

More
Prepared to Answer
Telling the Greatest Story Ever Told

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INTRODUCTION

“Come and see”

Philip had been breathless with excitement. “We have found the one the prophets wrote about, Jesus of Nazareth.” The bluntness of Nathanael was only natural. Nathanael was not merely skeptical. He was plainly insulting.

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”

Everyone knew that Judea, not Galilee, was the home of Jerusalem and the seat of all serious Jewishness. Nathanael considered Philip’s “Messiah” only marginally Jewish, if Jewish at all. Nevertheless, Philip flashed a knowing smile and a winsome, “Come and see!”

When Jesus and Nathanael finally met, Jesus was disarmingly gracious. His first words to Nathanael were a compliment that suspiciously mirrored Nathanael’s contempt. *“Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.”* Jesus added cryptically, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree.”

Hmmm. The fig tree was the symbol of Israel as well as the customary shade for Hebrew prayer. And whatever else a “true Israelite” might have been, a true Israelite was someone who was waiting expectantly for the Christ, the long-promised Messiah. “Nathanael, I saw you there. I

heard a child of Abraham praying. I know the things you ask for when it's just you and Adonai. Ah, Nathanael." Do you see?

Clearly something more was happening in John chapter 1 than is first apparent. For Nathanael suddenly went all the way in his confession, skipping right past "great teacher" and not pausing at "powerful prophet." His faith just exploded:

"You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."

"Because I saw you by a fig tree? You shall see greater things than that," Jesus pledged. The very best things: a flawless life, Compassion and Truth walking around, a spilling of wonders, a blurting out of heaven's best secrets.

Then a brave self-sacrifice.

Then a resurrection.

He would see, to borrow Jesus' picture, a divine and human ladder fusing earth and heaven. And so Nathanael would see who *he* was . . . and what *life* is . . . and who *God* is. As C. S. Lewis commented, "I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

(Please read John 1:43-51.)



"Come and see," is all Philip said in answer to an ungentle skeptic.

There is, of course, a perfectly good solution to Nathanael's problem with the Messiah who came from Nazareth. Jesus was actually born in the very Judean town that had been prophesied for the Messiah, but his parents fled for their lives from Bethlehem when he was very young. Even if Philip doesn't know all that and is stumped by a rather simple challenge, his confidence in Christ is not misplaced. He is right about Jesus, even if he cannot fully

explain why. He knows what he knows, for reasons that resist analysis and defy debate.

This story’s message, or one of them, is that we Christians can stay calm in the face of intellectual challenges to our faith. Christian apologist Paul Little loved to say, “After two thousand years, no question is going to bring Christianity crashing.” Believer, do you endure the condescension of your philosophy professor? Did you fumble for words when he made you stand up before the class? Did the credibility of Christian truth seem to hinge on a quick reply? Relax. It didn’t.

You’re still right about Jesus. Your faith will be vindicated in the end, and the world’s rebuke will be put to shame. That you believed in Christ crucified and held on when it no longer seemed reasonable, this will be your glory.

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.”¹

In fact, I cheerfully share syndicated columnist William F. Buckley’s admission that the Christian faith is bigger, worlds bigger, than my own powers of description or rational defense. It may sound like a cop-out. But there it is. I know what I know. For two millennia some of the most ingenious of our species, including some of the most evil, have labored hard and long to slam the door on Christianity. As Buckley observed, something is keeping it ajar. Better, *Someone*.

As long as there is God and as long as there is a world, there will always be here and there in that world a sanctuary. “I will build my church,”² said the Carpenter, the Christ. There will always be a remnant at peace, with ears sensitive to the sound of his unwavering voice. There will always be those souls made small enough in repentance and intellectual humility to find the narrow door that leads to eternal

life. God has seen to it. He loves us all with an eternal, steady, and changeless love.

It is his greatest pleasure to reveal his Son within the likes of one of us.

