

This deeply personal devotional guide probes the heart with human stories and profound honesty. Thad shines a light on the depths of God's love in all our relationships. This is the way true love transforms those who humbly live in life's messy, everyday world.

—JOHN ARMSTRONG, president, ACT3 Network

Barnum has done it again. He has given us another volume in his Deeper Devotions series that will bless the soul of any person who seeks to know our Lord Jesus better and love Him more. This rich book—perfect for deeper daily devotional discipleship—at once enriches the mind and opens the eyes of the heart. I pray it finds a wide audience of real discipleship.

—LYLE W. DORSETT, Billy Graham professor of evangelism, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University; senior pastor, Christ the King Anglican Church

It's so refreshing to hear someone ask the hard questions about God, life, and loving others, which Thad so aptly does while encouraging us with the news that the answers are out there.

—JULIA DUIN, former religion editor, *The Washington Times*; author of *Quitting Church* and *Days of Fire and Glory*

In *Real Love*, Thad Barnum demonstrates what we need to follow Jesus well: putting our true hearts on the table before God. When we do, the Bible comes alive and God's grace is seen for the unspeakable power that it is. There we find the gentle, loving change we so desperately search for.

—TODD HUNTER, bishop; author of *Christianity Beyond Belief* and *Our Favorite Sins*

In this inspiring and very real devotional, Barnum leads us toward the heart of Jesus in brilliant and compelling ways. Each reading calls for further thought and reflection. The result is no less than a deeper love for ourselves, for others, and for our Lord.

—JO ANNE LYON, General Superintendent, The Wesleyan Church

The distance between knowing *about* love and actually *living* it is infinite. In wonderfully readable prose, my friend Thad Barnum helps us see what it means to know love and authentically live it, as God intended for us when He made us. It's actually possible! And since it's also one of the most important things in our lives, I'm thrilled to recommend this book.

—ERIC METAXAS, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* and *7 Men and the Secret of Their Greatness*

Thad Barnum is a man who lives at the intersection of the Bible and daily life. In *Real Love*, he invites us to join him there. Thad writes about the highs and lows of life and everything in-between and how God's Word reveals God's love to us wherever we are. *Real Love* is a book about real life and the love we can experience if we have ears to hear and eyes to see.

—DAVID ROSENBERRY, dean and rector, Christ Church, Plano, TX

Real Love makes the biblical application in our contextual life a spiritual diagnosis. Bishop Thaddeus exposes and connects the truth of the Scripture to our life experience. Highly recommended for Bible study in groups.

—JOHN RUCYAHANA, president of National Unity and Reconciliation Commission; author of *Bishop of Rwanda*

Real love is something for which we all long and secretly doubt we will ever find. Thad Barnum renews our hope by showing us how a day-by-day relationship with Jesus pours real love into us so that it overflows from us to really change our love-parched world. Read this book and find what you long for in the One who longs for you.

—STEVE TREASH, senior pastor, Black Rock Congregational Church, Fairfield, CT

Barnum brings life to sacred texts and throws sacred texts on life as people live it in the midst of their own personal turmoil. I cannot recommend this book too highly.

—DAVID W. VIRTUE, president of Virtueonline, an orthodox Anglican Online News Service

Here is what you will find in these pages: Like the best of friends, Thad will be with you in your pain, tease you a bit if you are simply trying to put on a nice face, and invite you to enjoy and act upon a vision to love deeply from the heart.

—EDWARD T. WELCH, author, seminary professor, and counselor at CCEF in Glenside, PA

REAL LOVE

WHERE BIBLE AND LIFE MEET

THADDEUS BARNUM



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To Gregor

Other books by Thaddeus Barnum include:
*Never Silent, Remember Eve, Where Is God in
Suffering and Tragedy?* and *Real Identity*.

For more information about these and other
discipleship resources, visit the call2disciple ministry
website at www.call2disciple.com.

Thad's first devotional in this Deeper Devotion series,
Real Identity, is available at wphonline.com.

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Use *Real Love* devotions to accompany group
Bible studies or preaching in 1 John.

Free discipleship resources are available for download at
www.wphresources.com/reallove.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Erilynne and I are having the best run. We're married thirty-three years this year—all of it has gone by so fast. But even now, as we look back, we realize we've always had the privilege of being in the heart of Christian community. It's how we started. We belonged to the best of churches where we experienced the wonder of the Lord's presence in worship, teaching, mission, and fellowship. It was led by a remarkable man, the Rev. Dr. Everett "Terry" Fullam, whose excellence in Bible teaching spanned the globe. He mentored us—like he did so many—strengthening our walk in Jesus and preparing us for a lifetime in His service. We can't imagine these devotions without Terry's signature on our lives.

