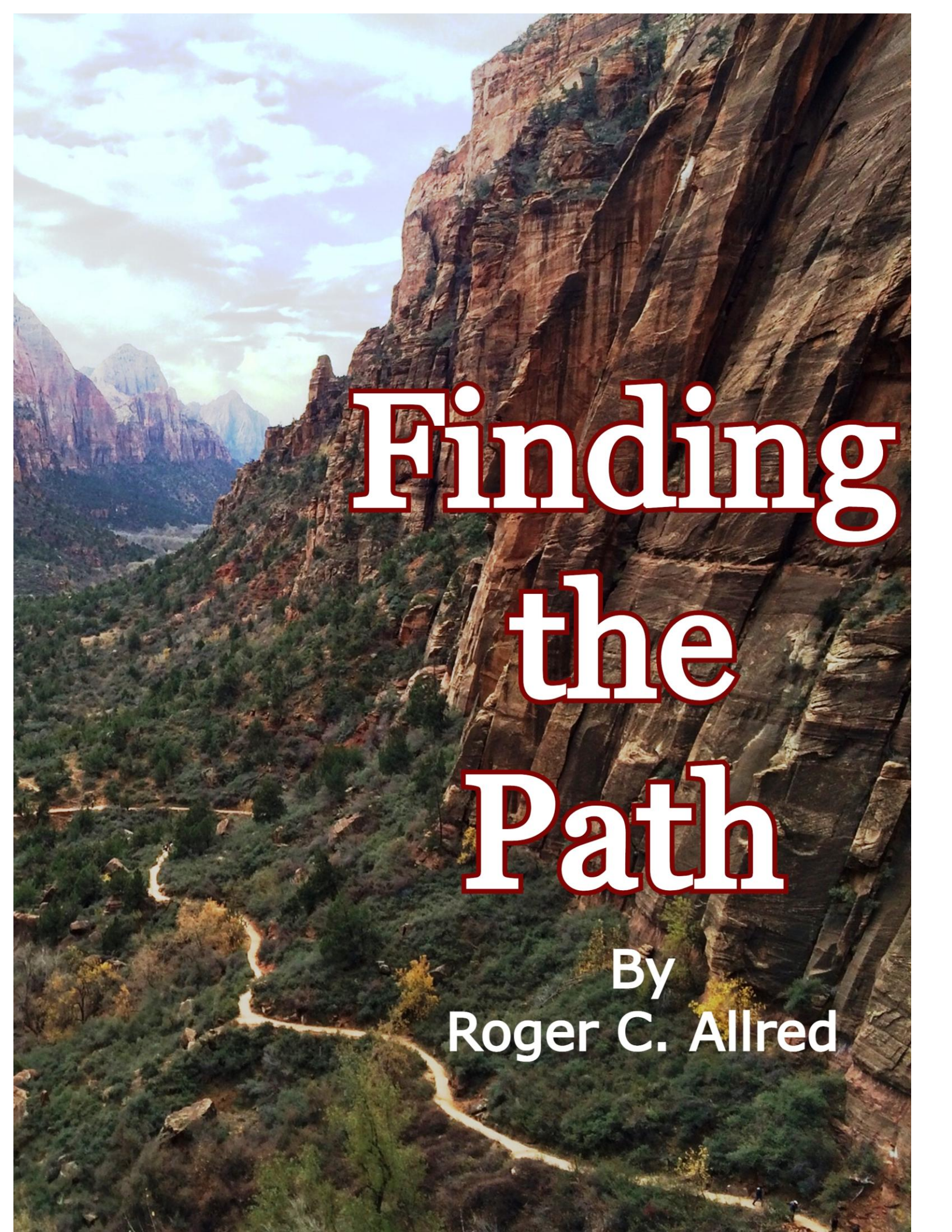


A full-page background image of a canyon landscape. On the right, a massive, steep, reddish-brown rock cliff rises vertically. A narrow, light-colored dirt path winds through a lush green valley at the base of the cliff, leading towards distant, hazy mountain peaks under a cloudy sky. The text 'Finding the Path' is overlaid in a large, white, serif font with a red outline, positioned across the middle of the image.

Finding the Path

By
Roger C. Allred

Dedication

Dedicated to all who are willing to make the necessary sacrifices to find the true path to happiness. Also, to those who are on the path and act as the hands of God by selflessly lifting, serving and nurturing all within their sphere of influence.

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Prologue

This is the story of an unremarkable man who had a remarkable experience. It changed him and could change the course of humanity, but only if others are willing to do what he did. That man was David Schwartz.

Chapter 1 - Preparation

Brian and Teresa Schwartz were born and raised in El Dorado, Arkansas, a community of less than 25,000 people. El Dorado came to be as an oil, chemical and timber settlement in the mid-1800s. Because it was a typical Southern town, located about 20 miles north of the Louisiana border, El Dorado was pronounced “El Do-RAY-do” and not the Hispanic pronunciation of “El Do-RAW-do.” An easy Southern charm had always been part of the culture.

Brian and Teresa married while they attended the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. After graduation, Brian went to dental school in Kansas City, Missouri but both of them were anxious to start Brian’s dental practice back home in El Dorado when he finished dental school. It never occurred to them to live anywhere else.

El Dorado was a good place to live. The people were friendly and the cost of living was rather low. The biggest obstacle to living there was finding a good job and since Brian was one of the few dentists in town, Brian and Teresa didn’t have to worry.

Teresa was very bright and studied to be a physical therapist in college. When Brian entered dental school, Teresa worked to support them and gave up her career plans. Many of their friends criticized her for that decision but she felt that it was the right thing to do because she was more interested in being a supportive partner in their marriage than in a career. When Brian started his dental practice she would help, doing billing or being a receptionist as the need arose.

Their first child, David Schwartz, was born in 1991. When Teresa brought her baby home from the hospital, she gave up working all together. She was again criticized for “wasting her intelligence and earning potential.” Teresa didn’t care. She was happy to be a stay-at-home mom. Dave was grateful that his mom was always there when he came home from school to give him a snack and discuss whatever was on his mind. He felt like her influence had a great deal to do with the positive course of his life. Dave’s only sibling was a younger sister.

Teresa wanted to name their son, David, after her father. Brian was fine with the name of David, if his middle name was Daniel. The name Daniel wasn’t important to Brian but he was very pleased that David Daniel Schwartz would have the initials, D.D.S. Brian wanted his son to follow in his footsteps and, one day, to take over his growing dental practice.

Brian and Teresa were good parents for their two children and they provided a solid, loving foundation on which the kids could build fulfilling lives. The family regularly attended the Second Baptist Church of El Dorado and being a Southern Baptist was an important part of the culture of the Schwartz family.

Dave knew most of the important Bible stories from attending Sunday School at Second Baptist. Pastor Jeff was a caring man who always made Dave feel comfortable about attending church. Pastor Jeff's sermons were interesting and uplifting, so Dave chose to be baptized a member of the Baptist church when he was ten-years-old. As he got older, Dave began to have questions about God, religion and the purpose of life. He found that what he learned in Sunday School did not satisfy those concerns.

Dave wondered why God would put people on earth and expect them to "figure it out" by themselves. He also was concerned, maybe even worried, about death. He had experienced losing three of his four grandparents, who he loved very much. He wasn't sure if they were in heaven or if they were still alive at all. If they were alive, what were they doing? Did God have a master plan for people on earth and for people after they died? If there was, was he part of it? No one, including Pastor Jeff, could give him what he considered to be reasonable answers to his questions.

Dave's parents weren't much help. They seemed to live their lives as if what bothered him so much didn't concern them at all. His parents were good people and they expected that they would go to heaven after they died. They stayed busy with work and daily activities and didn't fuss much with religion other than to attend Sunday services. His dad's practice was growing and providing the family with all of the necessities and most of the luxuries of life, so they were content.

The Schwartz' were better off than most families in town and Brian and Teresa were part of the best social circles. They spent a lot of time at parties, their wine club and University of Arkansas Alumni events. They were avid fans of their beloved Razorbacks. "Go Hogs!"

Dave's sister was five years younger and Dave didn't spend much time discussing matters of the soul with her because she was preoccupied with her own interests, like dance lessons and her friends. He didn't discuss his concerns with his friends at school either because they didn't seem to care like he did. So, he had to be content with the hope that the answers might come later in life for him.

In spite of the angst that his concerns caused him, he was a naturally optimistic and happy teenager. Dave was mature for his age and since he couldn't seem to make sense of God and religion, he adopted his own standard of, "Happiness is the objective of my life." At a young age, Dave decided to weigh his decisions by asking himself, "Where will this decision take me?" And, "Will this decision lead me to happiness?"

Dave was wise enough to understand that seeking momentary pleasure was not the way to find happiness. He had learned that the hard way by following the crowd at high

school and doing some things that he regretted. He was not proud of himself for what he did but he did learn an important lesson. His dedication to do only those things that would produce lasting happiness for him helped him to avoid many pitfalls.

At El Dorado High School, Dave was just like everyone else in most ways. He wasn't a stellar athlete but he did play football like a typical athletic, southern, male student. He wasn't a scholar but he loved to learn and was on the high school newspaper staff. He especially enjoyed journalism because it gave him the opportunity to track down the details of a story and then report that information as eloquently as possible. He loved the creativity of writing and the discipline of getting the facts right. He wasn't one of the popular kids in high school but both students and faculty agreed that Dave was a good boy.

As graduation from high school neared, he enrolled in college. He had always intended to go to the University of Arkansas, like his parents, but his desire to be a journalist led him to enroll at U.C.L.A. in faraway California. He thought that being in a university closer to the larger media markets would be good for his journalism career. His friends thought he was crazy to go so far away from home and his dad was very disappointed that his D.D.S. son was never going to be a dentist. His good parents, nevertheless, supported his decision to pursue his own dreams, so off he went to a world very different from El Dorado, Arkansas.

He arrived at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) and didn't know a soul within 1,500 miles. He took a taxi to his new home and was simultaneously awe-struck and frightened by what he saw on the way to his dorm from the airport. His parents paid for tuition, meals and housing but he was responsible for the rest. Luckily, his dad had provided him with a job cleaning the dental office while he was in high school. He didn't have enough money for a car but he had plenty to do everything else.

He arrived early for his freshman English class and chose a seat on the front row, as he normally did. He found that his ability to learn increased the closer he was to the teacher and Dave wanted to do his very best at U.C.L.A. With only a couple of minutes before class was to start, a young woman rushed in and plopped herself in the seat next to him. Dave glanced over at her and was stunned by how attractive she was. He was shocked when she smiled at him and said, "Hi, my name is Mellyn."

He stammered out, "Oh...hello." To which she responded, "What's your name?" Now, he was embarrassed and thought, "Well, DUH! Why didn't I tell her that?" He recovered enough to say, "I'm David Schwartz." Then he thought, "Oh no, she didn't ask for my family tree. She is going to think that I'm a dork."

Mellyn didn't seem to be concerned at all about his responses and she just smiled and said, "Good to meet you, Dave." Dave was thankful that the professor started the class, saving him from any further embarrassment.

As the professor began to explain the course and the coursework, Dave would take as many furtive glances at Mellyn as he could without revealing what he was doing. He was mesmerized by her dark brown hair, olive skin and almond shaped eyes. If he had ever seen a more beautiful girl, he didn't remember when. He was smitten. By now, Dave had completely stopped listening to the professor and was trying to figure out how he could get Mellyn to spend time with him.

Halfway through the lecture, the most brilliant idea of his young life occurred to him. He would suggest a study group and let her know that English was his strong suit. He spent the rest of the class-time formulating what he would say, figuring that he could get the essence of the professor's lecture from her, hopefully.

As soon as class ended, he turned to Mellyn and gave his practiced pitch, adding, "Hey, uh..." at the beginning and, "it always helps me to study with other people," at the end. He was concerned that he did not smile and what he said sounded fairly mechanical but he was pleased with himself that he had mustered enough courage to actually talk to her. He was thrilled when she said, "Sure" and gave him her phone number. The study group turned out to be the ideal way for Dave to eventually work up enough courage to ask her on a date.

Meeting Mellyn was the best thing that ever happened to Dave at U.C.L.A. With Dave's help in English, things went well scholastically for Mellyn at U.C.L.A. but not so well for Dave. He majored in Communication Studies, which was the typical course of study for journalism students. The problem with Dave's studies started long before he was born and had nothing to do with his intelligence, ability or passion for journalism.

The United States and other countries had enjoyed unprecedented prosperity following World War II. As nations grew more wealthy, they turned their back on God in favor of the opinions of an influential intelligentsia. The 1960's was a time of revolution and protests in the U.S. - The Sexual Revolution, Women's Liberation movement, Hippies, recreational drug experimentation, the Viet Nam War and related protests. Each of these events helped move society away from God-given, moral standards and towards "If it feels good, do it."

The United States, like most of the rest of the world, changed during Dave's lifetime from a mostly religious populace to one that claimed to be "spiritual" but not religious. The practical interpretation was that God might exist but no one needed to be concerned with what He thought and without God, situational morality became popular. Rock stars, celebrities and professional athletes became the prophets of the masses because "no-rules morality" fit their lifestyle.

Academia adopted this amorality as a more enlightened approach and simultaneously rejected Judeo-Christian values (God-given absolutes) and ancient Greek teleology (achieving one's purpose in life) in favor of godless Neo-Marxism ("social institutions like churches and schools exist to take advantage of the weak") and intellectual self-

righteousness. A complicit and equally amoral media was quick to embrace “the truth” as seen through the lens of political correctness.

One of these politically-correct philosophies was that diversity was more important than competency in education, government, industry and society in general. In 1998, the federal Employment Equality Act enthroned “Affirmative Action” as a way to use race, gender and sexual orientation to discriminate against more competent people because protected classes, as arbitrarily defined by law, were given preferential treatment.

In August 2011, President Barack Obama signed an Executive Order that directed federal executive departments and agencies to focus on “diversity” as a key component of their human resources strategies. He thus legitimized a politically-correct definition of fairness that was brutally unfair to more qualified students, prospective employees and current employees that were trying to advance in their careers.

U.C.L.A, like almost all universities, jumped on the diversity bandwagon and spent millions of dollars to promote and enforce it. Actually, those costs were being passed on to the students who enrolled in the universities through steep tuition hikes; Dave being one of them.

Dave enjoyed his General Education studies and did very well. It was when he began his higher division classes that he encountered Professor Jamika Harris-Stiles - a black, gay woman, the trifecta of diversity. Her hyphenated name included the last name of her wife. Because of her definition of her “intersectionality,” she felt justified in blaming white, heterosexual males for all of the perceived slights, “microaggressions,” that she had experienced in life. She was a beneficiary, however, of the diversity initiative and became a loud advocate of diversity as the panacea for all societal problems.

It was after taking a couple of classes from Professor Harris-Stiles that Dave began to question his decision to major in journalism. Political correctness didn’t seem to have much impact on Mellyn in the Accounting Department but it consumed the Communications Department, among many others, and the university administration. It seemed that his education included a heavy dose of indoctrination.

Dave had loved the idea of being a journalist since the time he took his first journalism class at El Dorado High School. That passion only increased as he became an active participant on the high school newspaper staff reporting on events and issues that impacted the students. He relished the idea of sharing facts that allowed others to make well-reasoned decisions. He now found, in Professor Harris-Stiles’ class, that stories were more about the agendas of those who controlled the media than they were about facts.

Professor Harris-Stiles had very little practical experience. She had served as an intern at a large Chicago-based newspaper and then on the staff of the L.A. Times. It didn’t take long for her to determine that she could make more money and have more freedom by moving into academia. U.C.L.A was actively recruiting for diversity in the

Communications Department. She was hired immediately and earned her PhD while teaching full-time.

She was an adequate teacher but she had no tolerance for students who didn't see the world through her eyes. This was the cause of Dave's concerns about journalism as a profession. His vision of journalism and that of Professor Harris-Stiles were at odds. It wasn't that she taught that a journalist should blatantly lie but she taught that the news should be molded to fit the narrative that was currently in vogue.

That narrative included that her way of thinking was enlightened and any other way was outdated and boorish. She taught that the role of the government was to provide for all, not as charity but because everyone was entitled to be cared for by the government, cradle to grave. Socialism was the only fair way. The Founding Fathers of the United States were old white men who hated women and minorities and their values needed to be purged from the United States of America. God, if he existed, was irrelevant.

Professor Harris-Stiles was not alone in her view of America. The Pew Research Center confirmed that those who accept her views reject God's importance in day-to-day decisions, and they overwhelmingly controlled the news media, entertainment media and universities. The zeitgeist of Americans in the beginning of the 21st century was to love the sophistry of intellectuals more than the wisdom of God, love virtue-signaling more than virtue and focus on rights instead of individual responsibilities.

Professor Harris-Stiles would routinely "correct" his articles, instructing him to overlook some facts in a story in favor of other information that would allow the story to be focused in a way that promoted what she thought was important. She also instructed the class to focus on stories that advanced her beliefs because those that disagreed with her promoted "hate, racism, sexism, xenophobia and homophobia." They were evil.

Dave grew up with many black and some Hispanic students, especially his football teammates. He had seen prejudice but it wasn't pervasive nor systemic. Racism had been steadily declining in the United States until it was politicized. Victimhood was now being fabricated and glorified. This spawned a new type of McCarthyism - accusing others of being racist for any reason in order to silence anyone who dared disagree with the accusers. Tilting at windmills of fabricated victimhood became an unprincipled way to gain power.

As Dave tried to reconcile what was being taught at the university, in the commercial media and on social media with what his parents had taught him, he came to realize that the trending narrative at the university could not be trusted. His own experience confirmed that success or failure in life had much more to do with family culture than societal influences. Those who valued education, obeying the law, and living a moral life almost always improved their station in life. Race, gender and sexual orientation were not the reasons that someone did not succeed.

Dave considered himself to be a fairly open-minded thinker. He knew that the right thing to do as a journalist was to report the unvarnished truth and let the facts speak for themselves but he was getting the message that the truth wasn't the objective of the modern journalist. Nevertheless, he was a diligent student and was able to graduate from U.C.L.A, magna cum laude.

Chapter 2 - The Purpose of Life

As frustrating as his studies were, Dave never regretted his decision to attend U.C.L.A because that was where he met Mellyn and he began the courtship of the girl that would become the love of his life. He asked her on a date after their English class study group ended. He was thrilled that she said, "Yes." From that point on, he did everything that he could think of to monopolize her time, which accomplished two objectives - He got to spend more time with her and the more that she was seen with him, the less likely that it was that he would have to compete with other guys for her attention.

They dated for about a year before they became exclusive. Dave and Mellyn started living together at the end of their junior year, like many of their friends were doing. Being together for so long gave Dave the opportunity to get to know her very well. Mellyn Simmons was the daughter of Samuel and Kathy Simmons and was born and raised in Redondo Beach, California, not that far from U.C.L.A. Samuel Simmons was a successful attorney and Kathy came from a wealthy family, so their family had plenty of money and their lifestyle showed it. Mellyn was not only pretty, she was wealthy, athletic, smart and very popular at Redondo Union High School. She was the whole package.

The question in Dave's mind, at the beginning, was, "Why would someone like Mellyn want to date me?" He had, in fact, helped her through their freshman English class because she was more of a numbers person but that didn't mean that she would want to date him.

