and imperfections, natural and spiritual.

**Seeing God in the Darkness**

The dark night of the soul is a time when God seems distant, when our soul seems lost. But purpose exists in the darkness. In any worthwhile venture, pain precedes gain, hurt comes before health, cleansing precedes completeness. During these dark seasons, God works in our inner being so we will turn from habits that bring destruction to develop a Christlike character. Like polluted water that flows through a filter, our souls will be purified.

Often when the night is blackest, we feel God has abandoned us. Yet God is working even then. Like the moon hidden by an eclipse, God is present but not visible.

During the dark times, allow God to work. You will see him again. And, better, you will be cleansed, made right, brought whole.

Hang on. Endure the night. Joy comes in the morning.

*Read Psalm 30:5.*
If Christ be in us there will be communion. . . . And if Christ be formed within us we cannot remain altogether ignorant of his presence.

With Christ in us, we have communion with God and with one another. What a wonderful reminder of the oneness we have in Jesus—the answer to his prayer that we would be one, even as he and the Father are one (John 17:11).

How blessed is that communion! The moment we discover that we are fellow believers in Christ, we feel a closeness with complete strangers that we have not felt before. It may be a group gathered at church, students meeting in the local school for a prayer meeting, or even words spoken across the checkout line. The family of God enjoys immediate fellowship within its circle. And where two or three are gathered in Christ’s name, he is present.

We cannot remain ignorant of his presence, for it is what draws us together in the first place. No wonder we are at home wherever we find fellow believers.

C. S. Lewis

Every step . . . from the Absolute to “Spirit” and from “Spirit” to “God,” had been a step toward the more concrete, the more imminent, the more compulsive.

DRAW NEAR TO GOD

We need God; he does not need us. Often we are like a hapless sailor in a boat who throws a rope at a rock, hoping it will provide security and stability. When the rock is lassoed, it’s not the sailor pulling the rock to the boat (though it may appear that way); it is the pulling of the boat to the rock.

The closer we get to God, the more real he becomes. He’s the rock. If you are physically distraught, he is the lifeline that saves your drowning soul. If you are spiritually famished, he is the umbilical cord that provides nourishment to your starving spirit. If you are emotionally depleted, he is the second wind that enables you to go the distance.

Think of yourself in that boat being pulled to safety by a loving Father.

*Read James 4:8.*
**Only a Glimmer**

Combat soldiers are disciplined in how to sight an enemy down the barrel of a rifle, gauge the range, and then pull the trigger. But what about at night, when there is no sunshine to make the enemy visible? During the Vietnam War the military developed a special telescope called the Starlight Scope. This amazing piece of technology could amplify the gleam of stars to many times their normal brightness, making it seem like daylight for the soldier looking through it.

As Christians we sometimes feel alone, abandoned, and surrounded in darkness. In those times we are tempted to doubt God’s promises, God’s faithfulness, God’s goodness. After all, we don’t seem to be experiencing them.

Do not doubt in the dark what God told you in the light, for his words are always and forever true.

*Read Micah 7:8–13.*

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**V. Raymond Edman**

*Never doubt in the dark what God told you in the light.*
Hannah Hurnard

We may know that God is love,
Know his Father’s heart... We have seen what hath sufficed
In the face of Jesus Christ.

THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST

How amazing it is that God wants you to know his heart. He wants you to know how much he loves you. The Creator of the world, the Holy One who is above and beyond anything you can imagine, wants to know you.

How do you know the love of God? How do you know the Father’s heart? The answer is found in the face of Jesus Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul gives a clue to that truth. God has given light in the darkness, and that light shines in our hearts so we can know the glory of God through the face of Jesus. It is Jesus who gives the perfect picture of God. When you know Jesus, you know God.

He wants you to know his heart. He wants you to know how much he loves you. And when you know him, you can’t help but return that love to him.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:6.

THANK YOU, FATHER, FOR SHOWING YOUR FACE TO ME IN JESUS. I DESIRE TO LOVE YOU WITH ALL MY HEART.
Martin Luther King Jr.

Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now—I just want to do God’s will.

CLIMB THE MOUNTAIN

The picture was sobering. At 6:01 p.m. on April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who had been standing with some friends and colleagues on the balcony of his room at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, was murdered. A front-page photo in newspapers around the country portrayed the confusion and horror immediately after the event. It was a dark day in American history.

Such is the cost for some who decide to do God’s will. Dr. King saw it as a privilege to do God’s will, to be invited up the mountain. So did Moses. Because of Jesus, we too have been invited to come close to God in fellowship with him. It is an awesome privilege—and an awesome responsibility.

Read Exodus 19:20.

Father God, grant me courage to pray, “I want your will to be done in my life.”
Augustine of Hippo

He is everywhere in His totality; so that in Him the mind lives and moves and has its being, and consequently can remember Him.