Terry went to be with the Lord on March 15, 2014. We felt the best way to honor him was to introduce you to him. If you're longing for great Bible teaching, go to www.lifeonwings.org.

Fast forward, and we are surrounded by the fellowship of so many. Thank you Dad and Elena, Barry and Kate, for your unending love and prayers—especially for these writing projects. Teresa, my brother’s widow—you’re the best! Krissy, Susan, Jill, Jan—our daughters, their husbands and children—you brighten our life beyond measure. To Ken, David, Steve, and Quigg—thank you for holding me accountable. To our staff, parish council, and church family at Church of the Apostles, Fairfield, Connecticut—these devotions would never be possible without your kind encouragement.

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To the Lord be all praise and glory.

INTRODUCTION



*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden,
and I will give you rest.*

—MATTHEW 11:28

After Mom died in October 1973, my older brother, Gregor, and I entered our adult years rarely crossing paths. We simply couldn't find common ground. He gave himself to psychology and philosophy with as much passion as I gave myself to the Lord. Early on, we ended up butting heads nearly every time we talked. The two of us—well, it just didn't work.

As much as we tried to connect, superficial was about the best we could do. Weather, health, family, work. We always promised to talk soon. Always said we loved each other. But nothing ever came of it. And somehow years passed between us. For reasons of his own, he distanced himself from many in our family. He rarely came around. We'd see each other once or twice . . . a decade.

Until we entered our fifties.

We talked a little more. He came to some family events. The things that separated us didn't seem to separate us as

much. The bond between us was real and strong. He loved us—me, our dad, our sister Kate, and our families. And we loved him.

Surprisingly, he not only came to our dad's eighty-fifth birthday party in January 2012, but he and his wife actually stayed with Erilynne and me at our home for a night. It may sound small, but it was big to us. And what concerned us most that night was his health. He wasn't feeling well. He had all kinds of doctor appointments set up, and he looked scared.

So I called him more. He called me more.

Then the news came. On May 17, the doctors said he had metastasized cancer and months—maybe a year or more—to live.

After that, we talked or texted every day.

"I want to talk Bible," he said, not long after. "Where do we start?"

It took me my complete surprise. "How 'bout tomorrow, late morning?" I asked, pushing him off.

"Cool," he said.

And immediately I felt this pit in the center of my stomach. I was scared this conversation would hurt our relationship. It would spark debate between us and we'd quickly fall back to old patterns of butting heads. Arguing. Building walls between each other, and I didn't want that. Not now, especially now.

How do I do this?

So the next day I called him and admitted I was nervous. "I want to take this slowly, if you don't mind. And if it doesn't go well, let's stop, OK?"

“Yeah,” he replied, “but I really want this.”

So off we went. “There’s one place we have to start,” I said, taking him to Matthew 11:25–26. “It’s a passage where Jesus prayed to His Father and said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.’ This is important,” I interjected. “He’s setting ground rules. This has nothing to do with how brilliant we are.”

“No, I get that,” he came back.

“It means we can’t, with our own minds, understand God. Or the Bible. We need His help. He reveals Himself — if we come to Him as little children. It may sound unfair. But He doesn’t care if we’re scholars or simple-minded. People in the Third World living in poverty, who have no access to universities, have as much access to Him as we do. That’s the story.”

He surprised me. He was all in.

“Agreed, I like it. Now keep going,” he insisted.

So I asked him what he thought of verse 28. He read it out loud: “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden.” And he stopped. There was silence on the phone between us. I waited until he finally read, “For I am gentle and humble in heart” (v. 29). I heard him take a deep sigh and say, “I’ve never seen that before.”

And here we were. The two of us. At the hardest place of all.

“Gregor, this is it,” I said to him. “This is everything. It’s the entire Bible in just a few words. Can you see it?”

“I’m not sure.”

“From the beginning, God created us to be in relationship with Him. We messed up. That’s why He came. It’s why He went to the cross—to right our wrong; so He could look us in the eye and say, ‘Come to Me. Be in relationship with Me. Real, dynamic, intimate relationship.’ This is His heart for us.”

“Say more,” he pressed.