Once Dave got to know Mellyn better, he began to share his frustrations with what he was being taught in journalism classes. He did not want to be involved in the current trend to promote making decisions based on feelings rather than facts, and thus deceive those who were being educated by a biased media. From these conversations, Mellyn understood what was important to Dave and she admired him for his commitment to being honorable.

Mellyn went from admiring him to falling in love with him. The reason that she was attracted to Dave was very simple, as she would tell him, "I admire you for your strong convictions and your desire to be the best version of yourself. You show me that you love me and want me to be the best I can be also. Those are qualities that I am not accustomed to seeing in guys, even if you are a country bumpkin."

Mellyn was intelligent, beautiful and had come from a wealthy family. It surprised Dave that even with all those things going for her, she didn't act entitled. She was kind, generous and truly interested in others. She was not perfect, however. She was stubborn or "strong-willed," as she would like to say.

One of her favorite maxims was, "In God I trust, all others I question." This was particularly interesting since her parents were agnostic and the topic of God had never been discussed in her home. She also hated to be corrected, even if she was wrong.

No, especially when she was wrong. Dave found this quality frustrating at times but usually just amusing. It seemed to him that she just wanted to prove to Dave and the rest of the world that no one could tell her what to do or how to think.

Accountants are typically organized and scheduled but not comfortable in social situations. Mellyn was the opposite of a typical accountant. She was a free spirit, very spontaneous and loved talking to people more than being on time. On the other hand, Dave was organized and scheduled. Their yin and yang fit together nicely and they were better as a couple than they were as individuals.

Obviously, Mellyn was the most important relationship in his life but Dave also made a friend at U.C.L.A. who had a significant influence on Dave's life. That man was Scott Henning who was also a journalism student and was from Smoot, Wyoming. Smoot was a farming town of about 120 residents in the beautiful Star Valley and Scott was an exceptional athlete at Star Valley High School. His talents allowed him to attend U.C.L.A. on a baseball scholarship.

Dave and Scott bonded initially because of their mutual mistrust of Professor Jamika Harris-Stiles, or Professor "Jammy," as Scott like to call her. She was a rather pretentious prig and Scott thought the nickname he gave her brought her down to the level of mere mortals. He wasn't trying to be mean but it was his way to bring a little levity into a difficult situation.

Scott was even more of a small-town boy than Dave. He was raised on a small dairy farm. His mom stayed at home with Scott and his four siblings and his dad worked for the phone company. Scott's dad and the kids also worked the dairy as a side-business. It provided income for the family but the dairy, more importantly, gave Scott's parents the opportunity to teach their children about being responsible and the importance of work. They all grew up knowing the value of being self-reliant.

Working on a dairy farm was truly demanding work. The cows needed to be milked morning and evening, 365 days a year. Not to mention hauling hay in the summer to feed the cows during the winter. Scott would say that his dad "loved to work" and his dad tried to instill that work ethic in his kids. Scott's dad enjoyed joking around with his kids and the combination of work and laughter made the work so much easier. Scott learned to love to work and sought opportunities to work to help others.

It was these life lessons that Scott learned from his parents, combined with his faith in God, that made him absolutely reject what Professor "Jammy" was trying to pass off as the virtuous way of thinking. Dave found a kindred-spirit in this kid who was raised in an environment so different than his.

While most of the other students embraced the "enlightened" mindset being taught at the university, Dave and Scott found themselves being the only philosophical dissidents in their journalism classes. It made them feel like David fighting Goliath - even though only Scott fully understood the story of David and Goliath, while Dave just knew it was a

story about the little guy winning. No matter. They were fighting a tidal wave of self-righteous rhetoric but they were fighting it together and it was good to have a fellow soldier on his side.

Scott was very personable and seemed to like everyone. Most people also liked him because he was just a great guy. He would go out of his way to help, comfort or do anything else he could to make another person feel better. He had a great sense of humor and used it to diffuse difficult situations. One of Scott's favorite things to say was, "How great is life today!" Every day was a good day for him and he lived his life to the fullest.

They rarely talked about religion but Dave knew that Scott's faith permeated every aspect of Scott's life. Scott attended church services regularly. He would gladly talk about his beliefs but he never tried to force his beliefs on others. Dave and Scott had spent enough time together that Dave knew that Scott's faith in God gave him peace and direction in this life and the anticipation of a glorious life hereafter. He was genuinely happy. Dave wished that he could be as much at peace with life as Scott.

One day, Dave asked Scott how he could be so positive about life and the future, especially with the craziness of life and the difficult people that there are in the world. Scott replied, "I don't know but I'm sure that a lot of it came from how I was raised and my faith in God. Another big influence in my life came when I became acquainted with the writings of C. Terry Warner in my philosophy class. C. Terry Warner was a philosophy professor at another university and a principal of the Arbinger Institute, which was founded on his teachings. The concepts I learned did more to teach me how to become a happier and better person than anything else, with the exception of what my mom and dad taught me about God. My folks are my witnesses that I am a much better person because of it."

"I came to understand that I was engaged in self-betrayal by not treating others the way that my conscience prompted me to do. Then, to cover my pride, I would justify my actions by blaming them for my bad behavior. I would convince myself that I was the righteous victim of others, who were just being selfish and mean. My feelings lied to me and I believed. Therefore, I felt justified and proud of my goodness, while I tolerated the shortcomings of others. It is embarrassing to confess my hypocrisy, but it is true."

"The real change in me came when I finally realized that those who loved me were telling me the truth about my bad behavior and I could trust what they were telling me because I knew they loved me. I learned that whenever I became angry it was because I had done something wrong. Not that I was the most wrong in any specific argument, but that didn't matter because I nevertheless had done something wrong. I started looking inward for the reasons for my conduct. I found that happiness came when I accepted responsibility for my actions and apologized."

"Wow, that is quite a story," Dave said.

“Yeah, I know,” Scott answered. “The only thing for certain is that I am happier and enjoy other people more when I act according to what I have learned.”

Dave would often think about what Scott had said. He genuinely admired Scott and wished that he could be more like him. Dave decided that his friendship with Scott was one of the most important relationships of his life and he would do all he could to learn from Scott’s example.

Neither Dave nor Scott were into the typical college drinking scene but Scott was so popular that he was always invited to the frat parties. He would usually go to one each weekend to socialize and often serve as the designated driver - maybe another reason that he was invited. It seemed strange to Dave that social gatherings without alcohol never happened and smoking pot occasionally was considered to be normal, although it was illegal.

Dave was much less social than Scott and he rarely went to parties but preferred spending time alone with Mellyn. During the week, they were studying at night. On the weekend, they would go to dinner with Mellyn’s parents in Redondo Beach. After dinner, Dave and Mellyn liked to take walks on a quiet stretch of Hermosa Beach, just a short drive from her parent’s house.

Dave was in his junior year and life was going well, with the exception of his journalism classes with Jammy but that was about to change. Early one Sunday morning, Dave got a frantic call. It was from Scott’s roommate who told Dave that Scott was at a party the night before. He had left the party and was walking to his car when he was hit by a drunk driver leaving the same party. Scott was in Cedars-Sinai Hospital on a respirator but was not expected to recover.

Dave threw on his clothes and rushed to the hospital, not knowing what he could do but he wanted to be there for whatever reason. He arrived at the hospital and inquired about Scott. The receptionist directed him to a waiting room where he met Scott’s parents. They had left Smoot late the previous night and driven for over 3 hours to the Salt Lake City airport. They caught the first plane to LAX and arrived at the hospital about an hour before Dave.

They were genuinely glad to see Dave because Scott had told them that Dave was a close friend of his. Scott’s parents were happy that Dave could be with them at this difficult time, even though they only knew him from Scott’s phone calls and emails. Through their tears, they confided in Dave that they were trying to make a difficult decision and they would appreciate his opinion.

The doctors told Scott’s parents that the accident had so badly damaged Scott’s brain stem that his brain had been deprived of oxygen. He was on a ventilator but he had been declared brain dead. He could never recover. The doctors and nurses expressed their condolences to the parents and told them that many people receive comfort by

making the decision to donate the organs of their loved one so that other people might live.

Scott had registered as an organ donor, which did not come as a surprise. Scott's parents were just having a hard time agreeing to give approval to the doctors to recover his organs for transplant. They had never imagined that this moment would come and they were struggling with the fact that their son was gone.

They asked Dave for his thoughts. Dave expressed his love for Scott and then said that it seemed to him that it wouldn't be true to who Scott was to delay the gift Scott wanted to give as he left this life.

Scott's parents knew that Dave was right and told the doctors to begin the process of organ recovery. Scott's donated organs were able to save the life of a man in his fifties by giving him a healthy heart. He also relieved a woman and a teenager from their dialysis regimens with the donation of his two kidneys. Finally, a baby received a lobe of his liver, saving the baby's life and allowing that little girl the prospect of a full and complete life. Scott saved four people's lives and gave his parents comfort knowing that his untimely death was not all in vain. He was a hero.

Dave got to say good-bye to his great friend before they took him to the operating room for the organ recovery surgery. Scott's body was then transported back to Star Valley for burial. About a month after the transplant, Scott's parents received a letter from the 59-year-old who received Scott's heart. The United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) keeps all donors' information confidential but the recipient of a donated organ can write a letter of gratitude to the anonymous donor's family and UNOS arranges for the letter to be delivered.

This is the letter that they received,

"Dear Donor Family,

You have given me the gift of life. Your act of kindness has a ripple effect that is impossible to measure. I cannot adequately express my appreciation for your courage, compassion and charity. Prior to my heart disease, I enjoyed camping, cycling, river rafting and hiking, including two hikes to the top of Mt. Whitney. After 13 years of heart disease, thanks to you, my life has been restored. The most important thing for you to know is that my wife, our children and their spouses, our grandchildren, my extended family and a multitude of friends have been praying for you in this difficult time. Your generosity will never be forgotten.
Sincerely, Roger"

This letter reassured Scott's parents that they and Scott had done a wonderful thing.

This was not the end of Scott's influence in Dave's life, however. Dave would always remember his friend's example and Dave became more focused on finding the peace that Scott had. Dave was going to miss Scott and his stellar example of goodness.

As the pain of Scott's death began to diminish, his old concern about God and life and death increased. He also questioned why God, if he existed, would allow such a wonderful guy as Scott to be killed. It all seemed so senseless. The specter of death now loomed large in Dave's life and he could not get it out of his mind. He and Mellyn spent many hours discussing the issue but it was mostly Dave talking and Mellyn being supportive. She did not know what to say to his questions like, "Without a compass, how does one navigate life?"

Dave made two decisions in honor of Scott. He immediately registered as an organ donor and he also vowed to never become intoxicated. He reasoned that alcohol never benefited anyone other than to create a chemical "high" that reduces inhibitions and creates a separation from reality. On the other hand, the costs of alcohol include; drunk driving deaths like the one that took his friend's life, unwanted pregnancy, life destroying alcoholism, divorce, child and spousal abuse, loss of a job, and wasted time, wasted money and wasted lives. It was not worth it.

As for the questions about the reality of God and the purpose of life, they would just have to wait. These were questions for which he could not find an answer. Dave did not actively seek for answers because he was not certain that there were any but he decided to wait and see if the answers came to him.

Dave continued with his daily life, with the memory of Scott always in the background. After graduation, he and Mellyn were married at The Beach Club in Santa Monica. The ceremony was performed on the sand with the Pacific Ocean as the backdrop. As part of his marriage vows, he told Mellyn, "My mantra has always been, 'Happiness is the objective of my life.' Simply put, this means that I will never knowingly do anything that does not contribute to my happiness. Marrying you, Mellyn, is the thing that has given me more happiness than anything else I have done in my life."

They moved to Bakersfield, a good-sized city in the central valley of California, where he took a job at a local network TV station. Dave thought that he would be able to practice his brand of journalism in a smaller market that accepted both conservative and liberal thought. It wasn't that far from Mellyn's parents in Redondo Beach and it was a place that they could afford to buy a nice house. Mellyn was also able to get a good job in the Internal Auditing Department with Chevron Corporation, an oil company that had a large presence in Bakersfield.

Bakersfield was a conservative enclave in a very liberal state. It was often referred to by other Californians as, "The armpit of California" because of the hot summers, poor air quality and the fact that Bakersfield is two hours from anyplace that anyone wants to visit. Being located in the very fertile San Joaquin valley made the Bakersfield area ideal for agriculture - cotton, almonds, pistachios and carrots especially. It was also rich in crude oil reserves, so the dominant industries were oil and ag. These industries employed many migrant workers and roughnecks, in addition to the white-collar workers that are needed in all industries. It was a good mix of people with varied backgrounds and cultures.

Bakersfield also had a large religious community, dominated by Southern Baptists, just like in El Dorado. Dave and Mellyn decided that their new home was a good place to raise a family and so, after a few years, they decided to have children. Danielle and Dylan were born to them a couple of years apart.

They settled in and were very happy. They assumed that their lives would be much like all of those around them, unremarkable. They were wrong.

Chapter 3 - God Cares

It was a sunny and beautiful April day, as are most Spring days in Bakersfield. Both Danielle and Dylan were school-age by this time and Dave and Mellyn were able to take the kids to school before they had to be at work. Their family was young and healthy and the future looked bright.

They both were satisfied and progressing in their respective careers. Dave and Mellyn had a nice group of friends and they were making enough money to have a very comfortable lifestyle. Everything seemed to be going as well as could be expected.

The only problem was Dave's ongoing wrestle with the purpose of his life. He continually asked himself, "Is this all there is to life - go to work, hang out with friends, raise my kids and then just die? Is there something more meaningful that I should be doing? Is there a life after this one?" Since he could not find answers that satisfied him, he just went on, trying to grab all the gusto out of life that he could.

After the kids were asleep that night in April, Dave and Mellyn laid in bed and talked. Both were happy but, for no particular reason, Dave began to explain his frustration with finding the true purpose of his life to Mellyn. He told her how he felt but she had heard it all before, many times. She reassured him, again, that things would work out. She kissed him goodnight and they both went to sleep.

Sometime during the night, Dave had a dream or vision or something like it that he couldn't quite figure out. It was so memorable that he was able to describe every detail to Mellyn the next morning when she awoke. This is what he told her.

I was walking in an open field when I met a man who appeared to be someone, I knew but I didn't know where or how I had met him. He was about my size and he had a well-groomed beard. The only different thing about him was the way he dressed. He was wearing what looked like traditional Middle Eastern clothes. For some reason, this did not strike me as strange because his dress just looked natural for him. His face had sort of a glow or aura but that did not seem odd to me either. I don't know why.

He spoke to me, "David Schwartz, is that you?"

To which I responded, "Yes. I think I know you but I don't remember from where or when."

The man then said, "My name is Abraham or it was after God changed my name because it was Abram before that."

This exchange confused me because I didn't remember knowing anyone named Abraham or Abram, for that matter, so I asked again, "Abraham, I am sorry but could you tell me more about yourself so I can recall how we met?"

“Oh David, we have never met before,” he said. “I lived over 2,000 years before Christ in the Chaldean city of Ur. I, like you, was a seeker of truth.”

“Holy Mackerel,” I thought. “What is happening? I’m talking to a guy who says that he lived 4,000 years before me.” As I thought more about it, I seemed to recall someone named Abraham in the Bible that Pastor Jeff, back in El Dorado, had talked about. Then I thought, “I must be going nuts!”

As soon as I thought those things, this Abraham guy spoke again. “David, I know that this is strange but you are not losing your mind. You are having a unique experience because you are seeking direction for your life. I am here to help you. Our God loves you and He sent me to help you find the path, the path to true happiness.”

“Pardon me, Abraham, but I’m sure that I haven’t asked God for anything. In fact, I think that the last time I prayed was when I went to Second Baptist when I was in high school back in El Dorado,” I said.

“Remember that God knows you, your thoughts and the desires of your heart. Weren’t you discussing the purpose of your life with Mellyn this very night?” he asked.

I stammered, “Well, um, yes, ah, I was. But I don’t understand what is going on.”

“Like I said, God sent me to help you in your quest for answers. God educated me because I was faithful to Him and I am here to educate you,” Abraham assured me. “The reason that he sent me is that I am your ancestor. God gave me the name of Abraham, meaning ‘Father of a multitude.’ I am the common ancestor of the followers of the world’s most influential religions - Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Like many people on earth, you are one of my progeny, even if you were born four millennia after me. So, let’s get started.”

If this was real and not some crazy delusion, this was exactly what I had wanted since I was in high school. It appeared that I would have the opportunity to finally get things figured out. All I had to do was ask the questions that had been bothering me and I would have the answers. I had nothing to lose by asking, so I did, “Abraham, since you say that God sent you to me, what am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to join a church or do something else? Am I saved, or going to heaven, or someplace like it?”

He replied, “David, I am not here to give you quick solutions. I am here to help you to find the path to God on your own. That is one of the major purposes of life on this earth - for every man and woman to find the true path by having faith in God and then to pursue that path. I had to do it on my own, with some guidance, and you are required to do the same. Every person’s journey is unique. You are having a different experience than most but it is not a guarantee of entrance into God’s kingdom. It is up to you to make that happen.”

Well, that wasn't what I wanted to hear. I also began to wonder if this person claiming to be Abraham was really a messenger from God or the devil, if the devil really exists. Before I even had the time to form my next question, Abraham spoke again, "I am really Abraham and Satan really does exist. Just so you know, God gave me the ability to know your thoughts so I can help you with your concerns even if you can't, or won't, express them. But, I will give you time to form your questions because that will be very helpful in your process of finding truth."

Now I was dumbfounded. I couldn't even think of some flippant idea without him knowing about it. I decided that I might as well cut to the chase, even if this was just a hallucination because if this was a crazy dream, it didn't matter anyway. "Fine, Abraham, let's start with this one - why does God even care about me and my life?"

"Ah, now we are getting someplace" Abraham said. "You want to know about the true nature of God and your relationship to Him. That is an excellent place to start."

"I'm not sure that is what I asked but go ahead," I responded.

Abraham did continue, "God is all-knowing and all-powerful. He created heaven and earth and everything that is in them but He did not create these things from nothing. All elements and the molecules and atoms of elements are eternal, so saying that He 'organized the elements' would be a more accurate way to describe the process."

"Since you and I are eternal beings just like God, after we complete our allotted time on earth, we do not return to earth as a butterfly or a cockroach, nor do we keep coming back in a different body. There would be no purpose in that. We all will resurrect with a body in the image of God and we will return to Him, if we have stayed on His path, to continue to eternally progress to be more and more like God, our heavenly father."

I exclaimed, "Then there is a purpose and a plan for my life! That is exactly what I have been trying to find out!"

Abraham smiled and nodded in agreement. Then he concluded with, "The most important thing for you to understand is that God did not actually create you and me. The essence of who we are is also eternal. He, as our Heavenly Father, gave us our spiritual body. He is literally our father and not our creator as the term would apply to rocks and trees. He has tender, loving feelings for each of us, just like any father would. Both our spirit and our body, male and female, are in the image of our Father in Heaven and will remain so eternally. So, gender is important, mothers are important, fathers are important and families are important. All these things are part of God's plan for us."

The concept that I am a literal child of God shocked and delighted me. It gave me a sense of worth that I never had before. Suddenly, my concept of God went from Him being some all-powerful, amorphous entity without human-like feelings to a loving Father in Heaven.

I didn't know what to say but Abraham obviously knew what I was thinking. "I understand how you are feeling because it hit me the same way."