The Living Word

Nurses and doctors report that when aged saints are on their deathbeds and under heavy sedation, they often will revert to their childhood. They begin to recite memory verses learned during vacation Bible school, or they will sing “Jesus Loves Me” or “This Little Light of Mine.” Colossians 3:16 (NKJV) says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

Such blessings can happen when we have made the Word of God a living, active, vibrant part of our lives, judging every action, every deed, every thought by what the Lord has instilled in our hearts. David said, “Your word have I hid in my heart.” The totality of Christ living in us gives Christians a contentment that unbelievers cannot understand. But it is real. It is comforting. It is genuine.

Read Colossians 3:12–17.
LORD, MAKE ME A POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON MY CHILDREN FOR YOUR SAKE.

JOSH McDOWELL

We must begin by instilling within our children . . . a healthy fear of God, an acknowledgment of His power and character.

IGNITING THE FLAME OF GOD

Psychologists are continually producing studies that verify that behaviors and character start to form even before a child’s first birthday. Meanwhile, Christians have known this for thousands of years. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 1:5 that he was impressed at what excellent teachers and role models Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, had been. Paul could see that their example and devotion had put the “flame of God” in Timothy.

The world today, with the impact of mass media, is doing its best to woo children to sinful practices. But Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV) says, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” This should be all the motivation we need to invest quality time in the spiritual nurturing of our children and grandchildren.

We too need to ignite the flame of God in our children. May it blaze continually bright.

Read 2 Timothy 1:2–7.
W. Phillip Keller

[Joy is] a serene, stable spirit known only to those who enjoy the presence of God’s person within their lives.

THE FLAG OF JOY

Don’t confuse happiness with joy. Happiness is a buoyant emotion that results from the momentary plateaus of well-being. Joy is bedrock stuff—the confidence that emerges irrespective of our moods or circumstances; the certainty that all is well, regardless of feelings; the hallmark of God’s kingdom dwellers.

An old British educator wrote: “Joy is the flag which is flown from the castle of the heart when the King is in residence.” Joy supersedes our circumstances, thanks to our relationship with the King of kings. If Jesus is King—sovereign and in control—then what do we have to worry about? If we live in his presence, we have no reason to fret.

Jesus is joy. He brings joy wherever he goes. Get close to him. Live in the glow of his life. Be conscious of his presence. Rest in his strong arms.

Read John 17:13.
He will keep his word; then I can come and humbly present my petition and it will be all right. Doubt is here inadmissible, surely.

Our universe contains more than 10 billion trillion stars. That’s the numeral 1 followed by 22 zeros. It seems unfathomable. But it’s nothing compared to explaining the Trinity—three entities in one, yet one all-powerful being. It doesn’t make sense to the human mind, to those of us who are used to finding answers and solving mysteries. We don’t like to leave matters unsettled. But some things can’t be known this side of eternity. They require unwavering trust in Jesus, without any further explanation. Can we accept that? Do we have a choice?

The Lord knows our desire to seek solutions to life’s puzzles. But he is more concerned that we live by faith. If we have the faith of a mustard seed, he said, we can move mountains. He also exhorts us to be still, and know that he is the Almighty.

Read Matthew 17:20.
**Frederick Buechner**

Believing God is . . . less a position than a journey, less a realization than a relationship.

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**TRUE BELIEF**

Nietzsche said God is dead. While Nietzsche, an atheist, wasn’t interested in embracing Christian beliefs, his words are a good reminder of what can happen when a society sets God aside. People execute their faith and turn their back on the Savior. They stop pursuing God with resolve and passion. Even those who go to church and claim a religion can quickly veer off course if they stop at “belief” but do not let it affect their lives.

Belief is more than just a position or a realization. We were designed for a relationship with Christ and we find our ultimate purpose and meaning in him. True belief is about the journey through life in relationship with God. True belief is alive and active, affecting your life today and every day.

*Read James 2:22.*

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Let my belief in you resonate in my life today, Lord.
G. K. Chesterton

By insisting that God transcends man, man has transcended himself.

TRUE TRANSCENDENCE

How do we transcend ourselves? Great thinkers have been trying to answer that question for centuries, often telling us to look within and rely on the resources deep inside ourselves. Indeed, as individuals who possess more than a physical body, we are endowed with inner qualities that go beyond genetics and physiology. We have something intangible about us, something spiritual and eternal that surpasses biological and chemical matter. But it’s far from pure or strong; it’s sinful and in need of cleansing. Only God, the Creator, can recreate us. He made us and knows our true nature. We are nothing without him. With him, we are capable of leaving our human failings behind.

Our true transformation is initiated and completed by God alone. We transcend ourselves not by looking within, but by looking at the cross and the only Savior who can make us all he created us to be.

Read Isaiah 1:18.

Jesus, help me to see my deep and abiding need for you.
Ted Engstrom

Godly leadership serves others. God is constantly searching for men with this characteristic.

Humble Leadership

It is humbling to think God may call upon us to accomplish major achievements for his glory. Joshua wondered how he ever could fill Moses’ shoes. Gideon was baffled that he, a low-class laborer, could be summoned to serve as a general in God’s army. Paul, who identified himself as “the chief of sinners,” was forever astounded to think that God would use him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. But God was able to use something in them that they didn’t see; he brought them to a place of humility and willingness to serve.