“You and me—we’re not coming to a philosophy, a theological doctrine, a worldview of some kind. We’re coming to God Almighty. We are coming to His Son. He wants us to know Him and love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. He wants this relationship with us. That’s the beauty of it.”

I stopped and said nothing more. Not then. I knew I had stepped on sacred ground. Nothing plagued my brother more in life than broken relationships. It had always been hard—with women in the past, with his own family.

Between us.

“You OK?” he asked, wondering why I stopped.

“Yeah, kind of,” I said honestly.

“Why, what’s up?”

Part of me didn’t want to go on. I didn’t want to tell him the next piece of the story—that is, if we step into this relationship with Him, He requires that we step into relationship with each other. These two inseparable pieces are the exact reason I started writing devotions on 1 John. I knew, at the heart of John’s message, stood the royal law. That is, if we truly love God, if we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, then we must—by God’s decree—love one another.

And if we don't, John said we are liars and the truth is not in us (1 John 2:4).

In my world, especially in 2012, I witnessed great Christian leaders break from each other. Churches split apart. Marriages ended in divorce. Long-time Christian friends took sides against each other. Things were done, were said, that should never be named among those who belong to Jesus. But it was.

It is. Division in the body of Christ—it's everywhere. And I was just as much to blame. Even here—starting here—with my own brother.

So I told him everything. About broken relationships in the church, among pastors and leaders, between churches right across the street from each other, among Christian denominations who hold the same creedal faith in Christ. The breaks in my own life.

"It's not acceptable," I said. "He doesn't allow us to love Him and then refuse to make it real in the relationships in our lives. This is why I'm going through 1 John. It's why I write devotions like I do. I believe with all my heart that He wants to take us to the place where Bible and life meet. Where what we say and how we live are one and the same. It doesn't matter if we believe something is true. It matters whether it's real in our lives. And if we're going to say we love the Lord, then we have to do what He says and love each other with as much passion as He, in Christ, has loved us."

"I agree," he shot back quickly.

And then he surprised me—again.

"I want to do this with you," he thundered.



“Really?”

“Yeah. You OK with that?”

“Yes, absolutely!” I agreed. And suddenly, the two of us—well, it just worked. Runners in stride for the first time since the days of our youth.

“We should’ve done this a long time ago,” he said later.

And more than anything—in these days of his sickness—I wanted all those years back, with decades more to come.



PART 1

BEHIND
THE TREE

— — — — —

1

LET'S TALK RELATIONSHIPS



Reflections on Matthew 5:21–23

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know
my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful
way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.*

—PSALM 139:23–24

I sit at my desk holding a letter in my hand. The man who wrote it is my friend. We've known each other the better part of twenty years. And, if I were honest with myself, he's family to me, like a brother.

I trust him. I love him.

But the last few months have been hard between us. What can I say? In my opinion, he made a wrong decision. He fell hard into a world of church politics and chose the way that brought him acceptance and favor. For as long as I've known him, that's not been his story. He's always stood for what is right and true and honorable when it comes to our Lord.

Better than me.

He's always been there, at my side, the moment I waver. Poking and prodding. Sometimes gentle, sometimes not, because that's what we do for each other in Christ. Though it's been hard on occasion, we've grown stronger over the

years. We've been iron sharpening iron in the best way possible (Prov. 27:17). Until now.

The letter is three months old. I keep it in my journal so I never forget, day after day, to beg God to heal the break between us. And again, for the umpteenth time, my eyes fall on the words that hurt the most:

I never thought this day would come. How dare you judge me for what I've done. You stab me with your words having no idea you're in the wrong. Not me. And you're too blind to see it. You've broken trust. You've torn the bond between us that I can't imagine will ever be repaired. Not easily. Not unless the Lord steps between us. But even then . . . I wonder.

He asks me not to call. Not write. Not for a while.

You have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not commit murder" and "Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court." But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, "You good-for-nothing," shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

—MATTHEW 5:21–22

In the days following his decision, I strongly opposed him. I was fully convinced I could change his mind. I gave

him everything I had—just as he'd done with me countless times. But it didn't work. The more I pressed, the more he dug in.

He said the same of me.

I got angry with him. Why push me away like this? Am I nothing to him? And why couldn't he see the consequences of his decision? People were hurt. All kinds of relationships were being torn apart—just like ours. But still he stood his ground and turned it all back on me. I found myself reacting in the worst kind of way. I started to quietly distance myself from him emotionally, pretending I didn't care—when I did.