To think that I could have a personal relationship, a son-to-father relationship with the almighty God was more than I could ever have imagined. Then, the concept that I was just a creation, like a rock, seemed silly. In fact, to think that God, who is perfect, would create a man, any man, and then damn him to hell for being the person that He had created is beyond ludicrous.

This lesson that I had just received from Abraham gave me a sense of hope and I wanted to know more. "Since God is my Father, why isn't he more personally involved in my life and why have I been left to figure out these things for so long?"

Abraham responded, "That is a reasonable concern and my answer might not satisfy you, but here goes. The development of faith is a key to becoming like our Heavenly Father and it is part of the process. God knows each of us and He knows the best way for us to progress and that process is tailored to our unique personalities. We can not obtain a perfect knowledge of God and His plan until we have developed sufficient faith. By not making this process easy, God teaches us how to develop spiritual strength. It is also His way to protect those who choose not to be obedient so they won't be punished for disobeying commandments that they are not willing to obey. God never punishes His children for not obeying a commandment that they do not know is His commandment. Does that make sense?"

"I think I know what you mean," I said, "but it sure seems easier to ignore the whole thing and live life one day at a time."

"How is that working out for you?" he retorted with a smirk.

"Hmmm, I didn't know that angels were allowed to be snarky," I said while secretly hoping that this messenger from an all-powerful God had a sense of humor.

He gave me a kind smile and then explained, "Life on this earth was never meant to be a vacation. In this life, everyone has trials, like personal or family illness, employment problems, financial set-backs, addictions, bad parents, divorce, abuse and many others. Sometimes, we create our own problems and the consequences of them. Sometimes, serious problems and pain come to us because that is part of being a mortal, regardless of our personal righteousness or wisdom."

"The questions for each of God's children are these, 'Will I allow adversity or trials in this life to control me or to shape me?' And, 'Will I become bitter or better because of the trials that I must endure?' We learn to be more resilient by overcoming adversity because earth life is schooling for the advanced education that awaits after death. When we refuse to be schooled by our earthly experience, we turn our back on a heavenly parent who knows what is best for us."

“Life is an opportunity for everyone to determine what is most important and do their best to live true to what is true. We must rise above problems and improve. Life on earth is a growing process where we must show, by how we feel and act, if we will be loyal to God above all else. Remember this also, not making a decision to do something we should can be as spiritually deadly as making the wrong decision.”

He concluded with this illustration, “The parable of the prodigal son in the New Testament is a perfect example of what happens to most of us. We are given so much by our Heavenly Father and then we go out and waste it. Prodigal, by the way, means wasteful. After the son in the parable had wasted his life in ‘riotous living’, he ‘...came to himself.’ He then decided to return to his father and his father rejoiced. God, our Heavenly Father, loves us more than anyone else can. He wants us to come to ourselves and return home to Him. He will not force us, come down and demand that we change or give us more truth than we can handle. But, He will always guide us by His Spirit if we seek Him. We all can change.”

“That is comforting to know,” I said. “So, as we learn more truth we will become better and better people.”

Abraham said, “That would be the way it should be but, sadly, that isn’t usually the way it is. Most people are too willful and too interested in satisfying their own pleasure and egos to be submissive to God, even when they know the truth. Here is a quick example from your era, even though the same principle applies to people who lived in my era, 4,000 years ago.”

“Most people know that obeying speed limits is safer for everyone on the highway, even themselves. But, how many people obey speed limits if they think that there isn’t a cop waiting to give them a ticket?”

“Not many from my experience, including me at times,” I replied honestly.

“So, it isn’t a matter of right and wrong, safe or unsafe, consideration for others or lack thereof, it is all about getting caught,” he said. “That is a sad commentary on the wisdom of mankind, or more accurately, the foolishness of mankind. Hypocrisy is and always has been a major roadblock to finding the path. You can easily see that most people in this life will not choose to truly be obedient to God instead of following their own desires. The other problem is cognitive dissonance.”

“What is that? I asked.

“I will explain,” Abraham continued with his lesson. “As much as we would like to believe that people would naturally want to become better after they learn the truth, that is not always the case. When they learn truth that is incompatible with what they want to do, they are in a quandary - what they believe doesn’t mesh with what they do. This is called cognitive dissonance and it is a very unpleasant feeling caused by their

conscious that is telling them that their actions do not match what they say they believe. They are being hypocritical.

They can change their actions and be true to what is true or they can just change what they choose to believe so it is consistent with what they want to do. Either way, the cognitive dissonance decreases. Since it is always easier to change perspective rather than change bad habits, you know what usually happens. The more serious problem is that when we turn our back on the truth, we begin a downward spiral and it becomes more difficult to recognize truth when it is presented to us.”

I told Abraham, “Change is tough. I know that. Maybe it would be easier to just move out into the desert and live alone so I am not tempted to do the bad things that are comfortable for me.”

“It is lucky for you that the ascetic life is not what God wants for you,” he counseled me. “Even though devout people who practiced Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and other religions have practiced asceticism, it is contrary to God’s plan. He wants His children to laugh and love, to have a complete life with a loving spouse and children, and to find joy in living. He also expects us to learn and grow by serving and interacting with other imperfect people. We must grow by resisting evil rather than escaping it. No doubt that it requires more faith to do.”

“Speaking of having faith to know truth,” I said, “I am more used to the scientific method which answers questions through observation and testing. And, it is going to be hard to get Mellyn to believe what you are saying without any proof. She does not accept anything unless she can prove it, consistent with her training as an auditor.”

“Abraham smiled and said, “You don’t give Mellyn enough credit. No one should accept any concept or idea without evidence. Scientific hypothesis testing and spiritual hypothesis testing have much in common, most importantly that the test results can be replicated. Mellyn can test the hypothesis herself and be routinely convinced that God does exist and that he has a plan for everyone. Millions of people have done it and she can too.”

“The biggest difference in the two methods is that the spiritual test results cannot be shared with others. It is very personal because the path to God is very personal, as I have explained. Developing faith is part of the test. She is wise enough to see the logic in what I have taught you and then you just let God’s spirit confirm it to her. After all, it does take more faith to not believe than it does to believe.”

“Now, you have really lost it! More faith to not believe than to believe? The atheists would love to hear that one!” I was the one being snarky now. I figured that he could read my thoughts anyway and he didn’t get mad when I called him out for being snarky with me, so why not!

Abraham apparently has a sense of humor and he just played along. “Just think of it this way; If God is real and has given us commandments and we have the faith to keep His commandments, we are blessed. We are blessed because all good comes from God. Happiness is good. So, we are blessed by having more happiness in this life and eternal happiness in the life to come.”

“If God is real and we choose not to believe and obey, we punish ourselves, usually by trading fleeting pleasure for true peace and joy. Then, after we die, we will spend an eternity regretting that we gave up the happiness we could have had with God, which would be hell.”

“If God is not real but we choose to have faith and keep the commandments, we still have more peace, even if there is no afterlife. We know from scientific studies and our own observation that those who follow the commandments are happier because they make fewer painful mistakes.”

“If God is not real and we choose not to follow the commandments, we typically would have less happiness because of the painful mistakes we would make. Then, we would cease to exist when we die.”

“Conclusion, believers are usually more at peace in this life and much happier in the next. Non-believers usually have more momentary pleasure but less peace and will be much less happy in the next life, assuming there is one. Non-believers lose either way. It takes more faith to not believe than to believe.”

I scratched my head and said, “That is certainly a perspective that I have never heard before, but it does kinda make sense.”

Abraham then asked me, “And, does abiogenesis really make any sense? Life arose spontaneously from non-living matter? Really? Humans are just the result of billions of years of mutations? Human love, the love you have for Mellyn, is a random result of those mutations? Those theories cannot be proven and they cannot be replicated. Take it from me, it is all scientific dogmatism, which is a foolish rejection of truth, just because it comes from another source.”

“Both religious and scientific dogmatism are unacceptable. All truth comes from God; some is received by scientific hypothesis testing and some is received by spiritual hypothesis testing. While we reject scientific theories that ignore the hand of God, we readily accept scientific truths because faith and science are symbiotic. Truth is truth.”

“OK, ya’ got me,” I conceded, “but I have another question - you mentioned a few minutes ago the story of the Prodigal Son that Jesus told and is recorded in the New Testament. Does that mean that the path is only for Christians?”

“I would really, really like to answer that but I can’t. That would violate my instructions to teach you the way to find the path and allow you to do what everyone else has to do. It

is important to realize that the Muslims and the Jews consider Jesus to be a prophet and a great teacher. The Christians consider him to be the Son of God. So, citing his teachings would be in harmony with the three most influential world religions and most of the others also respect the teachings of Jesus. His parables have almost universal application.

We will conclude our conversation tonight with this - I have given you a lot of instruction that you need to consider. We can talk more when I return tomorrow night if you would like me to return," Abraham said.

"Absolutely! You will return, won't you?" I pleaded.

"God has granted you a visit every night for seven days as long as you are committed to doing your best to find the path to Him," Abraham explained.

"I am. I will and I will try to explain what you have taught me to Mellyn. Thank you, Abraham," I said with complete sincerity.

"I will leave you tonight with these eternal truths," he said. "The path to God is a narrow path and most of God's children on earth will not choose to find it nor to follow it. You have already seen that in your life. You cannot be like everyone else but I assure you, it is worth it. Our Heavenly Father cherishes you as His son. He wants you to live joyfully on this earth and then rejoin him when your purpose on earth has been completed. You must understand that following the path to God will be the most important thing you will ever do." Then, I awoke.

Chapter 4 - Love is Eternal

Mellyn was still asleep next to Dave. His first inclination was to wake her up and tell her the whole story of Abraham's visit. He paused and thought about it for a few minutes, deciding that she would tell him that he had lost his mind. He couldn't blame her if she did. The whole experience was so fantastic.

"I will have to tell her eventually," he thought, "but I need to choose just the right time. I will take the rest of the day to determine how I will share this experience with her. Right now, I have to get up and get the kids started on their daily routine. School starts in two hours. It will be fine."

As a journalist, Dave felt compelled to record everything that had happened. He found a spiral-ringed notebook and wrote every word, action and nuance that he could remember. This journal became a guidebook for his life.

The day went as most days do. Dave went to work and performed his usual tasks but his mind was on how to explain to Mellyn that an angel had visited him and rocked his world with ideas that had never previously occurred to him.

That night, after they put the kids to bed, he did not turn on the TV as he usually did. He asked Mellyn if they could have a serious talk. Those words did not strike her well and her mind raced as to what he was going to say. She didn't have to wait long.

"An angel appeared to me last night," Dave blurted out. "So much for the smooth way that I planned to tell her," he thought. Then, he related the entire experience without her saying a word. When he had finished, he did not know what to expect. He even considered it a possibility that she would have him committed to the Psych Ward at the hospital.

Mellyn took a minute to collect her thoughts and, not knowing what else to say, she asked, "What did this angel look like? Did it have wings?"

Dave responded, "You know that angels don't need wings. That is just the way that they were artistically depicted. But, since you asked, Abraham looked like any other man in the prime of his life but he did have a certain aura that told me that he was not mortal."

"Honey, I don't know what to say. You know that I am a natural skeptic and it is going to take a lot more evidence than a dream to convince me. I don't think that you are crazy but you have to admit that that is one crazy story," she said.

"I know," he agreed, "but don't you think some of those ideas, like being a literal son or daughter of God, are inspiring?"

"Yes, yes, they are, if that is true. It just seems like a wild dream to me at this point. I'm sorry," she confessed.

“Well, what Abraham taught me made sense to me,” Dave told Mellyn, “Doesn’t it make sense to you?”

“Yeah, sort of, but the idea of an angel talking to you? You’ve got to admit that is kinda out there.”

Dave agreed, “You’re right. I guess the best thing to do is find out if it was a random dream or not. Abraham said he would return for six more nights if I am committed to finding out what is true and being loyal to what I learn. I am committed to seeing this to its end. If Abraham comes again tonight, then I will have all the proof I need. How about you?”

Mellyn wasn’t quite so convinced but she decided that it would be best just to go along with Dave and find out what happened next. “We’ll see. I love you and sweet dreams.” She kissed him goodnight and went off to bed.

It wasn’t as easy for Dave to go to sleep. He wasn’t sure if he was feeling excitement or anxiety. Maybe it was a little of both. He also wondered if Abraham would really visit him a second time. His experience the night before was undeniably vivid and enlightening. “But, was it just a passing hallucination?” he asked himself. He closed his eyes and sleep finally overtook him. Dave didn’t know when it happened but sometime during the night Abraham stood before him asking, “David, do you want to continue?”

“Yes, I do but do I really have a choice,” Dave asked.

“Of course, you do. You always have the right to choose what you believe and what you do. It is a gift from God to all mankind and it is called agency. The only catch is that you have to be true to what is true to receive God’s blessing,” Abraham answered.

Dave replied, “Well, I do want to be blessed, so let’s press on.”

“A wise choice,” Abraham congratulated Dave. Dave described the rest of the dream this way to Mellyn the next morning.

I was beginning to form a question about the necessity of organized religion when Abraham spoke. “You asked me a number of questions last night. Do you mind if I ask you some questions?”

“Well, you seem to know everything about me already. Why would you want to ask me anything?” I asked.

“In order to teach you the things that matter most, I need to have you tell me what matters most to you,” he told me and then asked, “Do you love Mellyn, Danielle and Dylan?”

I was dumbfounded. Since Abraham knows my thoughts, why would he ask that question? Did he know something about me that I did not realize myself or do I not know what love really means? So, I asked him, "You should know that I love Mellyn and my kids since you told me that you know my thoughts. Why would you ask me that?"

"Verbalizing what we feel is an excellent way to realize and reaffirm how important those feelings are. Do you tell Mellyn, Danielle and Dylan how much you love them on a regular basis?" he asked.

"Probably not as often as I should," I responded weakly.

"Daily, weekly, monthly?" he pressed.

"OK, OK, OK! You got me. I am not very good at all at expressing those feelings," I conceded.

Abraham smiled and stated, "That is why I asked. Now you feel, not only know, that you need to express your love more often."

"You are right again but I guess that you never had that kind of problem," I said.

Then, Abraham let out at loud, unrestrained laugh, which kind of shocked me. After he stopped laughing, he looked me in the eye and said, "David, I am a messenger from God now but I was a man who lived on this earth, just like you. When I was a mortal, I was not perfect but God gives us all opportunities to overcome our imperfections and that included me. I had three wives and made plenty of mistakes."

"That's a relief to know. I'm sorry but I didn't know that. Would you indulge me with a little more information about what you learned?" I asked him.

Abraham explained, "I don't need to get into the details of all my mistakes but I will help you understand why I know what I am talking about. My first wife was named Sarah. She was a righteous and beautiful woman but she was distraught that she was not able to have children. In fact, it was such a problem that she gave me her servant, Hagar, as a concubine - a second-tier wife. This was a common practice in the era I lived. Hagar gave me a son, Ishmael, who became the common ancestor of the Arab nations and of the Muslim prophet, Muhamad."

"Hagar used the fact that she had given me a son to mock and show contempt for Sarah. Sarah asked me to send her and my son away from our home for Hagar's insolence. I did so because God promised me that He would care for them and make of Ishmael a great nation. Can you see that I was not immune from family problems?"

"That must have been pretty bad for everyone," I said.

“You are right,” he said and then continued his story. “Sarah, by a miracle from God, bore me a son named Isaac when she was ninety-years-old and I was ninety-nine. Isaac became the ancestor of the Jews and of Jesus, who is called ‘the Christ.’ When Sarah died at 127, I married my third wife, Keturah, who gave me six sons. Those sons were also ancestors of the Arab nations.”

“The descendants of my sons Ismael and Isaac have been fighting for thousands of years. I lived until I was 175, so you can see that God gave me time to learn a thing or two.”

I told Abraham, “I had no idea what your life was like. You must have learned a lot in 175 years.”

“Yes,” he said, “but the defining moment in my life was when God commanded me to offer my son as a burnt offering to Him.”

“What a terrible thing for God to ask of you!” I exclaimed.

“I thought the same thing,” Abraham said softly, “It racked my soul. Many pagan religions at the time had offered human sacrifices but my loving God abhorred the practice. It shocked me but what was I supposed to do? God had commanded me to do it and I knew that He had commanded me. Since you don’t know the story, I will tell you. I took my son, without delay, to a place where I typically would have offered an animal sacrifice. When I lifted the knife to kill my son, an angel of God appeared and told me to stop. God then provided a ram to be sacrificed instead.”

“That is still an awful story. Please tell me why a loving God would do that and how that story teaches me anything about loving my family,” I said.

“I can only tell you what God told me and how I felt about it and then you will have to determine for yourself if it helps you understand,” he began. “God told me that because I was willing to obey His commandment to sacrifice my own child, I proved that I was willing to be faithful to Him in all things. Of course, with the foreknowledge of God, He already knew what I would do and so it became more of an opportunity for me to learn about me.”

“This is for certain,” Abraham continued, “there was no more powerful witness of how much I love my family than what I felt at that time. From that point on, I took every opportunity to tell and show my wives and children that I loved them.”

“Well, I will have to think about what you have told me for a while to really understand it,” I honestly replied. “So, which son was it that you were commanded to sacrifice?”

“That is a very good question,” he said, “because the Christians and the Jews think it was my son Isaac and the Muslims believe it was my son, Ishmael. I’m afraid that I can’t

tell you because that would violate the instructions that I was given but it would be worthwhile for you to find out in your search for the path.”

Abraham then said, “I use this story as an introduction to another very important lesson. This one is about the importance of family. I am visiting you to help you find the path to true happiness and families are an integral and eternal element of true happiness. I need to ask you some more questions, David. What do you think happens after you die? What happens to your relationship with Mellyn? What happens to Danielle and Dylan?”

I immediately responded, “I have no idea. I have heard some say that we become a bunch of happy angels with harps doing nothing but praising God for eternity but that doesn’t make sense to me.”

“Then I will take this opportunity to teach you some important principles,” Abraham said. “Remember that I told you that the essence of you, me and everyone else is eternal. It is hard for mortals to understand eternity because everything we know of in life has an end. However, we, who are individual children of God, have no beginning and no end. We are eternal beings and, if we are obedient to God, our families are eternal also. Marriage is not ‘just a slip of paper.’ It is a divine and eternal, three-sided covenant among a man, a woman and God.”

“Everything that is good comes from God. Marriage is one of the greatest blessings to mankind. Marriage helps each partner become a better person; it gives us mental stability and peace. Even social scientists acknowledge that married people are healthier, happier and live longer lives. So, good for them,” Abraham said with a wink. “A family with a loving and attentive father and mother is the ideal environment to raise well-adjusted children.”

“Love is the most important quality of God and because we are His children, it must be the most important quality for us to develop and refine. Eternal families are bound together by love, and the love that you have for Mellyn and your children was meant to continue after this life. Realistically, how could heaven be anything else?”

I was overcome with emotion. The idea of “until death do you part” had always troubled me and made me question the reason for love and marriage if it were only a transitory thing. When Abraham said, “How could heaven be anything else?” I wanted to shout, “Of course you are right! It must be that way!” But, I didn’t. I just managed to nod my head in agreement and tried to mask my emotion.