God does not seek the services of the pompous. He doesn’t need leaders who want fame or power—those are a dime a dozen, and they do nothing for his kingdom. God is constantly seeking those who are willing to serve. Such leaders can, through his Son, change the world.

Richard Foster

Make honesty and integrity the distinguishing characteristics of your speech.

As Good As Your Word

We have numerous catchphrases that express the idea of a person’s word being trustworthy. We’ll say, “His word is his bond,” or “Her word is as good as gold,” or “If he says it, then he’ll do it.” Interestingly, as Christians, our word is the Word of God, which of course is always true, always honest, and always just. Understanding this, our own promises, vows, and agreements should be honorable and dependable—part of our Christian ethic.

Numbers 30:2 teaches us, “When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word” (NIV). This goes beyond saying our wedding vows or swearing in as a court witness. It applies to our every transaction in life. We are to speak truth and live truth because our Savior identified himself as “the way, the truth, the life.”

Read Numbers 30:1–9.
Omniscience governing omnipotence, infinite power being ruled by infinite wisdom is the basic biblical description of the divine character.

GREAT AND UNEARCHABLE THINGS

Gary Larson’s *Far Side* syndicated cartoons were popular for twenty years in America. In one of his sketches, he showed God as a contestant on a TV game show. The scorecard in front of God indicated more than a million points, but the other two contestants had no points at all. The game show emcee was announcing, “Yes, that is another correct answer for God, who continues to hold the lead.”

His point? No one would stand a chance against God in a contest of knowledge. Jeremiah 33:3 says that the Lord knows “great and wondrous things” (HCSB) that man cannot know. Isaiah 40:13 asks, “Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor?” (NIV). What this means to us is that there is no problem, no question, no challenge that we can bring to our heavenly Father that he is not capable of dealing with. He has infinite wisdom, and it is ours for the asking. We need only seek him in prayer.

Read Job 41:1–11.
I’ve sensed God’s stinging rebuke, and it has hurt deeply, yet I know it was divine faithfulness at work.

GOD’S LOVING DISCIPLINE

Growing up, we all faced reprimands from our parents, teachers, and, later—if we got caught speeding as teenage drivers—even from judges. It’s never comfortable, but sometimes it is necessary. The apostle Paul chose not to trust John Mark and travel with him a second time after he had gone home early from a missionary journey. This so changed the young man’s attitude and behavior, he was able to earn back Paul’s respect, and Paul later sent for him to join him in Rome.

Numerous times in the Bible God himself rebuked individuals because they displeased him. He told Eliphaz the Temanite in Job 42:7, “I am angry with you!” (NLT). Jesus said in Revelation 3:19, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline” (NIV). Thus, there may be times in life when the Lord will use physical ailments, financial crises, or career setbacks to chastise us. If so, let us accept such discipline as a sign of divine love.

Read Revelation 3:15–22.
In the Prayer of Faith our hand is still in His. . . . The hand of the Father is Jesus’ hand!

Hand in Hand

As the mother and her young child prepare to cross a busy street, the mother grasps her child’s hand. A young man bends his knee before the love of his life and puts a ring on her finger. A man and woman with crowns of gray and wrinkled smiles walk hand in hand as they stroll a sandy beach.

Hand in hand we touch, we hold, we love, we protect. Remember the first time you reached out to God and put your hand in his? Perhaps it was a prayer for help, or a prayer for a desperate need, or a prayer of surrender.

Your Father’s hand is always there, reaching out to you, holding you, loving you, protecting you. He has not released his grasp. When your prayer of faith touched the heart of God, Jesus took your hand in his with a promise to hold it forever.

If you are in need of a gentle touch today, whisper a prayer asking Jesus to take your hand in his and hold on.

Read Isaiah 41:13.
JAY KESLER

Kids need elders, male and female . . . not simply to function as a parent functions, but to be, to incarnate, the qualities of God.

FOLLOWING IN OUR FOOTSTEPS

Billy Graham once told of a man who was walking to a bar one winter night during a new snowfall. His seven-year-old son called out, “Take smaller steps, Daddy. I’m walking in your tracks.” The man turned around and was horrified to see that his son was following in his footprints. The man hugged his little boy, took him home, and swore off alcohol. Until that moment, he had never understood that his actions were being emulated by his son.

Which young people might be imitating your life? Perhaps children or grandchildren, nieces or nephews, or even the kids in your church or neighborhood. They all need adults who reveal the qualities of God.

You never know how your life will affect the young ones around you. What children are in your circle of influence? Pray that your life shows them a true reflection of Jesus.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1.
R. C. SPROUL

It is precisely the presence and help of Christ in times of suffering that makes it possible for us to stand up under pressure.

COUNTERMEASURES

Suffering is a universal language. We can’t escape pain. Plans go wrong. Troubles come. Our bodies wear out. We live in a fallen world, and sometimes the pressure paralyzes us.