Our last phone call scared me. Not in what he said. But rather, in the way he said it. The tone in his voice disarmed me completely. I lost the fight to argue. Or defend. Or re-posture. I was suddenly aware I was losing—or had just lost—my dear friend. This story was changing us. Something I never dreamed possible. So rather than mounting my next assault, I stopped the conversation.

I told him I loved him. I told him I was sorry for the way I'd handled these past weeks.

He sighed and quietly agreed. We ended the call on a semi-peaceful note. But that was it. We wouldn't talk again for months.

A few days later, his letter came in the mail.

As the weeks passed, I prayed for him every day. At first, it was all about him. I kept saying the same thing: “Lord Jesus, correct his wrong, bring him around, and make our relationship right again. Like all this never happened.”

But eventually, the Lord stepped in and shifted my prayers. It wasn't all about my friend anymore. I couldn't escape the conviction that I'd broken the most important of all God's commands. The one He gave us at the dawn of time. The same one perfectly modeled by all the Lord Jesus Christ said and did.

Because it's Him. It's His law—the royal law (James 2:8).
We are to love one another.

So what was I doing living in a broken relationship with a friend as close as a brother? What was my part in it? Why did I let it happen? How am I supposed to balance the tension between hating his decision and yet not compromising either my love for him or for the Lord and His command? Who does this well?

This isn't easy.

And so I started praying King David's prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart. . . . And see if there be any hurtful way in me" (Ps. 139:23–24). I also started working my way through the epistle of 1 John realizing, at every turn, the apostle's message thunders with unmistakable strength and power: Relationships are *everything* in the kingdom of God. And that means we can't love God and hate our neighbor. If we do, when we do, we call Him a liar. We walk in darkness (1 John 2:4, 9).

But real love, when it comes down from heaven and fills our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), we do differently. We live differently.

He has work to do in me. And He has work to do in us, His church. For "if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in

the Light, we have fellowship with one another” (1 John 1:7) and that fellowship, that light, has the power to turn the world upside down.

For Him, and for His glory.

A few more months passed.

In my office, one late afternoon, the phone rang. I looked at the caller ID and it was him. I froze. I could feel my heart start to race. I didn't want to answer it simply because I feared another setback.

“Hey,” I said softly, my guard down.

“Have you got a few minutes?” he asked, his voice sounding troubled. He was driving home after a day of meetings that didn't go well and wanted to talk. He told me there were a lot of things in his life that weren't going well and, slowly, he began to share. Piece by piece. Opening his heart to me, trusting me again. Talking like we used to talk. As if this horrible mess between us was over.

“I haven't had the peace of Christ in me. Not since we broke,” he said.

“Me too,” I confessed.

“If you don't mind, I don't want to go back over it all again. Not right now. Is that OK?” he asked.

“Yeah. We will, in time.”

“I'd like that,” he said quietly. And somehow, at that moment, we began to find our stride again. As if we'd both learned what we thought we already knew. Yes, in Christ, we're allowed to disagree with each other. Sharply. Strongly. But there are rules that govern us. Kingdom rules that can never be broken. Ever.


He commands us to love each other. As Christ loved us.
This is His story. It's meant to be our story.
And I want it with all my heart.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION*



What would happen in your life if you made Psalm 139:23–24 your prayer? How would it affect you if you applied it to broken relationships in your life?

How are we supposed to balance the tension between disagreeing with someone and the command to love them in Jesus Christ? How would we do relationships differently if, no matter the issue, we let the royal law govern our hearts?



** The reflection at the end of each devotion is designed to encourage prayer, journaling, and conversation in small group settings. It's easy to read and go on. It's better to read, stop, and engage in dialogue and prayer.*

2

BROKERING



Reflections on Matthew 5:20–24

Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

—MATTHEW 5:23–24

Leave. Go. Be reconciled. Come and present—got it.
I knew this as a young child.

My mother would see me push someone smaller than me and make them cry. She would march over, swat my rear, and say, “Now go over there and say you’re sorry. And mean it!” Of course, I didn’t want to. I’d stomp my foot, shake my head, and say, “No.”

She’d tell me, “Fine, if you don’t, you’re in bed by 7:30 for a week.” And that, in front of my older brother and sister, would be humiliating.

I didn’t have a choice. I wasn’t doing the 7:30 thing.