Abraham obviously knew what I was experiencing, “David, what you are feeling is the Spirit of God witnessing to you that what I have taught you is true. I know that it makes you want to jump up and shout for joy. God speaks to our hearts and our minds to teach us the truth. The truth touches us emotionally and is logical. It is only when we let human pride get in the way that we block the witness of His spirit and allow the philosophies of men to overcome us with doubt and denial.”

"I think that I am beginning to understand," I responded, knowing that he knew exactly what I was feeling.

Abraham continued with his teaching on another aspect of marriage, "Life is precious and because it is precious, God has set strict rules about giving and taking a life. You already understand that it is a terrible sin to murder but Satan - remember that he is very real - has been very effective in deceiving people into believing that sexual intimacy, the act that gives life, is only about personal pleasure."

"It is an important part of our marriage," I said a little hesitantly because I was afraid that I might be saying something that I shouldn't to a messenger from God.

"As it should be," Abraham agreed. "Sexual intimacy is part of the plan of God whereby a husband and wife give each other pleasure in an exclusive and intimate way that binds them together, body and soul. It also brings children, God's children, into this world. However," he continued, "when sex is used as merely a way to selfishly satisfy personal lusts, men and women are misusing the power to create life that God entrusted to mankind. That is abhorrent to God. Chastity and virtue are essential to true love, divine love."

"It has also been statistically documented for decades that promiscuity and premarital cohabitation increase the odds of divorce. In essence, those who do not follow God's commandments regarding sexual intimacy often sacrifice long-term, loving marriages for fleeting pleasure."

The connection between sex and love was beginning to become clearer to me, especially with the fervency in Abraham's voice but I had never been taught this before. In fact, no one I knew had ever expressed what Abraham had just said.

Obviously, Abraham knew what I was thinking, so he answered the questions that were rolling around in my head. He said, "The society you live in has corrupted the divine purpose of sex. You see it all around you - disrespect for marriage, pornography, immodesty, abortion, promiscuity, infidelity. All the things that are the mainstay of modern media and self-righteous thinking. This is a wicked world and accepting self-righteous immorality can give momentary pleasure but it never leads to enduring joy."

There was no doubt in my mind that this issue was of upmost importance to God because Abraham just kept instructing, "Every one of these corruptions I mentioned attempt to deny God's commandments and to ignore the divine purpose of sex in the lives of His children. There are certainly eternal consequences of being godless but there are also consequences in this life."

I understood how people suffered because of divorce caused by infidelity but I didn't see the consequences of the other things on Abraham's list, so I asked him to explain more.

"First of all, you must understand, David, that every evil thing takes us farther away from God and that alone will reduce the happiness that we can enjoy in our earthly life. Wickedness never produces true happiness," Abraham said. "One of the causes of suffering caused by sexual sin is the result of the neuroplasticity of our brains."

"The what?" I asked.

He continued, "Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. Neuroplasticity allows the neurons, nerve cells, in the brain to adjust their activities in response to new stimuli. The pleasure center of our brains naturally reacts to the stimuli that gives us pleasure. If we get pleasure from pornography, for example, the brain adjusts to favor that activity over the more natural and better activity of finding pleasure in having sex with our spouse."

"The same principal applies to perversions, promiscuity and infidelity. Whenever we corrupt our brains by experiencing pleasure with activities that are not virtuous, we dull our ability to have pleasure with better, more enduring and God-given activities. Sin always has consequences that cannot be avoided."

I began to consider that I had no idea that I was doing wrong when Mellyn and I began living together before we got married. Most of the people we knew didn't think anything of having sex with anyone they chose. Was it fair for God to punish us when we did not know that we were doing something wrong?

Abraham answered my unasked question, "God never punishes us when we don't know better but our brains naturally work against us when we choose to do wrong. At the same time, God's spirit is given to every person to intuitively know right from wrong. We call it our conscience. It is not possible for someone to have an abortion, be promiscuous or cheat on a spouse without God's spirit whispering to them that they are doing something wrong. If that person continues to disregard their conscience, they reduce the flow of guidance from God."

Now I began to wonder how much damage I had done to myself and my relationships by the choices that I had made. It was a sobering experience. Abraham comforted me by saying, "Don't beat yourself up for making mistakes. We all make mistakes. The wise make changes to be more like God. We call that repentance."

"You might want to think about what you can do now to strengthen your relationship with Mellyn. That will bless her, your kids and yourself. Remember this - Marriage and children are essential to God's plan and they provide everyone who follows God's laws with a sure way to fulfillment, peace and happiness."

"There is one last thing that I want to say to you. You and Mellyn are equal partners in your marriage. Both of you have important attributes that you bring to your marriage. As a woman, Mellyn will be more inclined to nurturing. You have already seen that in her."

You, on the other hand, must do all you can to tenderly protect Mellyn and your children from mental, emotional, spiritual, economic and societal problems. That is what it truly means to 'Man up!'

"Now, it is time that I leave you but I will return tomorrow night and you can ask me another question. May you do what you should so that God will bless your family. Remember, the decision you make today could change everything."

And with that, Abraham was gone.

Chapter 5 - Blessings of Obedience

Dave awoke in the morning with an urgency to do all he could to create a stronger bond with Mellyn. He slipped out of bed while she was still sleeping. He went to his desk and began to write. Within an hour, she was also awake.

“Good morning, my darling,” Dave said.

“What happened to you?” was her response.

Dave just smiled and then rehearsed to her all that he had written in his journal about his dream that night. Mellyn, ever the skeptic, said, “I still don’t know if you are going crazy but I love being greeted with ‘My darling.’”

Dave laughed and said, “You have known since before we got married how much I love you. I can honestly say that you have been with me during all of the happiest moments of my life. After last night, I now see that we can have more peace and happiness in our lives if we pursue ‘the path’ as Abraham calls it.”

“You know that I think better when I write down my thoughts and then refine them so they express exactly what I am thinking. It’s a journalist thing, I think. Anyway, when I woke up this morning, I sat down and wrote a list of things that I will try to do to make our marriage better. In fact, I want our marriage to last far beyond ‘til death do you part.” He handed her his list.

- Be kind to each other, even when you don’t feel like being kind
- Do what you can to make Mellyn know that she is the most important person in the world to you
- Know when to shut up
- Forgive
- Say “I love you” and mean it, every day
- Laugh together
- Take out the trash before it overflows onto the floor
- Speak in a tone that does not overpower what you are saying
- Make your home a place to escape the nastiness of the world
- Be a rock of strength when her strength is not enough
- Act like an angel of mercy when mercy is needed
- Pick up after yourself
- Be patient when she says or does things that don’t make sense to you
- Kiss her like you mean it
- Spend time together whenever you can
- Realize that Mellyn is and will always be your best friend
- Work out financial problems together

- Sacrifice for the good of the marriage
- Be absolutely loyal, faithful, and committed
- Avoid sarcasm and sulking silence
- Compliment more, criticize less
- Apologize whenever you should and that will be often
- Touch whenever possible and appropriate
- Realize how lucky you are to be married to someone who isn't perfect, because how would a perfect person deal with being married to you

After she had read the list, Mellyn had to laugh at what he had written but secretly it touched her heart. She was still suspicious of Dave's dreams but she was also very contented with what he had been telling her and how it was making him a better husband, father and person. She decided not to jinx a good thing, so she said, "I can't wait to hear what you learn from Abraham tonight!"

Dave was anxious for his day to end. He was looking forward to his discussion with Abraham that night because he had a question that he really wanted answered. Dave was learning new things, good things, every night. He asked himself, "How can this just be a figment of my imagination if I am learning stuff that I never knew or even asked myself before?" Dave started to trust that this "messenger from God" was truly who he said he was because what he said made sense and it felt so right.

It seemed like just a moment after he went to sleep that he saw Abraham sitting in the lounge chair in his bedroom. Abraham said to him, "I have been waiting so we can discuss what is on your mind, but before we do that, I would like to follow-up on our discussion last night. What did Mellyn think of what you told her?"

Dave recorded the following description of his dream in his journal.

"You already know what Mellyn thought," I replied. "You have proven to me that you know my thoughts before I speak."

"Of course, you're correct! I just wanted you to reflect on what it all means and telling me is a perfect way for you to focus on that essential conversation again. So, tell me," Abraham encouraged me.

I began, "She obviously loved the fact that I was more focused on the importance of our marriage and family than I have been. She didn't say it in so many words but I know her well enough to read the look on her face. Let's just say that it was all good."

"That is wonderful. I am so happy for you both. Now, tonight is the third night being together and it is your turn to ask me something. Let's have it!" Abraham said so casually that I knew he knew what I was about to ask.

“OK, I’ll start with this one because I have several and they all have to do with organized religion,” I said. “You keep telling me about ‘the path’ that I need to find to have complete happiness in my life but you haven’t told me which path is the correct one. I have to assume that it is Christianity, Judaism or Islam because you say that you are the father of all those people. Which one is it?”

Abraham chuckled, “I can tell that you have done some investigative reporting from that question.” Then he said more seriously, “My assignment is to teach you correct principles so you can find the path, just like everyone else has to. There is truth in every religion that teaches mankind to obey God and to be good and to do good, from Baptists to Buddhists, from Muslims to Mormons, from Catholics to Confucianists.”

“I’m trying to narrow my search down, so I’m guessing that because you told me that Satan is real and is evil, anything to do with witchcraft and Satanism is out. Right?” I asked.

“That, I can tell you is correct,” he agreed.

“Well, if religion is so good, what about all the wars and atrocities committed in the name of religion?” I asked because I had heard this so many times.

“Is killing and harming innocent people a good thing?” He challenged me.

“Of course not!” I answered.

“Then,” he said, “they can’t be from God. When wicked men get power in any organization - churches, governments, businesses - they look for ways to gain greater power and wealth. That’s when wars and atrocities begin. People who hate religion blame religion as a justification for their hate without considering that wicked people are the true source of the problem and not the organization or institution.”

I replied, “That makes sense but I wonder about the importance of organized religion because an increasing number of people in the world identify themselves as spiritual but not religious. In fact, that is probably a good description of me. I went to a Baptist church with my folks as a kid. I enjoyed it but it wasn’t enough to keep me attending as an adult. Mellyn and her parents have never had anything to do with religion but I think all of us believe there is a God. We are all good people, even if we don’t attend a church. Why should we?”

“That is a valid and a very complex question,” was Abraham’s answer. “I will explain several reasons that organized religion is important to God and should be to you.”

“First, since God is our father and he loves us as His children, He wants us to be happy. Following the commandments of God is always a more reliable way to find happiness than following the fantasies of uninspired humans. God’s commandments and practices are preached and, hopefully, practiced in organized religion.”

"But sometimes those commandments just seem to keep me from doing what I want to do," I countered.

"Do the activities that you are talking about bring lasting peace and joy or just momentary pleasure?" he asked.

I knew the correct answer but then I felt kind of foolish for asking the question, so I just shrugged. Abraham smiled and went on, "Mortals always want quick and easy pleasure that doesn't require any effort or self-control. Some like to think that we are just high-functioning animals but we are not. We are sons and daughters of God and He knows that enduring joy only comes with effort on our part to be more like Him."

"Now, I want you to really focus on what I am about to say. Your children and all children need organized religion to support what you should be teaching them at home. Danielle and Dylan will be making incredibly important decisions when they are in their teens and early adulthood. Remember your struggle to find the purpose of your life when you were in high school! Almost every child wants guidance so they don't make a bad choice and organized religion can provide that guidance."

"It is true that most kids make a lot of good decisions without the influence of religion but they would all make better decisions and avoid a lot of heartache if they had religion. Any person guided by God will avoid the darkness of human philosophies and be enlightened in every consequential choice they make."

"We all have seen how kids make decisions that have led them on Satan's path to addictions, alienation from family and society, suicide, unwanted pregnancy and disease. They need help connecting the dots - That their decisions today will have a huge impact on the type of life they will have later. Too many don't make it until 'later' because they die or become hopelessly addicted to something first. Also, too many kids die spiritually and are damaged for the rest of their lives. When they turn away from the light and choose darkness over light, their lives are never going to be as happy. David, do you understand?"

I not only understood, I was dumbfounded. I had never thought how important religion is for young people in spite of the fact that I had experienced it first-hand. I was lucky enough to avoid most of the problems but I knew scores of kids who did not and they were still paying for their poor choices. That could be my daughter and son! I stammered with fear in my voice, "Yes, I do. Yes, I do!"

"Good," Abraham responded. "That brings me to the second reason for organized religion, God knows that actively participating in organized religion requires structure, effort and sacrifice."

"You mean like getting dressed up to go to church and staying awake during the sermon?" I said wryly.

Abraham replied, "Well, that is a start but if that is the total commitment one makes, it isn't enough to mean much. Many say that we can worship God just as devoutly by taking a hike in the mountains as we can by attending a service in a church building, mosque or synagogue. The truth is, that almost never happens. Humans need structure, otherwise we just forget about God and play, because play is always easier than worship."

"The structure of true religion also helps us focus on loving and serving God's children, our spiritual brothers and sisters. So, who do you think is becoming more like God, the person who lived like Mother Teresa or lived like Hugh Hefner?"

I said, "I didn't know either of them but Hugh Hefner certainly looked like he had a great life - money, fame and every pleasure out there. I am not trying to be a smart aleck but I'm just saying..."

"Fair enough," Abraham said. "Imagine that you are Hugh and are standing in the presence of God. Then imagine that you are Mother Teresa. Which would you rather be in that moment?"

"OK, OK, OK, I get it," I conceded. "Let's move on."

"Fine," he said, "the third reason is that organized religion gives us an opportunity to succor and strengthen others, if we are doing it correctly. That means much more than sitting on a hard pew for an hour each week and calling it 'Done.'"

"We must be actively engaged, every day, in helping others. A good mother is a perfect example of this concept. Selfless, sacrificing service would be a good description. This doesn't mean that we should ignore our personal or family needs. It just means that we help whenever we can, even when it is inconvenient. Service is a wonderful way to rid ourselves of selfishness and pride - two of the major impediments to becoming like God."

Then I said, "I see what you are saying. I just never thought it would require so much."

"So, let's talk about how organized religion blesses us. That would be reason number four," Abraham seemed like he was on a roll. "A group of people who love God and are of like-mind is an automatic support group. They draw close to each other and show love like a family. They also provide companionship, fellowship, a listening ear, a helping hand and, sometimes, some very good counsel. I mentioned this reason when I told you why your children need religion but it is equally important for adults like you."

"That sounds great but what about gossiping and judging that goes on in churches?" I countered.

“Oh, yes. That happens, too. Then we get the opportunity to grow by learning to show kindness to those who mistreat us. Has that ever happened in your family?” He said with a smile.

“You win again,” I conceded, “Maybe it’s time for me to realize that you have all the answers.”

“Don’t give up so easily. I appreciate your questions because they are the best way to satisfy your concerns and to address issues that are important. I also enjoy the fact that you can be yourself with me,” Abraham said. “Now, the next reason for organized religion.”

“Although we are children of God, we have a long, long way to go to be like Him. Reason number five is that organized religion is like a hospital to help us heal when we are damaged by sin and the vicissitudes of life.”

“What does that mean?” I asked.

“Sorry, vicissitudes mean the ups and downs of normal mortal existence. Dealing with illness, family problems, financial problems, death, etc.” he explained. “Life is not always a picnic and when we have problems, organized religion can assist us. Not to mention that, being with a group of God’s followers helps us to avoid making foolish choices that would take us farther from God and often cause misery in this life for us and those around us.”

“Religion helps us to understand how to repent, which simply means that we recognize that we are not on the best path, we feel remorse for the evil we have done and we change for the better. Repentance insures a brighter future. As Sophocles said, ‘All men make mistakes, but a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong and repairs the evil.’”

“Religion also helps us to do what God commands so we don’t distance ourselves from Him and lose His guidance and our happiness. Remember that everyone can change, if they so choose.”

I jumped in with, “But I know lots of people my age that say they are spiritual but not religious and they are happy.” I hoped that he might not have an answer to that one because being actively involved in a religion was going to require that I change my outlook and my lifestyle.

Abraham immediately replied, “When you are looking for an excuse, any one will do. Remember also, always choosing the easy path always leads downhill.”

Then I remembered that he knew what I was thinking.

He continued, "With greater effort comes greater rewards, including greater happiness. Saying that one is spiritual is just another way to be passively agnostic. One leaves the door open for the existence of God but certainly doesn't want God messing with his or her life. Humans like to create their God in the image of man. Now, reason number six - Organized religion keeps the doctrine pure, including the necessity of obeying God's commandments."

"You can count on this eternal truth - no one ignores God's commandments and becomes a better person. True and lasting personal progression and happiness only come from obedience to God. One might progress in a career or a sport or an avocation but none of those will bring the happiness of those who love and serve God and their fellowman."

"It seems to me that most people at least keep the Ten Commandments," I proposed.

"Oh really," Abraham said with his eyebrows raised. "Consider this then; Celebrity morality has had a numbing effect on even those who say that they worship God. Corrupt philosophies have led to a counterfeit tolerance that does not judge anything to be good or evil. Many attempt to claim their virtue by preaching, 'God is love.' God is just love and nothing else; no justice, no obedience, no self-control and no accountability. This chic concept ignores the consequences of sin and the absolutes of the commandments that God mandated."

"You will that remember that your friend at U.C.L.A, Scott Henning, told you about philosopher C. Terry Warner, whose teachings made such a big difference in Scott's life. Well, Mr. Warner taught, 'Indulgence is a punitive counterfeit of charity.'"

"Counterfeit morality appeals to those who are wise in their own eyes. As you suggested, I will use the Ten Commandments because the Ten Commandments are representative of the rules of most religions in the world. I will do this in order to illustrate how those commandments have been ignored."

"1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Haven't we, as a society, embraced celebrities, sports teams, jobs, entertainment, etc. to be our modern-day gods?

2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.

Aren't extravagant cars, boats, homes, jewelry, etc. forms of graven, meaning man-made, images that many choose to worship and adore?

3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

Isn't profanity rampant in all segments of society with the name of the Lord featured prominently? And, doesn't using the name of our God in casual conversation and in meaningless oaths qualify as 'in vain?'

4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Are watching football, working, shopping, playing at the beach, going to Disneyland, etc. holy activities? Is God's designated holy day supposed to be just another holiday?

5. Honor thy father and thy mother.

Does honoring our parents allow ignoring them in their old age? How about when young adults live off the labors of their parents? Finally, can we honor parents when we absolve ourselves of their care in favor of government agencies?

6. Thou shalt not kill.

People don't usually kill others, partly because of the legal penalties. How about when they kill the spirit of another through abuse or neglect? Isn't abortion a form of killing a person, since that embryo already has God-given life in it?

7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Is it ever acceptable to trifle with the God-given power to create life? Aren't promiscuity, pornography, sexual abuse and perversion all forms of violating the sacredness of what God intended as marital relations between a husband and wife? Isn't sexual immorality one of the foundations of corrupting Hollywood hedonism?

8. Thou shalt not steal.

Aren't exorbitant judgments from groundless lawsuits now one of the typical get-rich-quick scams of our day for dishonest plaintiffs and their attorneys? Is it not also stealing to over-tax one group of citizens so politicians can get votes by being charitable with other people's money?

9. Thou shalt not bear false witness.

Don't we allow a little cheating on a tax return, accepting political "spin," twisting the truth to suit our needs and exaggerating the negatives about people we don't like?