Deep ocean waters can crush a submarine made of thick steel, but little fish with the thinnest layer of skin swim there without a care in the world. Why aren’t they crushed? Those fish have an internal pressure that perfectly corresponds to the pressure from the outside. God gives them what they need to swim in the deep places.

When faced with the pressure of suffering, we don’t need skin made of steel; we need a power inside us that corresponds to the pressure from outside. That power comes from the presence of Jesus who lives within us.

Surrounded by pressure? Sense the presence of Jesus. Then rest secure in him.

Read 1 John 4:4.
John Bunyan

No one knows how many byways and back lanes the heart has in which to slip away from the presence of God.

BYWAYS AND BACK LANES

Where are the byways and back lanes of your heart? What grows along those paths? Too often they are somberly lit, allowing the darkness to hide the actions or thoughts that would be an embarrassment if seen in the light.

Too often, we slip there. A temptation. An angry outburst. A feeling of hopelessness or helplessness. A desire unfulfilled. We justify our actions and walk down the shadowy path. Only too late do we realize that we have slipped away from the presence of God.

In his presence is light. In his presence the pathway is clear and the way is lit by God’s Word, as the psalmist wrote, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105 nkjv).

Close off the byways and back lanes. Stay on the path. God has promised that he will show us the way; we merely need to walk in it.

Read Jeremiah 6:16.
Jonathan Edwards

There is a difference between having an opinion, that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace.

Knowing Makes the Difference

Opinions are a dime a dozen. The person with experience always trumps the person with an unsupported opinion. The experienced person knows; the opinionated person guesses. There’s a big difference.

Those who have truly experienced God know the loveliness and beauty of a grace-touched and holy life. Deserving judgment, they are the recipients of a second chance (grace) and a special endowment (holiness).

God’s holiness sets apart God’s grace. God, who is different from us, stooped to be among us. God, who is awesome in power, came in weakness. God, who sits on the throne of heaven, walked on earth as a servant. He is the One we want to experience and emulate. Knowing him makes all the difference.

Get close to Jesus. His loveliness and beauty will rub off on you in the form of holiness and grace.

Read Titus 2:11.
THANK YOU, LORD, FOR YOUR GIFT OF LOVE.
IN IT, I FIND MYSELF.

THOMAS MERTON

The secret of my identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God. . . . Therefore I cannot hope to find myself anywhere except in Him.

THE GREATEST GIFT

We take another promotion, seeking status in our work. We build bigger nest eggs, seeking power in our money. We take exotic vacations, seeking adventure in our trips. We relive our past through our children, seeking a lost youth.

We are looking for ourselves as though we were searching for hidden treasure. Yet our gift is the presence of Jesus. Consider his love to us. Despite our faults, he runs to us. Seeing our sin, he forgives us. Knowing we deserve death, he grants us life. Our identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God. In him, our veneers of self-preservation are sanded off; the scaffolding of stuff to hold us up is removed. We are loved by God. What better gift could you find? Receive it as your own.

Read Romans 8:37–39.
BILLY GRAHAM

The Spirit-filled life is not abnormal; it is the normal Christian life. Anything less . . . is less than what God wants and provides for His children.

LIVING IN THE NORMAL

The normal Christian life is life in the Spirit. When we come into relationship with Jesus, the Spirit takes up residence. He fills us. He possesses our mind. He controls our heart. We walk in step with him. We are open to his desires. We think his thoughts.

Our spiritual lives are overcome with God’s presence and might, enabling Christ-centered actions. We are under the influence of the Spirit. Instead of doing things only within our own strength and ability, the Spirit empowers us.

This power is greater than our own. It moves us, inspires us, motivates us, encourages us, and anoints all that we say and do, making Christ known.

Be filled with the Spirit.

Read Ephesians 5:18.
No matter how wonderful your character is, it will never be wonderful enough to earn God’s approval.

From the start we have been taught that we have to earn what we want. No handouts. No free lunches. If you want it, you work for it. So we labor to earn a living, to earn a position in the company, to earn status in the community.

We think such a strategy works to secure God’s favor too. It sounds logical. Yet we will never be good enough in God’s eyes. In fact, we can’t earn his acceptance because he has already done everything for us.

Christianity is not what we do to earn God’s favor, but what Jesus has already done for us. Jesus satisfied God’s demands. All we have to do is accept his gift.

Because of Jesus we are approved.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:10.
Henry Blackaby

Our generation lacks a sense of wonder and reverence toward God. We want to bring God down to our level, to the commonplace. He is God!

Find the Wonder

Stop for a few moments and look at creation. Gaze at the tiniest snowflake or the vastness of the sky. Does it make you pause in awe of who God is and what he has done? We should be amazed that he would care enough to create flowers that bloom in vibrant colors, animals of all kinds and shapes, planets seen and yet to be discovered. We should live in wonder that he sent his Son to die for guilty, sinful humanity.

Frequently, however, we bring God down to our level. Movies and books attempt to make him too much like us—with characteristics sometimes bordering on the ridiculous. Yet when we lose our sense of wonder, we lose a sense of the greatness of God.