What you're holding in your hands is a book of rather simple treatments of the questions people often ask of Christians. I don't pretend to exhaust the dialogue I take up with science, with already tiring postmodernism, with philosophy, or with conventional humanistic wisdom. You'll find a scanty two thousand words or less spent on such challenges as inspire many books. I answer skepticism unapologetically with psychological necessities (forgiveness for one, hope for another). I answer with the very simplest of philosophical tenets on which clarity of thought has long depended (our own existence for one and objective truth for another). Most of all, I answer with the historic certainties in, with, and under humanity's greatest movement (the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection of Jesus Christ). God's Word, the Holy Bible, is my authority, my real reason, and that old Book requires surprisingly few words to end any human debate.

In the beginning, God . . .

All have sinned and fall short . . .

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . .

For God so loved the world . . .

In my Father's house are many rooms . . .

You say, "But what about *this*? . . . Have you ever thought of *that*? . . . Can any good thing come *from faith*?" And all I really mean to say is, "Come and see."

For as I pick up the task of writing another book in answer to Christianity's skeptics, I'm aware that God himself doesn't venture to answer every challenge. Just think how easily he could. He could utterly overwhelm the need for faith with arguments and proofs that would leave us not only convinced but also hiding behind trees and rocks. That isn't his way.

He doesn't prove, doesn't argue, doesn't normally drop supernatural hints at our command or whisper into our ears. He doesn't chase away all the mystery. We are sometimes confused, sometimes hurting, sometimes in the dark, with no human prop on which to rest our faith. Still we follow. And his heart swells.

“Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.’”³

This is his way. He takes pleasure—profound, bursting delight—in our faith.

He doesn't submit higher evidence of his reality or of his love than those three decades of sheer epiphany that were the life of Christ . . . as if there could be any higher testimony than the “Word made flesh.” Since nothing exists that is greater than God himself, he cannot provide a better reason to believe that it is all true than simply to tell us in his own words that it is, in words that “are spirit and they are life.”⁴

He answers grim doubt with winsome grace, with the declaration “this one is mine” heard beneath the sound of sprinkling water in Baptism, with the promise “I have so loved you” tasted in the sacramental bread and wine. And our agnosticism shows itself empty in the light of that divine smile. *“Come and see.”*



Every Sunday for the better part of a year, 30 or so of us would meet before worship to study the very stories that I'll be sharing with you in the pages ahead.

Having studied the dying question of John the Baptist or Jesus' parable about weeds growing up with wheat or the story of Mary pouring oil out on Jesus' head and feet, we would save time at the end of each class for a single, vital question: Who needs to know this story? That is, what are the questions people are asking for which this story is the right reply?

"Well . . . they think life has no meaning. . . . They accuse the church of hypocrisy. . . . They say all we care about is money."

And then, in the final five minutes of Bible study, we would sometimes even attempt to roleplay the storytelling. We would turn two chairs toward each other in the front of the sanctuary. One person would articulate the skeptical challenge, and the other, after acknowledging the question and probing a little deeper with other thoughtful questions, would begin:

"I wonder if you know about the time Jesus . . . No? . . . May I tell you?"

And as the weeks went by, the experiences drifted back to the class of how people had done this very thing in real life. They had responded to a question or challenge or need with a "Jesus story." Among the class were lifelong Christians delighting in the sudden awareness that they knew what to say and had known for a long time.

As for me, I'll never forget the day it was my turn to roleplay. Here's the situation: The woman across from me was pretending to be burdened beneath a shameless past—she wasn't—as if she had trouble believing forgiveness could be true for her—she didn't. "Have you ever heard about the time a woman was caught in the act of adultery," I began, "and all her bloodthirsty accusers dragged her to Jesus?" And I proceeded to tell the story from John chapter 8.

I relished the details, pausing as Christ bent to scratch the dirt. . . . "Let the one without sin throw the first stone." . . . And I let the rocks hit the trampled ground. . . . I let

the town square empty out and the reproachful crowd disperse . . . until the woman, so ashamed, looked up into the face of her Judge, the Man from Galilee.

“Neither do I condemn you,” I said into her wide-opened eyes.

And my roleplay partner, dear woman, very nearly fell apart.

She wasn’t acting anymore, nor was I pretending to witness. We were experiencing the presence of Christ and the dynamic power of him, the dissolving of every question in that Living Water, that enduring Word.

“Neither do I condemn you!”

A word about this book . . .