So I’d go over to the sniffing little brat I hurt and grunt “Sorry” in that “I don’t really mean it” kind of way and then walk off. Mom would see and holler, “You know that’s not what I meant; now go back there and do it right.”

I'd think to myself, "OK, so you want me to do it right? I can do it right. I can put on the actor's face, play pretend, and tell this little runt, 'How it pains me that I wrongfully pushed and hurt you.' Then, with a bow, exit stage right."

Big smile on my face for Mom.

For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

—MATTHEW 5:20

Adult relationships are far more complicated, but the simple rules learned as a child still apply.

Most of us know we're not supposed to hurt each other. We know that if we do, we need to take the initiative, and say sorry. A real sorry, from the heart. We also know, if we're honest, that it has a lot more to do with us than with them. Not because Mom's watching, but because God is.

And He's harder to fool. He tends to see and hear *everything* and play acting only works if—get this—we fall for our own act.

Which I'm actually good at.

I remember picking up the phone a few years ago surprised to hear the voice of an old friend. He and his wife had moved to another state, and we'd lost touch. Intentionally. We didn't end on good terms. I'd faced him with some

issues, and he countered back, hard. Neither of us budged. We cordially, in a good Christian manner (play acting), parted ways.

“Thad!”

He called to say sorry. He’d gone through the Ash Wednesday service and began the season of Lent fully convicted by the Lord that he had to get right with me. And here he was, on the phone, extending kindness.

A real sorry, from the heart.

All these years have passed, and I still love telling the story of that phone call. We did everything we were supposed to do. Each of us confessed we were wrong. We asked each other for forgiveness. We prayed for each other on the phone and, after a long talk of catching up, we ended the call fully at peace with each other. In the Lord. All things put right. Everything perfect.

It all felt so good—like I could feel the Lord smiling down on me.

Until a few years ago. I told the story one too many times. A person finally asked the question, “So how’s your relationship now? Is it still going well?”

Hmmm. Not really. We haven’t talked since.

For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses . . .

—MATTHEW 5:20

He demands more. Not just because God said so but because it's who God is. And we get the tiniest glimpse of this as we come to know the love and fellowship of the Father for His Son, the Son for His Father, with the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Relationships are everything in the kingdom of heaven.

It's why the Father sent His Son to us. It's why our Lord suffered on the cross. This, in God's eternal wisdom, was the only way to reconcile what was broken. Us with Him. Him with us. Us with each other. At the highest cost imaginable.

And He will not allow relationships to be treated lightly. Superficially. At no personal cost to our hearts.

I know this. But I don't want this.

I want the law. I want rules. I want the quick-fix, five steps to unbreaking what's broken. Give me: (1) initiate, (2) confess, (3) say sorry, (4) ask forgiveness in Jesus' name, and (5) extend the Lord's peace; and I'm happy. I can do that. I want to do that. It keeps everything superficial, and it doesn't mess with my heart.

It doesn't make me face *me*. The real, broken me.

And better yet, it can all be done on Facebook and Twitter! Getting right with others gets me right with God and gives me a righteousness that makes me all warm inside.

You will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

—MATTHEW 5:20

The fact is, I don't want to do the hard work of kingdom relationships. I want to be in the kingdom. I just don't want to do the kingdom stuff.

My heart's been hurt enough. I already have too many scars layered with too many big, fat callouses. Good calluses—since I don't hurt as much when people stomp on me, or leave me, or call me things I never dreamed they'd call me. Bad calluses—because it makes me so uncaring, so insensitive, so cold of heart and blind to the people I love so much and hurt so easily.

Just let me keep everything light. Simple. Easy. Superficial.

And if something happens, if I get hurt or if I hurt somebody, then I promise I will say sorry, a real sorry, from the heart, with play acting that even fools me. And I'll do what I do best.

I'll broker what's broken so I don't break in the process.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

If we fall for our own act, how do we wake up, get off stage, and start being real with ourselves? The Lord? Each other?

In what areas of your life are you brokering? With whom and why? Are you ready, in and with the Lord, to do something about it? What first steps can you take today?

3

GOD IS LIGHT



Reflections on 1 John 1:5

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

— 1 JOHN 1:5

I live in two very different worlds.

The majority of the time—normal time—this great statement, “God is Light,” has little or no impact on my daily life. It’s not that I don’t believe it’s true. I do. But I relegate it completely to my mind. It’s safe there. Safe because I’m able to transform the “Light” into a concept I can think about and not experience. God forbid the “Light” breaks through. That would completely mess up my life.