Rediscover the wonder of who God is and what he has done. It should send you to your knees in gratitude.

Read Psalm 8:1–9.
Certainty is the mark of common-sense: gracious uncertainty is the mark of the spiritual life.

Common sense makes sense. We have confidence and certainty in what we know. Lest life become dull and routine, God challenges even our certainties. Every step for a believer is a step of faith, filled with grace—moving ahead in harmony with God’s character.

Gracious uncertainty understands the remarkable gift of today. Mindful that every step is rich with opportunity, we take each one, reflecting God’s love. Grace causes us to give more than expected, to serve beyond our time, to help when we are tired, to love when the feelings are gone. Grace upgrades and expands our lives.

Uncertainty forces us to walk by faith—knowing that God walks with us, assured that God directs our steps, confident that we make an impact by the way we love. The unknown becomes an adventure to dispense God’s grace.

Step lightly. Walk boldly. Live with gracious uncertainty.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:8.
I WANT TO BE LIKE YOU, LORD, EVEN IF IT MEANS REJECTION.

Clare of Assisi

Look upon Him Who became contemptible for you, and follow Him, making yourself contemptible in the world for Him.

Be Contemptible

Jesus was hated by much of the world, and that hatred still exists today. Then, as now, he was “despised and rejected of men” (Isaiah 53:3 kjv).

In spite of rejection, he died for us.

Being like him means being willing to be viewed with contempt in the eyes of the world. What does that look like today? Others may feel contempt for us when we refuse to bend God’s rules, or stand up for what is right, or go against the norm. In spite of that rejection, we are called to rejoice always, to honor Christ in all we do, to never be ashamed of the gospel message, to lift him up everywhere we go, and to extend grace to whomever crosses our path.

Being contemptible in the world’s eyes means being like Jesus.

Read 1 Peter 4:12–16.
J oh n W h i t e

The more you understand of [Jesus], the more real the companionship will be, and the more likely you are to keep in step with him.

I N H I S S T E P S

Who doesn’t long for a guide through life—maybe a crystal ball that responds to all of life’s questions. Should I take this class? Marry this person? Relocate for this job? Confront this colleague? How easy it would be to wave a hand over the crystal ball and heed its replies.

As humans, we long for such answers. As believers, we need answers that take us the way God wants us to go.

Though we often act like God’s will is some mystery that he is trying to keep from us, we don’t need magic to figure it out. In reality, God wants to show us the way. He wants us to know and follow his will. To do that, we stay close to his Son—we read Scripture, we pray, we do what we already know is right.

The more we understand Jesus, the more likely we are to keep in step with him.

Read 1 Peter 2:17–21.
THANK YOU, DEAR LORD, FOR LOVING ME SO FULLY.

SAINT THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

O Eternal Word! O my Saviour! Thou art the Divine Eagle Whom I love—who lures me.

LOVED DIVINELY

Throughout the ages humanity has been drawn to the image of the eagle. Nobility in particular often used this bird to represent their strength.

God has been portrayed in literature as the Divine Eagle who soars above all, including kings and emperors. And yet surprisingly, this Divine Eagle, so mighty and majestic, longs to draw us to himself. In fact, his love for us is so great that he suffered and died in order to give us an eternal home.

How shall we respond to so great a love? By offering our lifelong love in return.

Open your heart to God. Dwell each day under the wings of the one who gave his very life for you and who longs to teach you to soar with him.

Read Romans 8:35–39.
CHARLES SWINDOLL

Waiting is one of God’s preferred methods of preparing special people for significant projects.

IN THE WAITING

Patience is a gift. Many say it’s one they don’t have. Regardless, we wait. Every day. In the store checkout line, as the boss makes a final decision, at the doctor’s office, at the busy intersection. Sometimes we must wait in order to wait some more.

Even though it’s unavoidable, waiting in the daily details is an unpleasant part of life. And when a mundane job remains mundane, or physical pain clings like a bad shirt, or an anticipated situation refuses to evolve as we dreamed it would, questions arise. What is God doing? Why doesn’t he fix it? What’s his purpose in allowing the unwanted circumstances to persist?

Your daily routine that seems to never change may last for just one more day. But it could be yours for another month, another year, or even more. What will you do in the waiting? Dear friend, take a new look at this season. Fight your frustrations, and trust that this place of preparation is of great importance.

Read Isaiah 30:18.
Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what your real problem is and how you need to pray.

HEAVENLY HEALER

A man with pain in his lower right jaw went to the dentist assuming further drilling on his recent root canal was necessary. Once he’d been examined, he was told that the real source of his pain was a wisdom tooth—it badly needed to be pulled. Not until the man was accurately diagnosed by a professional could the actual problem be fixed.

No doubt you recognize certain symptoms in your life. You may not know their source, but they have your attention.

The one who is the expert of your heart knows what’s causing those symptoms. He knew the very moment the problem started, and he holds the answers to its resolution. Whether your words and wonderings gush out in a torrent of questions, or the only prayer you can muster is a sigh of desperation, you are not without hope; God knows what you need.