10. Thou shalt not covet.

Aren't excessive debt, fashion devotion, and some forms of plastic surgery all manifestations of coveting things we don't have?"

"Conventional wisdom teaches that we should do whatever we want unless it hurts another person directly and immediately. Therefore, everyone can indiscriminately have sex outside marriage if they are consenting adults and no one gets pregnant or a venereal disease. Ignore God because His justice is not immediate. Cheat on your taxes as long as you don't get audited. Drive as fast as you want if you don't hit someone else. Do anything you want as long as you don't get caught."

"Conventional wisdom is often counterfeit wisdom. The Ten Commandments are truly commandments and not merely suggestions or broad guidelines open to loose interpretation. Justice will come. Celebrity morality and the current culture of being 'spiritual' do not pass the virtue test. The only hope is to love God and our fellowman by keeping the commandments. Commandments are God's signposts to true happiness." Abraham stopped and looked directly at me as if to ask, "Are we on the same page now?"

I assured Abraham that I knew that the commandments were important but that I had never understood them the way that he explained. Then I said, "It has never occurred to me that obedience to God's commandments was the path to greater happiness but I see now that if all good things come from God, it makes sense that the more strictly I obey, the happier I will be. I am so grateful for you teaching me that anyone can change if they want."

Abraham was pleased. "Yes, yes, you are connecting the dots. Our time is running short tonight. So, I will give you a synopsis of what is important for you to remember.

First, there is only one path to God.

Second, organized religion is the way that God keeps us on the path to Him.

Third, just because you consider yourself to be religious, doesn't mean that you are on the path. Strict obedience is required.

Fourth, God is just and merciful. All those who would have been obedient to Him, if they had known of Him, will be given the opportunity in this life or the next to choose to follow the path.

Fifth, God is unchanging, which means that He communicates with people today just as He did anciently, through other human beings. Remember that humans, like I was, are imperfect and make mistakes but humans are all God has to work with. Find the pattern and follow it, knowing that when He has not communicated with mankind it is because they refused to listen.

Sixth, you know what is true by God's spirit speaking to your mind and to your heart. Truth is logical and it feels right.

Seventh, doing what God commands will always feel right and will lead to ever increasing happiness.

Eighth, fruit is the last thing that a fruit tree produces, meaning that it takes time and testing and observing to see the blessings of God completely.

Ninth, God blesses His people on earth and those on His path will be happier while they are on earth.

And tenth, God loves you as His son. He will guide you with His Spirit to find the way."

Those were the last words that Dave heard that night. The next thing he knew, he was awake.

Chapter 6 - Embrace Compassion

When Dave awoke, he saw Mellyn looking at him. “Well, what did Abraham say now?”

“You seem a little anxious, don’t you?” Dave said.

“Yesterday, you greeted me with, ‘My darling.’ I just want to know if I am still your darling,” Mellyn teased.

“Yes, you are,” Dave assured her, “and you asked about what Abraham had to say last night. Well, he said that we need to join an organized religion and focus more on worshipping and obeying God.”

Mellyn was rather shocked at that response. “Wait a minute. Now you are talking about making a commitment that I don’t know that I am ready to make.”

“I understand, my darling.” Dave tried to tease her and sooth her at the same time. “Abraham said that it will make our family happier and better. So, I think we ought to try.”

Mellyn shot back, “You are the one who is having these wild dreams so you will have to be the one that does all the leg work.”

“Fine, I will but I still have four more days with Abraham, I think. There is more that I need to know before I will know all that I need to do,” Dave said.

“Sounds good to me. Just let me know and then I will let you know what I think,” Mellyn responded.

“I understand, Mellyn. We will take it one step at a time.” Dave reassured her. “Let me share with you what I learned last night and then I need to get ready for work.”

Dave was convinced that God had sent Abraham to him to help him find the “path to happiness,” as Abraham said. After all, he had been visited three times by the same messenger and every time Dave had learned new and important doctrines. Dave felt grateful for Abraham and the direction that he had been given. He then told Mellyn about his most current visit from Abraham.

At this point, his major concern was Mellyn. He adored her and her last comment to him about his dreams left him thinking that she might not be interested in seeking out and following the path. He couldn’t imagine what he would do if she were not willing to make the same choices as he did. He decided that he had to better understand her feelings before he met Abraham that night.

He thought about how to approach her the entire day. His work schedule was busy getting news stories prepared for the station. As he considered what he would say to

her, he also thought about what he might say about his experience if he had to report it on the nightly news. He smiled when he thought about the response he might get from the station manager. He was certain that he would lose his job and that would be the end of his journalism career. He also realized that all men who had received guidance from God through-out history had been mocked. So, he put that thought on the shelf for now and concentrated on his conversation with Mellyn.

When Danielle and Dylan were ready for bed that night, Dave told them that he wanted to say a prayer with them before he tucked them in. This surprised Mellyn, so she said, "That's a new one."

Dave responded, "I just figured that I should do something to start our family on the path to God. It seems like a logical step to take. Do you want to join us?"

Now Mellyn was really surprised, "Well, uh, I guess so, uh, sure I do." The kids were happy to pray with their parents for the novelty of it, if nothing else.

They all went into Danielle's room. "Let's all kneel by Danielle's bed," Dave said.

Dave was prepared. He had been talking to an angel for three nights but he still wasn't confident about how to pray so, earlier that evening, he looked up the Lord's Prayer that he used to say when he attended Second Baptist Church. He found that the words came back to him rather effortlessly. He began, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..."

When they finished the prayer, they both kissed their kids and told them that they loved them. As they left the kid's rooms, Dave asked Mellyn, "What do you think?"

"I really don't know what to say. It felt good but you know that I was raised without religion, God or prayer, so it was kinda weird for me," Mellyn whispered.

Dave asked Mellyn to join him in the living room to continue the discussion. He started, "I understand, my dear, that religion has never played a role in your life but I am in a difficult spot. I was rather lazy about religion and God but no more. Because of my recent conversations with Abraham, I know that God exists and that he expects me to do what is right. I need to find the path to God and pursue it with everything in me."

"The thing that drove me to action more than anything else was what Abraham taught me about how Danielle and Dylan need religion to make better life choices. They are naïve and can be easily swayed to think like those who control social media. We both know lots of people who are still suffering because of decisions they made in their youth. Mellyn, we cannot afford to ignore this way to help our kids. Finding the path, including a religion, is more important than anything else in my life because I know that it will bless my life, your life and the lives of our children and grandchildren."

“Dave, I’m not much of a joiner and I am much too young to have grandchildren!” she declared. “Since I haven’t had the same experience as you, I don’t know what you want me to do.”

He consoled her, “I understand. We will take it slowly but I need to know if you are willing to give it a chance. You are my one-and-only and I can’t bear the thought of me heading one direction and you going in another.”

Now Mellyn was in a quandary. She knew her husband very well and she loved him deeply. He was a good man who wasn’t easily manipulated. She could tell that he was convinced of the validity of the instruction that he had been receiving in his dreams. She certainly would join with Dave if it would help her children but she never had religion in her life and she didn’t really understand how it could make her life better.

She had to make a decision. Would she allow this change in Dave to come between them and their future together or would she give it a try? Would she ignore an opportunity to help her children? Since nothing he said seemed to be obviously bad, did it make sense to go along with him and see what would happen?

The only thing that bothered her was making a commitment to religion when most people that she knew thought that religion was only for uneducated fanatics. Finally, she came up with a question that captured her concern. “Dave, why do I have to join an organized religion when I can just be a good person. Isn’t that enough for God?”

“Mellyn, Abraham made a pretty good case for religion like I told you this morning but I don’t have all the answers,” he conceded. “It seems to me that there has to be some greater purpose in life than what we now see. It has been my observation in my 30-plus years on earth that too many adults, like us, seem to wander in life with no apparent purpose. We go to work each day and come home, feed the kids, watch sports and drink ‘a cold one.’ We interact with others only when it involves a glass of wine and rather meaningless conversation. Eventually, we die. This lifestyle cannot bring true fulfillment. There has to be something more.”

“We need to be committed to a cause in order to have purpose in life. Some choose being committed to making as much money as possible; or dying with the most toys or doing whatever feels good in the moment. Others choose being popular and famous, or an ego-stroking career. Because of my conversations with Abraham, I am convinced that true happiness, however, only comes when we commit ourselves to a higher cause.”

“I strongly believe that what Abraham has been teaching me is that higher cause and we need to be committed to it. One of my favorite quotations comes from a Scottish mountaineer and writer, William Hutchison Murray. I memorized this when I was in college and it has inspired me ever since, ‘Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back— Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth that ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that

the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."

"Mellyn, will you join me in finding the path to God for the benefit of our family?" Dave asked, or more accurately, pleaded.

Mellyn agreed that she would but she told herself that she would still not make any serious commitments until she was convinced that this all was not just some pleasant-sounding fantasy of Dave's.

Dave was excited for sleep to come that night because Mellyn had agreed to find the path with him. He was also comforted by the fact that he knew that his life had meaning and purpose.

"Hello Abraham, I am glad to see you again," were the first words that came out of Dave's mouth when his nightly visitor appeared in his dreams. Dave wrote this about the fourth visit of Abraham.

"I am happy to see you too, David. I can see that you are starting to not only know what I am telling you is true but you are also beginning to feel that it is beneficial to your life. And based on what you are telling Mellyn, you are committed to finishing the journey," Abraham said.

"I am and Mellyn said that she is with me on this," I said excitedly.

"Wonderful! Just remember that she is only relying on what you have told her and so it might take a little more time for her to be as committed as you are," Abraham counseled me. "Now, tonight is my turn to ask you some questions to help you. Is that alright?"

"Certainly!" I answered.

"What is your cause?" Abraham asked me.

"To find the path to God, just like we have been talking about," I replied as I wondered why he would ask me that question after all our discussions.

"Why did you choose that cause?" was his next question,

So, I answered, "It will make me and my family happy, right?"

"Do you think the path to God is only about making you and your family happy?" he then asked.

Now, I was stumped. I thought that was exactly what Abraham had told me. Since I didn't know what else to say, I said, "Yes, I think so, I guess."

He smiled slightly and said, "You're not too far off but we need to talk about how you can find happiness for yourself and your family. The reality is that we all must learn that happiness comes when we forget ourselves and immerse ourselves in being more like God. That means loving and serving all of our spiritual brothers and sisters, including our families. Our cause must be to become more like our Heavenly Father and that means being obedient, which we have discussed in detail, and serving the rest of God's children. That is the path to God. Does that make sense?"

I answered again with, "Yes, I think so, I guess."

"Don't worry," he assured me, "I will help you understand how this is accomplished. It all starts with treating others as you would like them to treat you and that leads to developing true compassion."

"Compassion is one of the great virtues accepted by all major religions of the world. Even non-religious organizations typically embrace compassion because compassion is basic to being a fully-developed human being. Compassion is an active form of love that is expressed by being aware of the needs of others and helping them to meet those needs."

"On the other end of the spectrum is contention, which should be avoided whenever possible. Contention drives away of the spirit of God and one of the primary attributes of those on the path to God is the lack of a contentious spirit."

"The following are the critical concepts of compassion or charity or God-like love that I will explain, quoting other people who have lived on this earth and understand what it means:

First, acts of compassion make us feel good.

'Happiness and peace will come to earth only as the light of love and human compassion enter the souls of men.' - David O. McKay"

"Shawn Achor, a former Harvard University professor wrote, 'A long line of empirical research, including one study of over 2,000 people, has shown that acts of altruism—giving to friends and strangers alike—decrease stress and strongly contribute to enhanced mental health.'"

"We really don't need empirical research to know that doing good makes us feel good. It is intuitive and everyone who does it knows it."

"Second, compassion helps us connect with other humans.

'Compassion automatically invites you to relate with people because you no longer regard people as a drain on your energy.' - Chogyam Trungpa"

“We all know people who show kindness and compassion to those around them. These people are universally liked and admired. We are drawn to these people because of how they make us feel.”

“Third, compassion is the basis of civilized society.

‘I can do no other than be reverent before everything that is called life. I can do no other than to have compassion for all that is called life. That is the beginning and the foundation of all ethics.’ - Albert Schweitzer”

“Wherever groups of people live together in a community, compassion must exist in order to create an attitude of cooperation. Since tragedy is a normal part of the human condition, demonstrations of compassion bond people in the society to one another. Even the rich and powerful have need of compassion.”

“The more civilized the society, the more compassion is shown for the weak and those who are unlike the norm. The most advanced societies are those that take care of their own and then reach out to all that need help.”

“Compassion and tolerance, however, do not mean an acceptance of evil or anti-social behavior. We must teach our children to love all people, while abhorring evil, wherever it manifests itself.”

“Fourth, compassion must be expressed.

‘Whether one believes in a religion or not...there isn't anyone who doesn't appreciate kindness and compassion.’ - Dalai Lama”

“We all appreciate an act of kindness, a supportive comment, or even just a kind smile. It is impossible to be compassionate and ignore others. Those who ‘remember the little things’ really understand compassion.”

“Often, we will see someone having difficulty and say to ourselves, ‘I wish there was something I could do, but I don't know that person very well’, or ‘Someone else is taking care of their needs’ or, ‘I don't want to bother them at this time because they are already so busy.’ So, we do nothing. Consider Proverbs 3:27, ‘Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.’”

“And fifth, compassion requires sacrifice.

‘True compassion means not only feeling another's pain but also being moved to help relieve it.’ - Daniel Goleman”

“It isn't easy to be compassionate because it requires effort on our part. Passivity and compassion are not good companions. The path to God must include walking the talk.”

“David, does what I taught you make sense?” Abraham asked.

I tried to let it all sink in but it just sounded overwhelming so my reaction probably wasn't as enthusiastic as it should have been. "It makes sense but I don't know if I can do all that."

Abraham reassured me with, "If your heart is willing, it will come. As a man of God, one must be a bearer of light and truth to illuminate the path for others and to set an example of righteousness and not self-righteousness. No one fully develops God-like love in this life but God will bless us if we start with the best we can do and keep progressing."

"But I am just a regular guy who has never been shown what to do," I protested. "How in the world am I supposed to do all that?"

Abraham repeated, "If your heart is willing, it will come. Remember that life on earth is neither scripted nor rehearsed, so don't expect your performance to be flawless." He continued with, "The American clergyman, Edward Everett Hale, said, 'I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do.' The concept of just doing 'something' to help others is instructive."

I told him that I appreciated his guidance.

"I have one more thing to discuss tonight before I go," he said. "When you knelt in prayer with Mellyn and your children tonight, it was evidence that you are making excellent progress. You are recognizing that God is real and that He is important to you. Important enough for you to want to communicate with Him."

"It did feel like it was the right thing to do," I said, knowing that it was the first thing that I had done to find the path without being told by Abraham but I had to ask him, "Is that enough?"

Abraham exclaimed, "It is a great start! I would like to share some ideas about prayer that might help you. Is that OK?"

"I would love that," I responded. "I was just winging it and really didn't know if I was doing it correctly. I just tried to remember what I had heard at Second Baptist."

Abraham began to teach me about prayer, "Always remember that prayer isn't just about crying out for help when we are in a jam. It is a way to connect with our Father in Heaven. To tell Him what is on our mind and then take direction from Him."

I said, "Take direction from Him? I don't even know how that would happen."

"We'll get to that in a minute, I promise you," he assured me. "Let's start with the fact that you're not trying to impress God with flowery language, sermons and long

recitations. I know that is what it sometimes sounds like in a church service but that is not what God expects or even wants. He wants an honest interaction with you, His son.”

“Hmm, I had never thought of that,” I said.

“You will want to address Him as your Heavenly Father and then use language that is respectful of Him. It is not like you are talking to your next-door-neighbor but you can talk to Him like you were having a serious conversation with your own father. Be open and honest. Your Father in Heaven wants to bless you and as you think about all your blessings, you will want to thank Him. So, instead of reciting a standard prayer each night, tell your Father how you feel about the blessings that he has given.”

“I understand,” I assured Abraham but I knew that I needed a lot of practice.

Abraham then said, “And you should pray in the morning after you get up, at night when you go to bed and any time during the day that seems appropriate. You will get lots of practice.”

I smiled.

“Then,” he continued, “you ask Him for those things that you feel that you need.”

“Like how to find and stay on the path!” I exclaimed.

“You are a bright guy, David,” he said, “but if you want to hear Him, you must stay on your knees and listen with your heart. He will speak to you in a still, small voice that you will typically feel rather than hear.”

I responded, “I’m not sure that I understand.”

“It does take time to understand how the Lord is speaking to you. Sometimes, there will be promptings that come to your mind, other times it will be a feeling of assurance that you are doing the right thing. If you are on the wrong path, you will typically feel a confused or uncertain feeling. Just be patient and faithful in prayer and you will know how God speaks to you. It would also help if you recorded what you understand that God is telling you. Then, you will have a history of what you learned so you can evaluate if you are making progress. That will be another assurance that you are hearing the voice of God.”

“I am very good at recording things because of my training. So, I can do that,” I assured Abraham.

“Finally,” he said, “prayer is not like a vending machine. We don’t get everything we ask for. We must accept the answers of ‘No’ and ‘Not yet’ that God gives us to our requests because He is omniscient and gives us that which is best for us when it is best for us.”

“Now, press on! We have discussed some very important keys to being on the path to God and you need time to process those things we talked about. We will talk more tomorrow night,” and then he vanished.

Chapter 7 - Heaven and Hell

Before Mellyn awakened, Dave had recorded his experience the night before in his journal. He was sitting at his desk, pondering all that he had learned and how it would affect his family, when Mellyn came into his office.

Mellyn said, "I assume that you had another dream last night."

"I did," answered Dave.

"So, what are we supposed to do now?" She asked.

"My dear, I don't think that it is my place to tell you what to do but I will share what I have learned. Then, we can discuss what our plan should be," Dave replied.

"And I assume that you will want me to do the same as you?" Mellyn asked matter-of-factly.

"I would love that but it is your call," he said.

Mellyn smiled and said, "You know me too well, my handsome husband. Just tell me."

"OK," Dave began, "I am going to try to be a more compassionate person and I am going to pray to God every day, thanking Him for all the good things in my life, including you, and then ask Him to help me find the path to Him. When I find it, I plan to be committed to that path and I truly hope that you will be equally committed."

"If it is a good thing for our family, I will be right there with you," she assured him.

Dave jumped up, ran to her, gave her a big hug and exclaimed, "I couldn't ask for more! This is going to be awesome."

That night, just like the night before, Dave and Mellyn went into Danielle's room to say a prayer with their children and tuck them into bed. However, this night, Dave explained to Danielle and Dylan more about prayer, "Kids, last night we said the Lord's Prayer out of the Bible. From now on, we are just going to talk to God. We are going to thank Him for his blessings and ask Him for what we really need. Do you understand?"

The kids nodded. This was all new to them and they really didn't understand what was happening, but they loved and trusted their parents so they were sure that this was a good thing.

Later that night, after Dave and Mellyn got ready for bed, Dave said to Mellyn, "I was planning on saying a personal prayer but I was thinking that it might be nice if you and I prayed together. What do you think?"

“That’s OK with me as long as you say it and I just listen,” she answered.

“Sure, I can do that but when you are ready, you can take a turn,” he said.

“Then, I can ask for us to find a gold mine in our backyard?” she joked.

“Ha, Ha,” he said sarcastically, “but you realize that God is not like Santa Claus, we don’t get everything we ask for.”