Like it or not, I live by a simple rule: Everything has to be safe and protected. That’s why I shield my heart. That’s why my mind is trained to filter the world around me. It has a job to do, a very specific job, to keep everything ordered 24/7/365. No big changes. No rocking the boat. Everything stays the same.

So, for example, every Sunday in church we begin our worship from *The Book of Common Prayer* with these

words: “Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.”¹

This prayer is almost identical in thought to the words of Hebrews 4:13: “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

Together we say “Amen!” and then march right on with the service. I’m always glad for that. I fear one day these words will actually make sense, and we’ll find ourselves faced with the “Light.” Our massive defense systems gone. No big, thick walls between us and God, us and each other, us and ourselves. All of it gone, all of it true: Our hearts open, desires known, secrets exposed. Who can handle that?

Very unhelpful and way too emotional. I’d suddenly be forced to see myself for who I am and not who I pretend to be. I’d have to deal with things I’ve refused for years to deal with or talk about. I’d be suddenly tossed into the world of “messy,” and I don’t like messy. I don’t want messy.

Just say the prayer and press on. Stick with the routine. Make the simple decision to stay in control. Nothing impacts my life today. No big changes. No rocking the boat. Do everything to turn the “Light” of God into a theological concept that never finds its way to my heart.

My broken heart.

Everything has to be safe and protected.

I remember as a little boy I was afraid of the dark. At night, Mom and Dad kept the hall light on and my bedroom door open a crack. I had just enough light to feel safe. And just enough dark to sleep.

I like that arrangement.

I want just enough “Light” to feel safe. And just enough dark to live my sleepy little Christian life in peace and quiet.

For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,”
is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of
the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

—2 CORINTHIANS 4:6

Every once in a while I slip into “God-time” and enter the kingdom world where the Light shines bright in my heart.

Sometimes it’s His doing. I’m driving so hard, so fast with my busy life and I suddenly see His police lights in my rearview mirror. I hear the sirens. I get that horrible feeling of guilt in the pit of my stomach and get mad at myself that I’ve done something wrong. That I was caught. That I needed to be caught.²

But most times, it’s my doing.

I can’t sustain the image. I do everything I can to manage my world and, most times, it works. But sometimes it doesn’t, and I come crashing down. I become instantly aware of the people I’ve hurt, the things I’ve said and done which have

offended God and others, and worse—I’ve known it for a long time. I’ve pushed it farther down, refusing to deal with it. Refusing to admit my own rebellion.

And I find myself on my knees. Turning myself in. Slipping out of “normal time” into “God-time.”

He speaks, and the Light shines in my darkness to give me the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

This is where it all began. Years ago, when I was in my late teens, when I first came to know Jesus Christ as Lord of my life, as the Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5). I knew He knew me. I knew my heart was open, my desires known, my secrets fully exposed—and I loved it. I loved it because the fight to be somebody I’m not was over. The burden of carrying the weight of my sins was off of me.

And I knew what I didn’t know before. The secret of the kingdom of God is found right here.

“For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite’” (Isa. 57:15).

In humility. In confession. In repentance.

This is where He dwells with us. This is where He has ordained the stuff of relationships to begin and to be lived out day by day, year by year, in this age and in the age to come. This is the place, the only place, He is in fellowship with us. We with Him and each other.

And I lived here for a while. I went back over all the relationships I’d messed up over the years and I went to

them. Or called them. Or wrote to them. Just to say sorry and to own my part in what went wrong. I was learning to be and walk in the Light, not just with my past. Doing right-now relationships with an open heart. Desires known; secrets exposed. In humility. In confession. In repentance.

Where nothing is safe and protected.

Until I got hurt. Once, twice. And then watched others get hurt. Not by people of the world but by the people of the Light. I didn't understand it. I didn't know what to do. So I did what I've always done. I ran back to my other world.

And quietly slipped into "normal time."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION



How would life change for you if your heart was open before the Lord, desires known, secrets exposed?

We often love darkness more than light (John 3:19–21). What do you need today to help you be and walk in the Light of Jesus Christ? With Him? With others?

NOTES



1. *The Book of Common Prayer*, red ed. (New York: Church Publishing, 1979), 355.

2. This is the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sin (John 16:8). It is also called "the discipline of the Lord" who "disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness." See Hebrews 12:5–11.