This is my second volume expressing a philosophy of personal witnessing that could be called All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Sunday School. My answers to skeptical questions center on the authoritative stories of Christ, which are divinely inspired and embedded so lovely and deeply in the Christian consciousness. This narrative springs from days of Old Testament waiting, meanders through the life and times of Christ, and empties into this New Testament age.

Why answer questions about science or history, philosophy or morality with stories about Jesus? Let those who will not embrace Christianity know not merely *what* but *who* it is that they're denying and what the cost is to them and to him. On the other hand, some objections people have to the faith are quite reasonable, considering everything they've ever heard and everything they have not. So shove back the innocent ignorance about Christ to offer an alternative to all the propaganda. The compelling scenes of his life, in my view, are ideal conversation pieces between my religion—itsself a grand, true story—and the story-hungry culture that surrounds it. After all, if anything can make someone a Christian, it is, just once, really seeing Christ.

And heaven itself stands up to applaud, not when millions find their place in the love of God, but when one does. If my books have played any small part, it would be my great joy to hear from you and know *your* story. I could not take up the writer's task if I didn't know that the Lord, who once spoke through a donkey, could use even me; that the same Jesus who fed five thousand people with a little boy's lunch can bless anything. To be used in such a way, to such an end, seems too much to ask. But nothing has ever stopped God, whose servant I am.

His,
Mark Paustian



*“Where was
God when
I needed
him?”*

“How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?”

So wrote King David from his sickbed, tortured by painful thinking, yet unable to set it aside. “How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?”

“*Ad-a-NAH!*” is the sound of the ancient Hebrew word that David cried out four times.

“How long?” Literally, “Until when?”

It puts a picture into my mind of God pouring into King David’s cup as a father would pour milk into a cup for a child, whispering, “Say when.” Only, what poured so freely was pain into his mind and disease into his body. David cried, “Enough already! When!” Still God kept pouring, until David was lost in the dreadful feeling of abandonment, in the appalling thought that God had turned his face away.

Scripture says God won’t give you more than you can handle, but that threshold seemed long past for David, so he cried out, “*Ad-a-NAH, Adonai! Ad-a-NAH? When, Lord, WHEN?*”

This is the cry of all humanity. All of humankind lies in the sickbed with King David. What is wrong with everything—all the sin, the shame, the futility, all the fractured relationships, the suffer-

ing children, the rumors of wars, the shadow of death—when put all together, becomes this one, weary, anguished cry.

“Until when?”

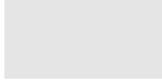
Such a curious thing, to find in a three-thousand-year-old hymn my own soul’s complaint, the one each of us thought was private and our own. The God who inspired these words clearly knows the real me. And he knows when to say “When.”

This time it’s a Greek word, “*ho-te*,” and it is found in Galatians chapter 4.

“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son,” who slipped barely noticed into the warm lake of humanity. And so, after Mary’s labor pains and the anguish of child-birth that went on God knows how long, she was the first one to look into the gray eyes of this infant and ponder the imponderable fact.

“It’s really you.”

(Please read Psalm 13 and Galatians 4:4-6.)



You look back on times in your life when the pain or confusion or sorrow got so bad that you cried out to God with all your heart, “Where are you?” And he answered?

Nothing. (Or so you thought.)

Our hearts naturally lean away from God as it is, with resistance deeper than consciousness and stubbornness we cannot begin to justify. So in times of suffering or gut-punching disappointment, people can find the temptation irresistible to declare themselves rid of God and to resolve to move on without him, this God who does nothing when they need him most. Where is he?

Although he neglects none of his own promises, God still fails some test of the people’s own devising. People taste

some things in times of shame or anguish that they know they never want to taste again. And they resolve right then and there that it is going to be up to them to make sense of life on their own, to reach for whatever satisfactions are available in this world, to feel what they want to feel, and to survive. Alone. Whatever it takes.

Now I even hear people speak this language—*Where in the world is God?*—when they become pregnant out of wedlock or are fired from another job for irresponsibility: “Lord, how could you?” You don’t need me to point out the irony here. Sometimes life is a mess because we are. Then what we need, first of all, is for someone to help us read our own stories properly. We reap what we sow.