Present your symptoms to him and then wait for him to reveal the diagnosis—and provide the remedy.

Read Romans 8:26–27.
Francis of Assisi

I... exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ that, when they go about the world, they do not quarrel or fight with words.

Word-Watching

Our mouths can get us into all kinds of trouble. James cautioned in the Bible that the tongue, though small, can act like a spark that sets an entire forest on fire.

Not only do we have the ability to do great good or great harm with our words, but as believers, the things we say will either draw people closer to or push them farther from Jesus. If our words don’t uphold the message of love that Christ came to bring, then we’ll be tearing it down in ways we don’t even realize.

Quarreling and fighting don’t represent our Lord well. Too often our words short-circuit in our minds and come out before we’ve thought them through. So take the advice of both James and St. Francis: put a watch on your mouth, and let the words you speak today represent Christ.

Read James 3:3–12.
God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.

C. S. Lewis

The tragedy is that people look for happiness on the outside—by earning more money, accumulating more stuff, taking more vacations, manufacturing more changes. Once they have fulfilled all their desires, then they will be happy.

Wrong!

Happiness is an inside job. No amount of nipping or tucking, investing or traveling will make us permanently content. Happiness is a by-product of the internal filling of God. He cannot give us happiness apart from himself. Why? Because happiness simply does not exist without him.

Read Psalm 68:3.

LORD, FILL ME WITH YOUR HAPPINESS.
I wonder, how many burdens is Jesus carrying for us that we know nothing about? . . . He carries our sin. He carries our shame.

The famous poem “Footprints” reminds us that in life’s most difficult seasons, Jesus does not abandon us; rather, at the times we are unable to go on, he picks us up and carries us.

We are amazed by the picture of a burden-bearing Savior. He took our sin upon himself so that we might have freedom. He takes up our shame so that we are no longer hindered by it. What other burdens have never landed on our shoulders because he would not allow it? What other burdens has he taken upon himself rather than letting them fall to us?

Whatever is loading you down today, you need carry it no longer. Jesus will scoop up the weight in one arm and put his other arm around your tired shoulders. Gently he’ll remind you that it is for these very things that he sacrificed his life.

Today, feel him removing the weight of your burden and holding you near.

Read Matthew 11:28–30.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

God’s love for us is shown by the fact that God not only gives us God’s Word, but also lends us God’s ear.

I’m Listening

Listening is a mark of love. When you are sure of being heard you can share your thoughts, your hurts, your emotions, your dreams with your beloved. Listening is key to a lasting and healthy relationship.

God is good at listening. He is never too busy for us. He demonstrates his love by speaking through his Word and listening to our voice. He is a two-way communicator. He hears the hurt in our tone. He sees the need in our nuances.

God is a ruler who calms the stormy waves of our lives. God is also a presence who walks the dusty roads with us. He talks with us. And, better still, he listens to our pleas, our tirades, our doubts, and our anguish. He responds as a cherished lover.

What do you need to say to God today? He’s listening.

Read 1 John 5:14.

LORD, HEAR MY CRIES.
Bernard of Clairvaux
This divine love is true love, for it is the love of one who wants nothing for himself.

G O D ’ S T R U E L O V E

Divine love. How do we even begin to comprehend it? It is so far beyond what we know as love—our earthly passion for another person.

We may be willing to sacrifice some of our own desires for one we love, but our noble gestures pale in comparison to the ultimate sacrifice our loving heavenly Father made. He sent his Son to give his very life for us. And he did it while we were still sinners, while we were far from being worthy of such a great love.

In our own relationships, how often do we perform a kind deed for our beloved in the hope of receiving a reciprocal response? But God, in his divine love, does not love us in order to get something from us. He simply offers his love as a gift, freely, with no ulterior motive or hope of reciprocity.

The choice is ours.

Read 1 John 4:16–19.

What a gift your love is, Father. Thank you!
Augustine of Hippo

For Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee.

RESTLESS HEARTS

Watch any amount of television and you will come away feeling sorry for the people who are seeking fulfillment in a job, a friend, a lover, in a flawless body or a perfect performance. Nothing on this earth—no amount of fame, notoriety, or perceived perfection—can bring rest to our restless hearts. We find peace in God and God alone.

This is how God made us. Humanity is not a random accident. We were created on purpose by God himself, who made us in his image so that we might commune with him, love him, and be loved by him. He made us for himself. And only when we find our rest in him will our hearts stop seeking.

When we find him, we find everything we need in this life and in the life to come.

Read Genesis 1:26–31.
John Stott

There is nothing in the non-Christian religions to compare with this...God who loved, and came after, and died for, a world of lost sinners.

THE WAY HOME

Have you ever become separated from your group in an unfamiliar place, longing to find home? Your heart pumps faster. Your palms grow clammy. Your thoughts run wild. Lostness is not just a physical reality; it is a spiritual fact too. When we are lost, we need someone to show us the way home. Verbal communication is not good enough; personal help is what we long for—someone to take us by the hand to guide us home.