“Am I going to hell for that?” Mellyn was still teasing him but Dave decided to play along.

“Great question. I’ll ask Abraham tonight for you. Now, are you ready to pray with me?” Dave asked.

“I am but messing with you is still a lot of fun,” she smiled and then kissed him.

Dave gave a prayer for both of them. He thanked God for Mellyn, his children, their jobs and their lives. He then asked God to help them agree on what was best for their family so they both would be committed to pursuing it. They went to bed feeling like a positive change was taking place. They had a good life but both felt like something better was coming.

Dave recorded his fifth visitation by Abraham this way the next morning.

“Well, things are really looking up for you, aren’t they David?” Abraham said to me. We were both sitting on a bench overlooking a beautiful meadow that I had never seen before and the weather was perfect.

“Yes, they are,” I answered. “Mellyn is coming around but I know that she is still evaluating what I have told her.”

“That’s probably a good thing,” he said. “There are too many people who are deceived because they listen to flattering words which lead them astray. Sadly, they don’t dig deep enough to determine if what is being said has any merit. At least Mellyn will have the conviction to be stalwart when that conviction finally comes.”

“I hadn’t thought of it that way,” I admitted. “I was just afraid that she was being stubborn but I know that she is a very good woman and she wants to do what is right,” Then I asked him, “Am I doing what I should for her?”

Abraham complimented me by saying, “You have done a good job of teaching her by your example and recognizing that she needs to find the truth on her own. Your decision to show her and your children how to pray is a big step in the right direction to find God. Well, done!”

“Thank you, Abraham, and you can take all the credit,” I said.

"I don't like to take credit for the good choices of those I teach because then I also would have to take credit for their bad choices," he said with a chuckle. "But, you can assure Mellyn that she is not going to hell."

I responded, "Now that is great news and it is something that I wanted to ask you about anyway. It is my turn to ask you a question, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is and I am ready to answer," he assured me.

"Great!" I said, "Please tell me about heaven and hell and who goes where and why."

"That is an excellent question," said Abraham. "It is always good to begin with the end in mind and your search for the path to God is no different. The other reason that this is such a great question is that there is a lot of misinformation about this topic. Specifically, many people conceive of hell as a place where the wicked are continually burning but are never consumed. Now, does that make any sense? I can see why rational people often reject the idea of Satan and hell. It is because Satan has deceived people into preaching a doctrine that is just absurd."

"You already taught me that Satan is real but is hell real also?" I asked.

"Satan is very real and he influences people with his deceptions to say and do horrible things. With regard to hell, it is real but the reality doesn't match what many people say. I will teach you the truth but it will take a little more than a sentence or two," he explained.

"I've got time," I quipped but I was still a little nervous about the topic.

"I will start with a few questions," he began. "Does it make sense that a perfect God would create so many imperfect humans that he would just send to hell for being imperfect?"

"You already taught me, Abraham," I responded, "that we are children of God who are eternal and not just creations of God."

"That is correct but it is a doctrine that is not understood by most," he said. "So, does it make sense that a loving God, a Father in Heaven, would send His children to earth to prepare them for an afterlife, just to torture them eternally if they were disobedient?"

"No, it doesn't," I replied emphatically.

His next question was, "Does it make sense that a human could burn forever and not change form?"

"Nope," I replied.

“Does it make sense that God would have one place for “good” people and one place for “bad” people when we all know that there is a spectrum of goodness and badness?” was his last question.

“Not really,” I said.

“You are absolutely correct.” Abraham confirmed. “There is a ‘hell’ but it is not a place. It is a state of mind. The ‘burning’ is the searing of a guilty and remorseful conscience that the disobedient suffer because they missed their opportunity to reap the rich blessings of the righteous. Finally, damnation simply means that one’s eternal progress has been stopped by the poor choices that person chose to make.”

“That certainly makes a lot more sense, especially knowing that God is my Father in Heaven. As a father myself, I could not imagine torturing my children regardless of how bad they were. So, would you now explain what happens to the good guys,” I requested of him.

Abraham said, “Let’s begin with the fact that each will receive according to his or her preparation and willingness to be faithful. The rewards will not be heaven or hell. The reward will be perfectly suited to each individual. Heaven and hell are only general descriptions of the rewards of those who accept or reject God and His commandments.”

“That sounds good but what about harps and wings?” I asked facetiously, knowing that he would not be offended by my teasing.

He came back with, “I guess that could be arranged for you but you would look rather silly with wings and you don’t have much musical talent. Do you really want that for an eternal reward?” I knew that Abraham could give just as well as he could take teasing.

He continued, “Some people preach that we spend eternity praising God. That is true, we will be eternally grateful, but we will spend eternity progressing to be more like our Father in Heaven. Like any good parent, God is happiest when His children are becoming better individuals. When we return to God’s presence, we will not just be laying around - believe me - we will be busy.”

I was a little bit embarrassed about what I was going to say next, so I whispered, “That all sounds great but to be honest, I am kind of afraid of death.”

Abraham then comforted me with his explanation, “That is very normal, especially for those who do not have an understanding of who God really is and what His plan is for us. I hope that with our conversations, your fear is diminishing.”

I nodded shyly.

He continued, "Death is something that not even the most powerful and intelligent people on earth can control or adequately explain so, without God, death takes on a very sinister and mysterious mien. With the greater understanding that life is eternal, we realize that death is just a door to another, better life. Death is certainly not the most important event in our existence. It is inconsequential compared to how we lived our life."

"When faced with death, there is no comfort without a belief in a benevolent Creator. The separation is complete and permanent if there is no God but let me assure you that there is a plan of happiness for everyone who will follow it. We will live and love and have a physical body again. That body will not feel pain and will live forever. Death is just a temporary separation from our family and friends."

As my apprehensions started to disappear, I told Abraham, "When I was young and was complaining about something I had to do, like go to school or mow the lawn, my grandpa Schwartz would say, 'There are only two things you have to do - die and pay for your sins'."

"Your grandpa was a wise man," Abraham responded. "The only thing I would add is that you don't have to pay for any sins for which you have repented."

"Now, I want to share some words from people who are much more eloquent than me," said Abraham. "Death is a mere comma, not an exclamation point!" taught Neal A. Maxwell. Do you remember when your friend, Scott Henning, died?"

"I certainly do. It was one of the saddest days of my life," I answered.

"Do you think his death was the most important part of his life?" Abraham asked me.

I exclaimed, "No way! He was one of the best guys I ever knew. Everyone loved him and when he died, he saved four people's lives through the donation of his organs."

"And how will he be remembered?" he pressed.

"That he was like an angel on earth," I stated emphatically.

Abraham then told me, "That is right and he went on to a glorious reward for his goodness and devotion to God. So, his death was just a comma in his eternal existence."

"Consider the wisdom in this stanza from a poem by Gordon B. Hinckley,
'What is this thing that men call death,
This quiet passing in the night.
'Tis not the end, but genesis
Of better worlds and greater light."

“Finally, from Leonardo da Vinci, ‘As a well-spent day brings happy sleep, so a life well spent brings happy death.’”

I responded, “That is very comforting to me because I always felt like Scott deserved better than to die in such a senseless way. I still miss him.”

“There is no doubt that death brings sorrow and pain for those who are left. Russell M Nelson, a renowned heart surgeon said, ‘The only way to take sorrow out of death is to take love out of life.’ If we look at the death of a loved one from this aspect, we mourn because we loved; and love is the most important attribute of all.”

“It is our solemn obligation to show our support for those who are left to mourn. Of course, we weep for the loss of them that die, we mourn with those that mourn and comfort those that stand in need of comfort. And, we must care for those who are unable to care for themselves upon the death of their support.”

“The words of the song, ‘Where Can I Turn for Peace,’ by Emma Lou Thayne, explain the source of all comfort when a loved one dies. These are a few very meaningful stanzas:

‘Where, when my aching grows,
Where, when I languish,
Where, in my need to know, where can I run?
Where is the quiet hand to calm my anguish?
Who, who can understand?
He, only One.’”

“Death is not a mysterious monster because of ‘He, only One.’ It is the doorway to greater happiness.”

“Also, remember that there is an eternal purpose in having a body. After we die, we will resurrect, meaning that we will have a body of flesh and bone through-out all eternity. This wonderful body we have has the ability to taste, smell and feel. It has given us the ability to taste delicious chocolate, smell the fragrance of a rose and feel the tender caress of a loved one. Receiving a body is one of the reasons that we came to earth.”

“On the other hand, these same physical senses of the body are what derail so many people and cause addictions to drugs, pornography, perversions and licentiousness. Learning to control our physical appetites is an important part of being on the path to God. A lack of self-control is the surest way to allow Satan to control our lives. In essence, we receive the reward of whom we choose to follow. If we follow Satan, we get the immediate and momentary pleasure of satisfying our physical appetites and egos and then the hell of knowing that we gave up so much more. If we follow God, we receive peace in this life because we chose to be virtuous and then eternal joy in the life to come.”

“Your words are comforting but now I have another fear,” I admitted.

"You are concerned about those who never find the path or never thought of looking," Abraham acknowledged my concern.

"So, let's take my grandparents," I said. "They all were members of Second Baptist in El Dorado. They attended faithfully and believed, or I think they believed, that they would go to heaven because they accepted Jesus as their Savior. What happened to them?"

"We must all determine for ourselves if Jesus Christ is really God. I cannot tell you." Then, Abraham continued, "More to the point, let me ask you - Is obedience to commandments really necessary?"

I answered, "Based on what you have taught me, I think so."

"Another question - Would God, if he is Jesus Christ or not, give us commandments and not expect us to be obedient, especially considering that they are His guideposts to happiness and guideposts to being more like Him?" he asked.

"I don't think he would." I said flatly. This line of questioning was not relieving my fears.

He continued, "Is it reasonable that one group of God's children could tell everyone else, 'We are going to heaven because we believe in Jesus and you are going to hell because you don't believe the same way we do?'"

My response was, "That sounds a lot like they are setting themselves up as the judges of the eternal reward of others. That really doesn't sound correct."

"Well, those are things to think about," Abraham said.

"Wait, wait, wait!" I protested. "You did not answer my question about my family!"

"David, you asked me about their beliefs and I can only give you things to consider. I cannot tell you if anyone is on the correct path but I will help you understand eternal truths that should help put your mind at rest concerning your family and friends," he offered.

"Please do," I pleaded.

This is what Abraham taught me about finding the way to heaven, God's kingdom.

"God, our Heavenly Father, loves each of His children. He pleads with us to return home, just as any loving father would do. His kingdom is available to all and anyone can return to Him if they are humble enough and wise enough to subject their will to His."

"It is absolutely unreasonable that a loving and just God would not give everyone the opportunity to accept Him and to follow Him. Millions have lived and died without that

opportunity. God is well aware of them and has provided a way for them to go to heaven. It does not matter if they lived in 12th Century China, or 19th Century Africa or 21st Century America. If someone has not had a fair chance on earth to choose to love and serve God, they will have that chance after they die and before they are judged. God's judgement will be based on the desires of every person's heart."

"Now, some might say that those people have an advantage because they do not need the faith that someone needs on earth to believe. My answer is that an omniscient, just and merciful God knows what he is doing and everyone will know in their own heart that they were judged fairly and that their eternal reward perfectly fits their eternal nature to submit to God's will or not. Does that make sense, David?"

I answered, "Yes, it does and I am grateful that those I love, and everyone else for that matter, will have an equal chance. It makes absolute sense that God would want us to return to Him and would give us every chance but never try to force us to love Him. It's just like any loving parent would do."

"You have a willing mind and an open heart. This is one of the reasons that God sent me to you. Now, I must go and let you think about what we have discussed. I will see you tomorrow night and I will have some more questions for you. 'Til we meet again," Abraham said as my dream ended.

Chapter 8 - Problem of Pride

Dave was awakened the next morning by the sensation of Mellyn stroking the back of his neck. "Are you awake, dear?" she asked.

"I am now," he said, "but that feels good. Did you want something?"

"Well, I was just wondering how it went last night," she replied.

"So, it was just information you were looking for," he said teasingly.

Mellyn smiled. "You never know but let's start there."

"The good news is that you are not going to hell," Dave began, "but there is a whole lot more required of us than just not killing someone or robbing banks to be worthy to return to God's presence."

"Is that your assessment or did Abraham tell you that? she queried.

Dave could tell by the tone of her voice that Mellyn had been seriously considering what he had told her about his dreams. This seemed to him that she was now starting to believe what he said and that she was ready to move forward. So, he carefully told her everything that he had learned the night before. Then, he went on to say, "Honey, I want us and our children to be together forever. I also want all of us to have the protection and guidance of God in this life. I also want us to have the peace that comes from living a better, purposeful life. This all means that we have to work together to make it happen. Do you know what I mean?"

"I think I do, Dave," Mellyn responded. "I also want to apologize for not accepting what you told me in the beginning. I can now see the goodness of it and I feel that it is true. I don't quite know how to describe it. It is just a calm reassurance that finding the path to God is what I want for our family also. So, what do we do now?"

Dave was so thrilled with what Mellyn just said that he reached out and took her in his arms. As he held her, he whispered in her ear, "You are so wonderful and I am grateful that you are mine. I now want you to be eternally mine."

"Me too," she said.

"I'm not exactly sure of everything we need to do but I do know a few things for certain." Dave listed what he knew, "We need to pray and ask God for guidance and keep His commandments. We also need to become active participants in an organized religion. I guess the religion where we feel that 'calm reassurance' that you just mentioned. We also need to focus more on others and not just on ourselves."

"That sounds like a lot but I am with you one hundred percent," Mellyn assured him.

"I am so happy, my dear!" Dave declared. "We can do this and I have two more visits from Abraham to determine what more is needed and how we can accomplish it."

She said, "It's a shame that you have to wait until tonight for more instruction from Abraham but we will have today to think about how we do what you said we should do but let's get up now and have breakfast as a family before we take the kids to school. We also need to find an appropriate time to explain to Danielle and Dylan that our lives will be changing and why. Before we explain it to them, however, we need to figure out exactly what we are going to do."

As Dave worked that day, he felt a peace about life that he had never experienced before. Since he was a teenager, he was always unsettled about why he was here on earth and what he was supposed to do with his life. He now knew the answers to both questions. He was anxiously awaiting Abraham's visit that night.

After saying a prayer before getting into bed, Dave slipped into a peaceful sleep knowing what was to come. It wasn't long before he was dreaming and he could see the entire earth below him and Abraham was standing next to him, also staring at the view from outer space.

Abraham spoke first, "It is glorious and beautiful, isn't it David?"

David recorded his conversation of their sixth night together in his journal this way.

I was in awe of the view of the earth from this vantage point and I told Abraham, "It is intoxicating!"

"So true," he agreed, "and all of God's creations are beautiful in their own way and for their own purpose. So, why do you think that there are so many problems on that earth down there and what are the causes of those problems?"

I thought this was an intriguing question for a messenger from God to ask me, an insignificant journalist with no real training in these matters. I took a moment to reflect and answered, "Obviously, you know much better than I but I will tell you what I think. Maybe it's wrong but this is my perspective."

"I have been a journalist since I was in high school and I have spent a lot of time researching stories for the news. My job is not just a job for me, it fascinates me. It has always intrigued me why people do what they do. My conclusion is that misguided or evil people are the cause of most of the world's lingering problems."

"Go on," Abraham urged me.

I continued tentatively because I didn't want to seem like I had all the answers, "I could be wrong but it seems to me that intolerance, greed and disregard for others have

caused or been the major cause of all of the wars, murders, and heartache in the world.”

“Very insightful,” Abraham complimented me. “I’m especially impressed that you did not blame God for natural disasters, disease and famine.”

I responded, “Well, a lot of that has to do with what you have taught me. Our mortal experience cannot exclude the impact of being mortal if we are to learn and grow. I have learned that we can have hope in any situation because we have a loving God that will support us, give us peace and take us back to Him, if we are faithful.”

“Bravo! Bravo!” he exclaimed. “You are a quick study. So, share with me some examples of world problems and how they are caused by people.”

“OK,” I said, “we know about Genghis Kahn, Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Pol Pot and Saddam Hussein. Every one of them did what they did so they could have power and wealth without regard for the lives that they destroyed. Some of the early Catholic Popes and the Islamist extremist group Al-Qaeda, with religious fervor mixed in, caused the same type of misery.”

“Those types of problems are all in the past, aren’t they?” he pressed.

“I could be wrong,” I admitted, “but it seems to me that they are just sublimated for the time being. Who would have thought that in the 1930s and 1940s the German people would support the Nazi wars and the murder of millions of Jews, or that the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, which was supposed to give power to the people, would lead to Stalin murdering almost 20 million of his fellow countrymen? Even more recently, Mao Zedong’s “Great Leap Forward” killed over 40 million of his fellow Chinese. People are people and the same problems could be brewing now.”

“What do you mean when you say, ‘could be brewing now?’” Abraham asked.

“I don’t mean to be judgmental but what is happening in the media now worries me. Both the entertainment media and the news media. I am a journalist and I have seen how the public is swayed by the opinions of those who control the news and entertainment media and also those who are influential on social media, especially the celebrities. They talk about acceptance and unity but I see hate and divisiveness. The “Right” and the “Left” have tribalized and they act like they hate each other. I think those that control the media have a significant role in this conflict. They can turn ‘the news’ into propaganda by merely cherry-picking the facts that support their agenda and then spinning the story accordingly. Have I said too much?” I asked.

“No, no,” he assured me, “you need to verbalize what you think so that I can help you know how to discern the truth. Finding the path is all about finding the truth, and remember this also, it is about treating others as our brothers and sisters because they literally are.”

So, I continued, "Fine. I will tell you about one of my college journalism professors, Jamika Harris-Stiles. It was by listening to her lectures that I realized that modern journalism is more about influencing public opinion than it is about reporting truth. She was a loud advocate of so-called 'social justice,' especially for black and gay people. To me, those who call-out everyone else for "micro-aggressions" of racism and homophobia represent the 21st century version of McCarthyism. It has become a weapon to silence anyone who does not agree with their unsupportable opinions."

"We all know that there was a time when race, sexual orientation and gender were used to enslave, abuse or discriminate. It seems obvious to me that those days are behind us from a legal and societal standpoint. Clearly, there are individuals who will never give up their prejudices but there are laws in the U.S and most of the modern world that prohibit those kinds of abuses. It appears that this "social justice" is just self-serving. What I have seen in the field of modern journalism is that virtue-signaling rhetoric is being used to manipulate opinions in order to elect politicians who want to change society so that they gain power. This is the same type of divisiveness that was used by Hitler, Lenin and Mao. That is why I am concerned."

Abraham nodded in a way that made me think that he was understanding but not indicating whether I was right or wrong. Then, he spoke, "I can see why you are concerned. There has always been much hypocrisy in the world and God's followers must virtuously defend the truth and at the same time try to find common ground with those who do not think the same way that we do. We must always treat others with kindness and dignity."

He posed another question, "What do you think causes unhappiness in mankind?"

My answer was, "There are four things that I have seen that seem to be at the root of unhappiness and I have never met an unhappy person who didn't have at least one of these problems. They are addictions, disobedience to valid and proper laws, poor life choices and a victim mentality."

"Yes, that makes sense," Abraham said. "Of course, that assumes that they were mentally stable to begin with."