That’s the message of Christianity. God dropped everything to seek out and rescue lost humans. It boggles the mind that God would send his own Son so that a lost humanity would find its way to him. Yet that’s exactly what God did.

Try to find a parallel story in another religion. Can’t do it, can you?

Christianity is God finding us and bringing us home.

Read John 1:1, 14.
When joy’s heart breaks, it’s because joy feels free and safe enough to embrace everything, even the feeling of falling to pieces.

Heartbreak and joy don’t seem to go together. Joy is parties and balloons and laughter and loved ones. Heartbreak is just the opposite—loneliness, depression, desperation, pain.

We want life to be easy, don’t we? We’ll take the joy, thank you; hold the sorrow and tears. Some people are even willing to step into sin in order to pursue some elusive sense of joy. But that’s the problem. What the world mistakes for joy is really a lesser, more fleeting contentment—happiness. And happiness is tied to events and circumstances. Joy, on the other hand, can be felt even in the midst of heartbreak.

Joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit, with a purity that allows us to face all of life’s ups and downs with a steady undercurrent of peace. We may not feel happy—life is full of pain and trouble—but we can be assured that God is in control. And that makes us safe enough to embrace even the sorrow.

Read Psalm 5:11–12.
Just as a bridegroom wants first place in the love and devotion of his bride . . . God wants the Christian to put Him first.

First in Your Heart

When a bride and groom stand before the altar, they promise love and devotion “till death do us part.” How can they make such a promise? How can they know that they will always feel this way? It’s easy in the beauty of the wedding ceremony; unfortunately, it’s not easy when the pressures of life mount in the coming years.

But that’s just the thing—the promise is not to feel that way forever, the promise is to live that way forever. To always live in love and devotion, to act with love and devotion, regardless of how we feel at the moment.

Every one of us longs to be loved—to be first in someone else’s thoughts, to sense devotion that overwhels us with joy. God wants us to put him first in exactly this way. To live with love and devotion, regardless of the doubts, the problems, or the fears. He wants to be first in our lives. He deserves nothing less.

Read Nahum 1:2–6.
The peace of God is first and foremost peace with God; it is the state of affairs in which God is for us.

What would it be like to walk in perfect peace? To do so, we must have peace with God before we can have the peace of God. In other words, we must know God before we can know peace. And when we are at peace with God, we understand that God is for us, not against us.

Before we knew God, we were at war. We were the enemy. We were fighting a losing battle. But then, when all seemed lost, Jesus—the Prince of Peace—mediated on our behalf, establishing and guaranteeing eternal peace with God. Once estranged from God, we are now his friends. Once vulnerable, now protected. Once defeated, now victorious. Once downcast, now happy. Once the opposition, now we have joined his forces. We are living on the right side. We live under his watch. We can walk in perfect peace.

Read Philippians 4:7.
It is noteworthy, then, that love is the soul’s inclination, strength, and power in making its way to God, for love unites it with God.

Let Us Love Like Jesus

What is love? In a word, it’s Jesus. He embraced the cross because he loved us. He died so that none of us would perish. He gave the ultimate sacrifice out of godly concern and compassion for us—a people who didn’t deserve it. Christ’s love looked beyond his needs to the needs of others.

Are we willing to follow his lead, loving as he did with giving, selfless, humble love? While we can’t die for someone else’s sins, we can set aside our love of work so we can spend more time with our family. Or reconnect with an old friend when it would be easier not to. Or forgive someone who hurt us. Whatever the sacrifice, can we do it for Jesus, uniting our hearts with his? When we do, we are united with God. The power of love does that.

Read John 3:16.
EXTRAORDINARY GOD, I LONG TO SPEND TIME WITH YOU TODAY.

[The] Lord desires intensely that we . . . seek his company, so much so that from time to time he calls us to draw near him.

COME AWAY

Put down the phone. Push away the keyboard. Turn off the television. God asks you to stop and spend time with him alone.

Like an excited fiancé who wants nothing but to enjoy time with his beloved, God seeks you out to simply be with him. He doesn’t need pious prayers. He doesn’t ask for lofty commitments or ritualistic practices. He asks for you. You, there in the middle of work’s madness. You, tired and longing for someone to notice. You, broken and distant. He wants your company and will not tire in searching you out.

Sometimes God’s silence compels us to run and find him. Other times, the glowing sun outside the kitchen window signals us to drop the ordinary and be captivated by him . . . just for a moment.

Bring your open heart today and allow yourself to be drawn near to him.

Read Song of Songs 2:10.
John Ortberg

Love is why God created us in the first place. . . . God did not make us because he was bored, lonely, or had run out of things to do.

THE REASON IS LOVE

It’s a classic story. Gepetto the woodworker carves a boy out of wood and wishes he would become real. His wish is granted, and Pinocchio is transformed into a real boy with a mind of his own.

Pinocchio’s boyish ideas land him in the wrong crowd and he runs away from home. This act of rebellion breaks his father’s heart, causing Gepetto to experience the ache of separation between himself and the child he has created.

Knowing full well that mankind would make a similar decision to rebel, God created us anyway. He knew our outcome before he formed the dust we were made from, and yet, with love immeasurable, he formed us and shaped us. The human race soon rebelled, but God’s love didn’t waver.

His love for you doesn’t waver either.

Read 1 John 4:7–12.
Our dissatisfactions show what’s driving us. The challenge is to want what our Lord wants for us.

Motivational speakers know the secret to motivating change. First, they explain in great detail why your current situation is unbearable. Even if you weren’t unhappy before you began listening, you’re likely to suddenly find yourself extremely dissatisfied with your life. After the seed of dissatisfaction has been planted, the desire to change easily sprouts from it.

Dissatisfaction does indeed drive us—we want to make changes. And it can be good—a positive exercise that compels us to look at our lives, see what needs to be changed for the better, and then work to make those changes. The challenge is to want the kinds of change that God wants for us, allowing him to show us where we need to improve and then letting him guide us into transformation.

Where are you dissatisfied? Take that dissatisfaction to God. He’ll show you how to want what he wants for you.

Read Galatians 5:16–25.
It is those who know God to be eternal who most satisfactorily prove that God is their contemporary.

YEARS TO COME

To some folks, God is the great watchmaker in the sky who set time in motion and stepped back to watch from a cosmic distance. Others believe he is intimately involved with specific, daily concerns. A person’s picture of God makes all the difference in the depth of relationship he or she will have with the Creator.

Though we cannot grasp the concept of eternity, we can trust that God is eternal. Our lives on earth are governed by time and bookended by conception and death. God, however, is outside of time. He existed before hanging the stars and will continue to exist long past our time on this planet.

When we grasp the significance—the bigness—of this fact, only then are we ready to trust him in everything else. When we understand that we can never fully understand, when we trust promises that are beyond our comprehension, then we’ll be ready to take God at his word as he walks with us today.

Read John 1:1–5.
I may not long for death, but I surely long for heaven.

Joseph Bayly was well acquainted with death. He and his wife, Mary Lou, buried not just one, but three, of their sons. In 1986, he joined their three boys in heaven.

Many of us, like Joseph and Mary Lou Bayly, have known the great sorrow of losing a beloved someone to death—whether a child, a sibling, a parent, or a close friend. Perhaps we were even sitting with that person when he or she took their last breath on this earth and their first breath in eternity.

In such moments, despite our heavy hearts, we catch a glimpse of heaven. We come to understand that heaven is not merely a fictional concept, invented to make the grieving feel better. Rather, it is a real and glorious destination—a place that turns painful death to great joy.

Heaven is indeed a marvelous end for those who love Jesus.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50–55.
W. Ian Thomas

There is nothing quite so nauseating or pathetic as the flesh trying to be holy.

No Posers

The Urban Dictionary defines poser as someone who “tries to fit in but with exaggeration.” You’ve probably encountered such individuals. They desperately want to blend into the group, but it rarely happens because they are so self-conscious in trying to do so.

Posers mingle about in the Christian world, doing and looking good. In public, they tell us life is great and their smiles flow freely—for a few short hours. Eventually, though, they must retreat and reenergize, because relying on self-righteousness runs even the best intentions into the ground.

Are you guilty of posing, of putting on a good face? Stop trying so hard. Become consumed with Christ and who he wants to be in your life. Go forward in the confidence that he is with you, and let his Spirit enable you to find your place.

Read Galatians 5:16.
CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

Truth lies between two extremes, and man, like a pendulum, swings either too much this way or that.

THE TRUTH

Picture truth as a pendulum. Swing too far one way and truth can become a bludgeon with which we hurt those around us—speaking truth that perhaps would be better left unspoken, or speaking it in such a way that we cause hurt, embarrassment, and sometimes irreparable damage.

Swing too far the other way, however, and we skate along truth’s edge, nearly falling off into deceit—into that realm where truth is hidden when it should be spoken, when it needs to be spoken. At this end of the pendulum, we so fear hurting the other person, even momentarily, that we omit saying what ultimately would help.

How do we find the middle ground? By being so in tune with God that he guides our words, our tone, our timing. By seeking his wisdom for speaking the truth so that he is honored and others are helped.

Listen carefully for his guidance. He will give you the words you need.

Read Ephesians 4:15.
Awaken us, O God, from the slumber of ease and riches ere the sword devour us.

The Slumber of Ease

You may not think you’re particularly rich, but most of us live in luxury that millions of our fellow citizens on Planet Earth can only dream of. We sleep in warm houses, flip on electric switches when we want light, open cupboards overflowing with food, have closets filled with clothing, and enjoy hot showers.

There is nothing wrong with any of these things—in fact, we can thank God for every single blessing. Too often, however, these very riches send us into a slumber. We think there’s no need to depend on God for the basic necessities of life, and so we take his blessings for granted.

What pleasures and gifts has God given you? What responsibilities have come with those blessings? May you awaken this day to thankfulness and to a sense of urgency about what God would have you do with his riches.

Read James 1:12–17.