I agreed and added, "The sad thing is that many of these unhappy people have both fame and fortune. Sometimes, I wonder if being rich and famous condemns people to being unhappy."

"We do see that a lot, don't we?" Then, he asked me another question. "What do you think prevents people from finding the path that we have been discussing?"

I replied, "Indifference comes to mind. Take my parents. They are awesome people and great parents. They did all they could to provide a stable, happy home for my sister and me. It was a wonderful place to grow up but they did not teach us much about God."

Maybe they didn't feel like they really knew. They would never do anything bad but everything had its neat little box; job, family, church, socializing, hobbies, etc. There wasn't an overriding philosophy of life that seemed to guide them. When I was struggling as a teenager to find purpose in my life, my parents didn't seem to understand. They had a happy life and expected that I would too if I just did what they were doing."

"Having parents that show unconditional love for their family is certainly one of the greatest blessings there is," Abraham said. "You are very fortunate indeed. Your stable family is what provided you the foundation and courage to seek the path."

"I know," I assured him. "I love them and my sister and her family. I just hope that they have a chance to know what I know."

"They will, or they better have, after all we have discussed," he admonished me.

"You're right, I have to help them," I agreed.

"So, is indifference the only reason that people don't follow the path?" Abraham then asked.

"No, I don't think so," I said. "My experience is that most people my age think that religion is only for the ignorant or superstitious. They say that no one can prove there is a God and then say that if there was a God, he wouldn't allow the terrible things that happen to good people. They think that they are more enlightened because they only believe things that can be proven scientifically. And besides, their lives wouldn't be as much fun if someone was telling them what they could and could not do."

Abraham laughed, "It has always been that way, even 4,000 years ago when I lived on earth. I always said that they just put the cart before the horse. They don't want anyone telling them what to do; therefore, there is no God. It's easier that way."

"Now it's my turn to ask a question," I asserted. "Why are you asking me these questions and not giving me any of your answers?"

"Valid question," he said. "It is because it is a way to teach you something that is essential for anyone who wants to find the path and stay on the path. Therefore, I must ask one more question; what do my questions to you have in common? The cause of problems in the world, the cause of unhappiness and the cause of people not finding the path?"

I thought for awhile about his questions and my answers, even though I wasn't certain that my answers were correct. The best I could come up with was, "They all have to do with people doing the wrong thing. Is that right?"

Abraham answered, “Well, partially. They do make bad choices but the important part is why they make those bad choices.”

“I have no clue,” I admitted.

“If you think about it,” he began, “you will see that pride is the root cause of almost all evil in the world, including wars, murders, theft, infidelity, problems with children, addictions, self-righteous causes, and rejecting God and His commandments. Pride is the primary motivator of people who harm others in their quest for self-gratification. Pride causes pain, pushes away the best things of life and even creates contention among people who should naturally love one another. That is the reason that controlling pride is absolutely essential for anyone to stay on the path to God.”

I understood what Abraham was saying. I had done stories on people who knew the truth but would not admit it because it would take away power or wealth from them. So, instead of admitting their mistakes, they would defend their poor choices and go on to make more poor choices. Their pride had chained them to an evil life-style but they found solace in the fact that they didn’t have to admit they were doing wrong. It was pitiful.

Next, I asked Abraham, “So, I shouldn’t be proud of my kids for doing well in school, or dance or Little League?”

“It is not that use of the word that I am speaking about,” he explained. “You can and should feel pleasure and satisfaction in the accomplishments of your children or Mellyn or even yourself. The use of the word pride that I am talking about is when people have an inflated opinion of their own dignity, importance or superiority which leads them to treat others as if they were lesser human beings. Pride also causes people to reject God and replace His wisdom with their own self-righteous opinions. This is the reason that a prideful person cannot stay on the path to God.”

“One of the challenges of life is to maintain perspective. In this world, there are people who are wealthy, educated or naturally talented, beautiful, etc. There are also people who are on the other end of the spectrum of those qualities. It takes constant effort for both groups of people to maintain a proper perspective and stay true to God. Those who are much less intelligent, beautiful, etc. must remember that they are still children of God and have great worth. Those who are much more intelligent, beautiful, etc. must not let the praise of others make them think that they are more important or valuable than anyone else. The lack of pride in themselves can derail the first group and becoming prideful can derail the second group.”

“I guess that it’s a good thing that I am just average, vanilla-type guy,” I said. Then I asked, “Does that mean that those who believe in God are not prideful and that those who don’t believe in God are always prideful?”

“Another excellent question,” Abraham said. “Just believing in God is not enough. The path to God requires being submissive to Him and His teachings, including being kind and loving towards others. We must ‘walk the talk’ to reap the blessings. Not trying to ‘walk the talk’ is just hypocrisy. On the other hand, people who don’t believe in God are not always prideful. Many have been humbled by their circumstances or have learned from the examples of others.”

“However, willfully rejecting God’s rules always presents the perfect opportunity to create one’s own standards of conduct, which usually lead people on a downward spiral. This includes all of us average-type people also. The sad truth is that all people who ignore the light and knowledge that come from God in favor of their own perceived wisdom blind themselves to what is true and they will continue to make poor choices.”

Abraham continued and I could tell that this was the important lesson that he wanted to teach me. “Please indulge me for a few minutes while I explain about the impact of rejecting God’s wisdom. Most people’s prideful philosophies typically fit in one of the following five categories:

Number one - ‘I believe in God, but I know what is best for me.’

These individuals recognize His presence but they will not surrender their will to anyone, including God. The only commandments that they will obey are those that carry a legal penalty. They will not kill or steal but the Sabbath is not a holy day, using God’s name in vain is nothing and sexual relations of any kind are perfectly acceptable for consenting adults.”

“Sadly, they do not understand the significance of God’s commandments and they miss out on the related benefits. We can choose our actions but we can’t choose the consequences of those actions. Commandments are the source of wonderful blessings from God.”

“Number two - ‘God cannot exist because he would not allow all the terrible things that happen to good people.’

This philosophy assumes that God would not allow this life to be unfair. A natural disaster, a baby dying, or a spouse that is a drug addict would not exist in the world that they would create. They believe that since all of those are present in this life’s experience, there is no God.”

“The truth is that we do not have all knowledge and what we think we know could be false. It is true that life is not fair, but it was not meant to be fair. It is a test of our faith and faithfulness. The faithful know that through the omniscience and omnipotence of God, all things will be made fair in the end. God has a plan for us. People of faith receive great peace in this life when things go badly. The godless have nowhere to turn for peace when tragedy strikes, as it always eventually does.”

“Number three - ‘My parents taught me about God but the more educated I became, the less I could see His reality or His relevance.’

Being wealthy, or intellectual, or very talented are wonderful accomplishments, but they often bring an arrogance that stifles a belief in God. Those who believe they are self-sufficient frequently think that they are smarter than those who recognize God's hand in their lives. This pride usually causes them to think that they don't really need God. Sometimes they will participate in religion because of the sociality or because it provides good programs for their children. They, however, pick and choose what to believe and they reject that which is not up to their intellectual standards."

"This cafeteria-style religion prevents them from fully benefiting from God's love and guidance. When people are selectively obedient, they receive selective blessings. The wisdom of man is foolishness to God. Nevertheless, God is always waiting for the proud to humble themselves and submit to His will. When they do, life is better because following God is the only true path to happiness."

"Number four - 'Religion is the opium of the masses,' said Karl Marx. Some believe there is no force, or intellect or power higher than that of man. Atheists and agnostics often use past abuses by religions as justification for categorizing all religion as evil and destructive but they choose to ignore the fact that the godless have historically been much worse. They also ridicule faith as self-induced in order to escape the realities of life. Their belief is that we came from nothing and we will end as nothing. Even brilliant minds, such as Dr. Stephen Hawking, have been seduced by their own intelligence."

"Denying God does not make Him cease to exist. It only blocks the path of peace, joy, inspiration, comfort, guidance, family solidarity, hope and love that could be enjoyed by those who choose to reject Him. True disciples of God have always enjoyed divine guidance and better lives."

"Number five - 'I believe in a God that lets me have it my way.' Many of us like to order a hamburger with just our favorite condiments so we can 'Have it our way.' It appears that many people want the same in religion. They know God exists but they want Him to allow them to live the way they choose. In essence, they want to create God in man's own image. Some also believe that they deserve to go to heaven just because of what they believe."

"A God of justice would never give His people laws and not expect them to obey them, no matter what they claim to believe. Our merciful God loves us and wants us to follow Him because he knows that the more we become like Him, the better and happier we are. As a group, those who do what God commands have always been better people than those who have it their way."

Abraham concluded with, "I apologize if that seemed too preachy but I can't emphasize enough the need for being submissive to God and His eternal laws. That includes loving our brothers and sisters, even those with whom we disagree, like Professor Harris-Stiles. The path to happiness requires it. I am going leave you now to ponder these things for a while by yourself."

Now, I was all alone and still staring at the earth from outer space. I thought about how the creator of all things could be concerned about one individual such as me. It made me realize how insignificant I am in relation to God and that I have no legitimate reason to think that I am better than those around me. I awoke with a new perspective of the majesty of God and my need to be kinder and more accepting of others.

Chapter 9 - Wisdom

Dave's first thought of the day was that this night would be the last time that he would meet Abraham in his dreams. He began to think about all the remaining things that he would like to discuss with Abraham and wondered if there would be enough time. Then, he pulled out his journal and recorded the conversation of the previous night.

He knew that the lesson on pride that Abraham just taught him was very important. He spent some time considering what he needed to do in his own life to eliminate pride. His thoughts were interrupted when Mellyn walked into the room where he was writing.

She slipped her arms around Dave's neck and whispered in his ear, "Now what do I need to change?" She enjoyed teasing him but at the same time, she felt grateful for what they were both learning. The love and peace in their home was increasing and she was very happy with what was happening.

Not to say that she wasn't happy before. She was raised by wonderful parents, even though they never acknowledged God. Her marriage to Dave was great. She loved her children and everyone in the family was healthy and everything was going reasonably well. However, this feeling that she had now was new. She had a hard time describing it but she was more at peace with her life and she had an expectation of better things to come.

Dave told her, "We just need to be more concerned about doing good and less about thinking how good we are. We, as mortals, are really insignificant compared to God and his majesty. We only need to change those aspects of our personality that the Spirit of God prompts us to change. I am just happy that we are in this together and that we only have to take one step at a time. Since we need to find a religion, I will do some research and we both should ask people that we respect about the church they attend, if they attend church. Then, we take the kids each Sunday and go church shopping."

Mellyn said, "Don't forget about praying as a family. I never had prayed before but it gives me such a good feeling that I think we need to make it a daily habit. It also helps me to organize my priorities by expressing gratitude for all the wonderful things in our lives. I am so grateful for the knowledge that there is a God in heaven that loves me and will bless me with the things I need in order to become better."

Their faith in God gave them both great hope. They felt ready to make the necessary changes in their lives, even though they were still uncertain as to what all those changes might be.

Dave was anxious that night as he got ready for bed. Specifically, he was anxious that he might not ask the correct questions of Abraham on this final night of his visits. He decided to ask God in his prayers for inspiration to get all the information from Abraham that was necessary in his search for the path to Him.

In Dave's dream that night, he was sitting in front of his computer at work. The search engine was on the screen and he was trying to find the answer to a question that he could not remember. What he did remember was all of the confusing and contradictory information that was flashing before him.

He noticed Abraham sitting at his side when Abraham spoke, "The twenty-first century certainly has brought us a world where knowledge of almost any topic is at our fingertips. An overwhelming store of information is available to anyone who has access to a computer or a smart phone."

Dave recorded their conversation this way, "That is so true for me. The real problem is being able to sort out the nonsense to get to the truth."

"I know what you mean," Abraham agreed. "Discerning the truth has always been an issue for mankind and now there are so many more misleading opinions, strident voices and trivialities distracting us."

"That is exactly where I wanted to start our conversation tonight!" I exclaimed. "I need to know how to distinguish truth from error. I want to know if I think something is true because it is true or because I simply want it to be true. I have seen journalists, like me, make things look appealing or kind or positive when they were none of those things. I don't want to be deceived."

"I thought so," he said. "Finding truth is the essence of finding the path."

I then said with a smirk, "That's great, because you already know what I am going to ask."

Abraham smiled kindly and said, "As true as that might be, you have to admit that knowing how to discern truth would be on everyone's list who is trying to find the path to God."

"Yes, you are right again, Abraham, so please give me the answer," I pleaded.

"Since you don't seem to tire of my sermons," he began, "here comes another beauty."

"You would think with an almost limitless accumulation of facts that are available with a few keystrokes, that people would make better choices and be better humans than in the past. That does not appear to be the case. You can read thousands of books or spend all of your free time Googling but that does not ensure that you will make wise choices."

"There are millions of very intelligent people on earth. They are well-educated and seem to love to learn. With so many intelligent people on earth, mankind should be able to make better choices and be better people than in the past. That does not appear to be

the case either. One can be incredibly intelligent and have multiple degrees from renowned universities but that does not mean that that person will make wise choices.”

“For millennia, society has looked to the most educated people for answers to the ills that plague society. Sadly, in the last fifty years, many disciplines in academia have lost their way. Now, many university administrators and professors have chosen to focus on aberrations rather than time-tested truths. Their desire to be relevant and appear to be enlightened have led them trivialize traditional values. These include undermining truths about God, marriage, gender, virtue, rights of unborn children, individual responsibility, and the inspired work of the founding fathers of the United States.”

I piped in, “And diversity over competence!”

“That is correct also,” Abraham agreed. “Wisdom does not come from having the most information or being the smartest. Wisdom comes from not being seduced by the trending sophistries of society or an inflated ego. The wise, instead, focus on the best answers to the problems that face mankind, using time-tested truth from God and history as a foundation.”

“Consider the powerful and intelligent people who have destroyed their reputations, and the lives of others, by making selfish choices. Your career as a journalist should have given you plenty of examples.”

I nodded my head in agreement. I had edited the stories of what seemed like hundreds of those people. I attended a university that was typical of most and saw first-hand the damaging impact of misguided professors teaching their distorted pet-theories to unsuspecting students who were anxious to become educated. Because those students needed good grades to get good jobs, the professors could arbitrarily preach their version of what was true and false without any real challenge.

Abraham continued, “Celebrity morality, political agendas and the philosophies of self-important intellectuals are taking a toll on societies worldwide. While satisfying our egos with intellectualism and elitism makes us feel important, being wise will make us happier. Avoiding deception will also benefit our society in general. Most of all, making wise decisions is the best thing we can do for our children and the generations that follow because good decisions lead to good places.”

“Finally, I need you to understand that I am not trying to demean a good education. Remember that education is very important to God because he is the fountain of all knowledge and wisdom. To be well-educated is a worthy goal for all and receiving advanced degrees is commendable, if the students weigh everything they learn against the truth and standards that God has established.”

“OK, I’m done preaching,” Abraham said.

“I can see that being intelligent and well-educated mean nothing if I am not willing to follow the wisdom of God.” I assured him. “Now, I don’t mean to be rude, Abraham, but you told me last night not to be arrogant because that will blind me to the truth but you didn’t tell me how to discern truth.”

“That is true,” he confirmed, “but discerning truth is only possible through honest introspection and a desire to be true to what is true. Not being misled by one’s pride is the starting-point to find the truth.”

“Another major cause of people not finding the path of truth is that they follow the mantra of, ‘If it feels good, do it.’ Some were never taught, others consistently choose to avoid anything that requires effort, sacrifice or self-restraint. All of these reasons lead them to a life of moral mediocrity or to the dark world of addictions. Being unable or unwilling to commit to making wise choices causes problems in our families, jobs, friendships and in society.”

“Abraham,” I implored, “I want to make wise decisions but even with that desire, I need to understand how to distinguish the truth from all of the distracting noise that is out there.”

He assured me that I was headed in the right direction by saying, “I understand your concern and I am trying to teach you that your very important question cannot be answered without preparing yourself first. With the foundation of humility and self-restraint that I just explained to you, I can now teach you the steps to discern the truth.”

Now, I felt foolish for interrupting. I apologized. “I’m sorry, Abraham. Please continue.”

“There is no need to apologize, David,” he said. “I know that these things have been on your mind for a long time and you are just anxious to do what is right. I commend you for your sincere desire to find God.”

I smiled a little sheepishly.

Abraham continued by asking me, “David, you are a journalist, so I will ask you, how do you find the truth of a story that you are reporting?”

I answered, “First of all, I do research by gathering relevant information and the opinions of knowledgeable people. I give more credibility to those whose opinions have proven to be reliable in the past.”

“Excellent!” he said. “That is a perfect first step in your search for truth about God and His path. You must research the doctrines about God that exist in society. You will find some truth in all religions that believe in God and I assure you that the true path to God is out there. If you search, you will find it.”

Those words lifted a tremendous burden off of me because Abraham assured me that I could find the truth that I had been seeking if I was diligent. “Thank you for that! What should I do first?” I asked.

“You have already started,” he said. “You decided to begin to pray and to start looking for a church to join, correct?”

“Yes, I have,” I answered. “Praying in our family has been a great experience for us all. Mellyn just told me the other night that she feels the same way. We haven’t begun to attend a church yet since I have only been talking to you for a week now but we both will be asking people we know about where they attend. I guess we’ll probably start with the Baptist church since that is what is most familiar to me.”

Abraham said, “That is as good as any as a place to start but be sure to keep praying. I recommend that you find a church that values both education and faith because truth encompasses both spiritual and secular learning. In fact, you will find more truth about God if you belong to a church where the more educated members tend to be the most faithful. That correlation is not typical.”

“The church you choose to guide you on the path will be full of imperfect people who are trying to be better. The doctrine of the church should encourage true brotherhood and avoid contention. The church of God will teach true doctrine but will not try to establish that truth by attacking another church. Never forget, though, it is through prayer that God will tell you if the doctrines are correct.”

“How does he do that?” I asked.

“All truth comes from God and God reveals truth to man, almost always, in two ways. He will tell you in your heart and in your mind if it is true. As you study and pray about the things of God, you will begin to understand the truth intellectually and then God’s spirit will assure you in your heart that it is correct. This is what we call faith, which means knowing things by the spirit and not just intellectually.”

“Remember also, faith is not a static thing. It grows or ebbs, depending on the attention that you give it and your obedience to what is true. In the scientific method, we always test the hypothesis. We do the same when we seek for spiritual truth. We test the hypothesis by obeying the principal that we have learned. Obedience is an essential element of following God. There is no progress without it. If there is both intellectual and spiritual improvement, the hypothesis is true. The greatest evidence of spiritual truth is that it produces greater confidence and happiness,” Abraham said.

I replied, “I have seen that in the past week of your visits. I have more peace because of what you have taught me about God, my relationship to Him and what I must do to return to Him. I have increased confidence because I tested it to see if it is true.”

“Those are what I call spiritual anchors,” he told me. “Every time you have an ‘Aha moment’ of faith, you need to take note. Those aha moments will give you strength because that is when God’s spirit has spoken directly and personally to you. That increased strength will help you when your faith is tested and it will be tested.”

Abraham now summarized what he had taught me. “You have now learned the first steps to having faith are; 1) Overcome your ego that blinds you to truth. We call this humility. 2) Exercise self-restraint by choosing virtue. 3) Research doctrines about God. 4) Go to church services so you can see how faith has affected the believers’ actions and also to get strength and knowledge from fellow believers. 5) Pray to God to reveal the truth to you or to guide you to it. 6) Remember your faith anchors, your ‘aha moments’ of inspiration, when your mind and your heart both tell you that something is true.

“So, that’s it! That’s the way to find the path.” I said with some confidence.

“Hold your horses, David,” Abraham cautioned me. “That is the way to begin but there are a few more important steps, especially for staying on the path after you have found it.”

“We’ll start with the sure way to know if something is true and comes from God. This is it - If it is genuinely good, it is from God. For example, kindness, love, faith, service, virtue, honesty, and humble piety all are from God. God loves us as His children and every good attribute helps us to be more like Him, including showing kindness to all of His children.”

“Finding the path includes finding a faith, a religion and a church that leads you to Him - A religion that accepts all as they are but expects them to become better. That religion will establish minimum standards of piety for someone to be a member in good standing. Merely sitting quietly in a pew, listening to a sermon each Sunday is not enough.”

“Perfection is not required in this life but striving to become better is. An honest seeker of truth will sense if something is missing in the doctrine of a church. You must continue to search until you find sound doctrine that God’s spirit confirms to your mind and to your heart is true, godlike and complete.”

I thanked him for this litmus test and then he continued with another step. “David, it is extremely important that you question your own virtue continuously. Remember that virtue is not obtained by calling-out others for not believing as we do, or fabricating victims to defend, or marching in parades or protests, or declaring that we are more kind and fair than God. Virtue is developed by obeying God and loving and serving His children.”

“If you are trying to do God’s will, it is easy to get complacent and stop improving, especially after you have found the path. Questioning how good you really are is an

excellent way to prevent you from becoming proud. Being proud of one's goodness is a sure way to lose the path."

"I can see that," I said but I thought at the same time that I had never been on the path so I wasn't sure that I would recognize if I was being proud of my goodness.

Knowing my thoughts, Abraham immediately said, "If you honestly question your virtue, you will know if you are becoming better. Also, anyone who seeks for truth is on the path to God because, remember, all truth comes from God."

I exclaimed, "I had no idea that I was on the path already! All I felt was confusion."

"Turbulence typically precedes inspiration for those who are diligent in their search for answers," Abraham assured me. "It is part of the learning process."

"I am truly grateful for the inspiration that you have given me," I told Abraham.

"And I am grateful for the time that we have spent together. It is always a satisfying experience to see another decide to follow God," he said. "Loving others and helping when we can is a fundamental attribute of anyone who is a disciple of God. It is something that we intuitively know but it must also be said. Furthermore, you never know how much good your simple act of kindness will do but be assured; a pebble of kindness always creates a ripple. If we all would do something meaningful to help another every day, the impact would be like a tidal wave of goodness washing over a world of selfishness."

"The final step is to be committed to God for the rest of your life. Commitment always includes obedience to God. That commitment will also include a financial commitment. God doesn't need your money but the test of financial sacrifice is a way to keep us from being proud as we help others. It also separates those who 'walk the talk' from those who don't. Hypocrisy is totally incompatible with being a disciple of God."

"Obedience always produces blessings. It takes discipline but that discipline is rewarded continuously. You will fail to do what you know is right from time to time but that is part of being a mortal. You just have to stop, ask forgiveness and get back on the path. Your direction of travel is always more important than your exact location on the path to God."

"So, the last four steps to find the path are; 7) Know that all things that are genuinely good come from God, 8) Question your virtue continuously, 9) Love all of God's children and 10) Be fully committed to God by obeying His commandments. And now, my dear friend David, I have done all that God sent me to do," Abraham said with some emotion in his voice.

"Wait, Wait!" I shouted. "You have taught me so much but I still don't know all I need to know."

“You don’t know everything but you know enough, David, just make sure that you never give up the ground you have gained on the path to God,” he whispered as he faded from view with a wave. That was the last I would see of my friend and mentor, Abraham.

Chapter 10 - The Beginning

When Dave's eyes opened that morning, he was filled with a bundle of conflicting emotions. He felt peace, trepidation and anticipation. As he began to regain full consciousness, he tried to sort out his feelings and formulate a plan. One thing he knew for sure; He needed to make certain that Mellyn and he were on the same page.

Dave did feel at peace because he knew that his dreams were not just some fantasy. He had actually talked with Abraham, who was sent by God to answer his nagging questions. Those answers were logical and made all of the pieces of how to have a fulfilling life fit together perfectly.

It was wonderful to know that he wasn't just a mass of cells that had come together by an unexplainable big bang that really had no purpose. He was a son of God and God had a plan of happiness for him.

He felt some fear because he knew he had to change and become a person who was more focused on being better and doing more for others, especially his own family. He also was not certain if Mellyn knew what he knew because Mellyn had to rely on what he told her. It would be reasonable to assume that he was not able to adequately communicate Abraham's message.

This was definitely one source of his trepidation but the major concern was that he would not measure up to God's expectations. Abraham had assured him that everyone makes mistakes and that no one is expected to be perfect in this life. God would forgive him as long as he continued to try to improve. He knew he had to tackle these issues with all his heart, mind and strength.

Nevertheless, he was anxious to get started on this new journey. Abraham promised him greater happiness and an eternal reward. These same blessings would come to Mellyn, his children, his parents and his sister's family and anyone else who would try to find the path and stay on the path to God.

He decided that the first step was for Mellyn and him to discuss what they should do. It did not make sense to try to do that over the dinner table or at the end of a busy work day. He decided to take her to the place he loved the most, so he would reserve a hotel room at the lodge in Sequoia National Park and hire a babysitter for the weekend. He discussed his plan with Mellyn when she awoke and she readily agreed.

The following weekend, Dave and Mellyn packed their clothes and the notebook where Dave had recorded everything that he remembered that Abraham had told him. They gave instructions to the babysitter, kissed Danielle and Dylan goodbye and started out on their journey to determine what their lives would be like in the future. He knew for certain that their life together would be different than it had been.

They arrived at the lodge in the evening, had a lovely dinner at the restaurant and spent the rest of the night enjoying each other as husband and wife.

The next day, they decided to discuss their future as they hiked to Tharp's Log, a hollowed, fallen Sequoia tree that Hale D. Tharp had used as a summer cabin in the mid-1800s while his sheep grazed in meadow.

Mellyn began the conversation, "So, how do we start? I have no idea what to do."

"We need to make a plan," Dave replied, because he was the planner of the two. "I think we need to first decide what is most important to us, like our basic principles, our core values."

"That sounds like the corporate strategic planning that we do at Chevron," she said. "I would say that we both believe that love and honesty are important, right?"

"Absolutely!" Dave agreed, "and I would add that finding happiness in life is very important to us."

Mellyn concurred. "We have found happiness in the love that we have in our family and the honesty in our relationship."

"They all go together, for sure," he said. "Abraham taught me that anything that is genuinely good, like love and honesty, come from God and that we can have the greatest happiness by following the path to God. Abraham also told me something else that I need to add to our list. We can be together as a family after we die if we are true to God. That would give me the greatest happiness."

"You are a true romantic, Dave, and I couldn't agree more!" Mellyn said enthusiastically. "Now, we need to decide what we have to do to achieve that goal."

"I think we have agreed on our priorities in life," Dave said as they stopped to be inspired by the stunning view at Crescent Meadow. 'If you don't know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else,' is how Yogi Berra, the renowned baseball catcher and philosopher, put it."

"My priority is my family," Mellyn said with conviction.

Her statement didn't surprise Dave because he knew Mellyn so well. She was a loving wife and mother and he felt very fortunate for her dedication to their children and him. They stood together enjoying the view of beautiful Sequoia trees and the ferns that grew beneath them surrounding the meadow. This setting was ideal to contemplate what was most important to both of them.

Then, Dave spoke again, "Our family is a priority for me also and I want to add these priorities; duty to God, our self-improvement, our work and our society. Based on what I

learned from Abraham, no priority in my life can take precedence over my duty to God. I must follow Him first because He will make all other worthy priorities better, including our family. Work is very important but no job, boss or career is worth sacrificing my allegiance to God and my family.”

Mellyn responded, “You know that this devotion to God is a very new thing for me. I trust you and your judgement but I will have to lean on you for a while to see if I can have the same level of conviction as you do. However, you shouldn’t worry about me because I have already seen the benefit of the things that you have shared with me.”

“That is very fair, Mellyn,” Dave said. “You know that my mantra has always been, ‘Happiness is the objective of my life.’ I know that including God in our lives will give us a happiness that we could not achieve in any other way. The mere fact that we will be together, as husband and wife, after death is enough for me. You are all I want forever.”

“I feel the same way but let’s also include Danielle and Dylan, don’t you think?” she said with a grin. Dave just laughed and nodded his head.

Mellyn continued, “I also want to say that our core values and priorities must not change but there are times when an urgent demand will require that we focus on something lower in our list of priorities.”

“For example, our family is always a higher priority than my work. It is important to be on the job each workday, focus completely on the task at hand and willingly work overtime, if necessary. But, if I get a call to come home because one of our kids needs to go to the hospital, my expediency immediately changes. My values and priorities have not changed but the expediency of the family emergency will always take precedence.”

Dave concurred, “Absolutely! And very well said. It occurs to me that if we are going to be true to our values, including being true to God, we must find a way to avoid the influences of society that take us away from Him.”

“I hate to say this,” said Mellyn, “but I think that your profession is at least partially responsible for the degradation of the values we see in society today. What is reported as social justice disregards the complete truth and then manipulates the emotions of people with anecdotal ‘evidence.’”

“It is a scary thought, but you are right,” Dave said. “It is like we are living in an Orwellian world, where the Thought Police is the media. They are the ones that decide what is good and what is bad and spin the facts to make others believe. They even have developed their own brand of Newspeak where some words are banned from use. History is being rewritten to emphasize the faults of our heroes and ignore their contributions to the freedoms we enjoy. Defending the agendas of the pandering politicians allows the press to make bad choices seem virtuous.”

Mellyn added, “And TV, movies, music, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, sports, commercials and videos glorify the vanity of celebrities and demagogues. Supposedly, late night comedians are so smart that they can teach us everything we need to know about politics. It’s such nonsense and anyone who has studied history knows it. Why can’t people understand that they are being manipulated?”

“We should never underestimate the power of the media,” Dave said. “Celebrity morality is perverse, pervasive and persuasive and it will corrupt the minds of anyone who is not aware of what is going on, including our children.”

Mellyn was now on a tear. “I have seen it in what Danielle and Dylan see on TV and in the movies that I thought would be safe for them. Kids on TV and videos apparently do not need to study and are usually wiser than their parents. Their dads are buffoons or compulsive liars, but probably both. Dating at age 10 is normal unless the kid is a real nerd and using profanity is how people know that you are really serious.”

“And Abraham taught me that the media trivializes the wisdom of God,” said Dave. “It teaches that religion is for simple-minded bigots. They seem to believe that the real religion of women is Oprah and the real religion of men is football. The Sabbath is just another Saturday with professional sports.”

He went on, “The media has also done a great job of teaching that having sex with anyone, at any time is just what we human animals were meant to do. Virtue and restraint are old-fashioned. Mellyn, you and I were taught the same thing. We did not know that having sex is something that is so important that it should be reserved for marriage to bind us to one another. The media taught us that marriage is okay if you want to get married and if you are in your 30’s and have already had sex with a lot of people, so you are now ready to settle on just one sexual partner.”

“That is what almost everyone I know thinks,” she agreed. “The media also teaches that pornography is harmless and that beating your dog is a vicious crime but killing your unborn child is just a choice. And, now our society accepts these obviously evil attitudes. It scares me.”

“Mellyn, we cannot risk allowing those in the media, which does not share the values that have shaped civilization, to teach our children concepts that are corrupting and harmful!” Dave said emphatically. “We must be proactive in teaching our kids how to find enduring fulfillment and happiness in God. We know that there is evil in the world and there are powerful people who want us to accept evil. We must fight for truth and goodness if we are going to help Danielle and Dylan find the path to God and stay on it.”

“And, what about those academics that teach our children, especially in the universities?” Mellyn added. “Their wild theories about gender fluidity, racism, situational morality and, so-called, hate speech are divisive and hate-filled but they masquerade as being enlightened and inclusive. This hypocrisy is a minefield for our children.”

"I remember reading something after Danielle was born that stuck with me," she said. "It was something that Jonas Salk wrote, 'Good parents give their children roots and wings: roots to know where home is, and wings to fly off and practice what has been taught them.' When Danielle and Dylan leave home for college, I want them to have a firm foundation so that they are wise enough to rise above the silly sophistry of those we pay to educate them."

"At the same time, Dave added, "we must teach our children that they can and should love those who do not share our values. There are not just good and bad people in the world and many people do bad things because they have never been taught the truth."

By this time, Dave and Mellyn had reached Tharp's Log. They were the only ones there at that time. They looked around and chatted about how it would be to live in that meadow for the summer. The view was so beautiful but they decided it would be too lonely and isolated for them. Bakersfield wasn't necessarily beautiful but it was home and they were very happy to be living there. They found a fallen Sequoia tree in the meadow and sat down to enjoy the view.

Dave began the conversation again, "Mellyn, it sounds like we want exactly the same things for our family. We want peace in this life and life as a family with God after we die. We recognize that there will be trials to overcome in this life but with the hope of a loving God watching over us, we will be happier, even with trials in our lives. Is that correct?"

"I had not completely processed it but I do agree with you," Mellyn acknowledged. "My faith in God and his plan for us is probably weaker than yours now but it is getting stronger. I am confident enough to continue on this path with you. We want the same things and I am convinced that we are going in the right direction."

"That's awesome," he said as he put his arm around her waist and pulled her closer to him on the log. "We agree on what is most important to us and our kids. We know that we must do something different than we have done in the past. We must change for the better, but how do we do it?"

She answered, "You had seven nights with a messenger from God. What did he tell you to do?"

"My journal, with all of the details is back at the lodge, but this is what I remember," he said. "Be humble, exercise self-control, study about God, attend a church, pray, remember moments of inspiration, know that all good comes from God, question your virtue, be kind and be obedient and committed to God."

"That is quite a list," Mellyn responded. "We have started to pray and we are going to find a church to attend this Sunday. We are questioning our virtue and we have agreed to be obedient to what we learn. Most of all, we have given more attention to God than

at any time in our lives. But, I need to have a step-by-step method that helps me focus on all these things.”

Dave agreed, “We need to establish some pattern to follow so that we don’t lose track of where we want to go. How about, every day we try to learn something new? This could mean that we get things to read that will help us, like the Bible and other books and writings that acknowledge God and His goodness, from whatever source.”

“We could also talk to people we respect about their beliefs and make sure that we listen without prejudging,” Mellyn added. “Of course, you and I would discuss what we learn and accept only those things that bring us closer to God.”

“That makes sense to me and then what else?” he asked.

“It seems to me that doing something kind for another person each day would help us be better people, the type of people who show by their actions that they want to be disciples of God,” Mellyn replied.

“That’s perfect!” Dave said excitedly. “Like random acts of kindness; a smile for someone who is down, a listening ear, a helping hand. That is just like what my friend from U.C.L.A, Scott Henning, would do. Anything that is good would work because all good things come from God. What else, Mellyn? You are on a roll.”

She continued, “I know that we have started praying in our family but I think we need to be more mindful of all that God has given us - our love, our children, our health, our home, our jobs and on and on. It seems to me that expressing gratitude daily is really important to maintain a positive and proper perspective.”

“I am certain that you are right again,” Dave said. “That is also a way to be humble, which Abraham really emphasized. And speaking of Abraham, I need to thank God for sending him to me and us. I still don’t understand why I was so fortunate but I am very grateful.”

He continued, “This also makes me think about other ways that I can be more grateful. A good first step for me is to decide to complain less. Another step is to recognize that “playing the victim” is not healthy. I know that those who act like missile-seeking targets have little time for gratitude.”

“And another thing that is important to me is physical exercise, Mellyn added. “A healthy body and mind crave exercise. I know I do. I am able to think more clearly after I exercise. I suggest that we do something active five hours each week, even if it is just walking. If we take a walk outside, it is even better because we would get a bonus dose of vitamin D.”

Dave agreed, “If we walk together in the neighborhood and discuss what we are doing, that would be great. You could also go to the gym while I play with the kids at the park.”

“That all sounds wonderful,” Mellyn said. “It seems to me that we have a plan to find the path to God. We just need to execute, right?”

“I think so, but there are a couple of things that we need to think about as we try to keep on track,” Dave said. “First, I learned at Second Baptist to beware of false prophets, that would be anyone or anything that sounds good or flattering but really is a distraction from what is true.”

Mellyn offered, “I guess that if we are humble and pray as Abraham told us to do, we will be able to know.”

He agreed and said, “That makes sense. Abraham told me that we know enough to find the path. The other concern is sacrificing what is right for doing what feels good. I remember going to a seminar early in my career. Zig Ziglar was the speaker and he said, ‘The chief cause of failure and unhappiness is trading what you want most for what you want right now.’ We must not let distractions keep us from what is eternally important. So, as long as we are both committed to our goal, I think we are good. We must be diligent.”

Dave and Mellyn got up and started back to where they had parked their car. Mellyn concluded their conversation on finding the path by saying, “Then, let’s do it, especially for our children!”

Epilogue

Dave and Mellyn Schwartz were well on their way to find the path to God. Dave was just a regular guy but his sincere desire to find his purpose in life and be true to that purpose qualified him to receive a remarkable experience from God.

By following the instructions that Abraham had given to Dave, Dave and Mellyn did find the true and only path to God in a relatively short time. They pursued that path with sincerity and vigor, including sharing what they had learned with family, friends and anyone else who would listen. Obedience to the true doctrines of God proved to be a rock-solid way of life as compared to following the ever-changing philosophies of uninspired celebrities, politicians, university professors and students, Big Tech, and self-righteous “social justice warriors.”

The impact on Danielle and Dylan was especially satisfying. The kids followed their parents’ example by learning the truth and deciding for themselves to stay on the path. They made friends with those who had common values. They learned to reach out with kindness to those around them. They avoided the snares which tragically caught many of their classmates. They came to personally know God and understand their relationship to Him. They were at peace and looking forward to fulfilling lives.

Dave and Mellyn also learned that “the path” was really a “covenant path.” This meant that they needed to make covenants, or sacred contracts, with God. The covenant was that they agreed to be obedient to God. In return, He promised to bless them with peace and happiness in this life and a glorious life with Him when they died, based on their faithfulness.

It became obvious that those on the covenant path were not like most of humanity. It wasn’t race, gender, size, weight or personality that mattered. It was being disciplined and dedicated enough to do things the right way, the loving way, God’s way.

Those on the covenant path did not judge those who chose a different path because they knew that God alone was judge of His children. They would help anyone who was interested find the path to God, just as a man would tell his friend if he had found a fabulous physician. Their job was to be loving, kind and respectful to all, humbly being the best they could be and helping others to do the same.

Dave and Mellyn, and many of those with whom they shared their faith, are still joyfully on the covenant path and enjoying the promised blessings. They are not perfect but they sincerely try to keep God’s commandments and love their fellowman. They rely on the justice and mercy of God to do what they cannot.

The experience that Dave had is not typical of how God communicates with His children on earth but God will communicate with any honest seeker of truth who is willing to listen and make the necessary changes to be on the path to Him. No matter the mistakes one has made, all are welcome on the path to God, our Father in Heaven.

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