And yet we all also suffer in ways that aren’t particularly our fault. The first thing I want to tell you if you’re asking, “Where was God when I needed him?” is that it’s okay to say such things out loud. For the reassurance that this is so, do turn to Psalm 13, which was described earlier. The first time I found that spot in the Bible—the first time its words opened up to me—was when my bride of a couple months fell deathly ill and would scream out in pain. I’ve been leading people to that holy ground ever since. You might as well bring to God what is really in you, not what you think is *supposed* to be in you, even if your question has a serrated edge: “God, where are you!?”

What we’re always needing to get down to, when it comes to a relationship with God, is “the real me talking to the real You.” Not me as an actor on a stage talking to a god of my own distorted invention. Let it be *God* as he reveals himself in Holy Scripture and *me* as he is so prone to reveal me in the same place. All of us at some time or another are confronted by our human frailty, by the weakening of our bodies, by the inevitability of our deaths. We face every day the limitations of our spirits. We long to love and to live meaningfully, to connect with people in real

relationships, and to soar. So let us cry, not what is supposed to be in us, but what is.

“How long, O Lord?”

I ask you to bring yourself and your tear-stained questions to God. “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”⁵ What *are* the plans? We are dying to know. So the verse goes on: “‘. . . when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the LORD.”⁶ That’s the plan. The reality of God is sometimes felt most in his apparent absence. You may seek him in the dark with a passion you could never muster in the daylight.

I understand what makes your heart ask, “Can there really be a God of love?” Yet before you can measure his compassion or his resolve, my task is to suggest another question, “What is our deepest need?” People who answer that the deepest needs of people are to be wealthy or healthy, beautiful or pain free, will always conclude that God must love some people and not others. Say that the needs that matter most have to do with being surrounded by happy things or by nice people and, if your premise is true, it might be fair to question the depth of God’s care. However, once you recognize that we all share equally in One Great Need—our need as sinners is to have peace with God—the others are reduced to insignificance, and everything is changed. In other words, look in the mirror.

If you’ve ever surprised yourself by the bad thing—the selfish or mean or cowardly thing—you were capable of, in that moment, sin’s eternal consequences suddenly made terrible sense. Every other difficult thing in the world was trivial, a secondary concern next to the problem of peace with God. And the real truth of the matter was that even before you did that awful thing, your need was just as des-

perate, just as absolute. Self-righteousness kept you from seeing it.

If you still can't see your gaping spiritual need, then ask, at least, *what if it were true?* What if what is really wrong with everything is human sin? What if, as the Scriptures say, it is God that is the wronged one, the disappointed one? What if all that has gone wrong is humanity's fault, not his, but our minds are so clouded in sin and shrouded in death that we can't see it? What if when we blame God for things we don't understand or rage in senseless atheistic hatred at him for not existing . . . well . . . what if we're wrong? What if nothing less than eternity is at stake, nothing less than where we will be and how it will be for us forever?

Then the last thing we really need from the God who is there—the *very* last thing—are sweet and pleasant lives that never confront us with our own true condition.

On the other hand, if you could only begin to plumb the depth of humanity's need for a simple thing called forgiveness, called mercy, you might ask your question again, this time with appropriate humility: Where was God when I needed him?

He answered with a crucifixion. God, who exists in sublime independence, chose to enter a relationship with us that would cost him everything and us nothing. For our One Great Need, the Father gave his One and Only Son. On the cross, as someone has pointed out, we witness the greatest miracle in the Bible, the miracle of restraint—when the Father sat on his own hands, doing nothing at all. But how!? How could the one who exploded from heaven, “This is my Son whom I love,” possibly hold himself back? Because, you see, he also loved *us*. And so came Jesus' time of no miracle, no answer, no help.

I write a mystery: Where was God when God needed him? See him there, nailed to a tree, crying, bleeding, suffering, dying, and not saying “When” until it was enough . . . not arching his back and pushing on the nails

and shouting his triumph, “It is finished,” until it really was and the whole world, full of people like you, was redeemed.

I honor your questions. It is good that you ask them. I only ask that we move the conversation to this new ground, this raised plot called Golgotha, where the great human complaint loses all its steam . . . if, in fact, this smattering of blood is God’s. It may not even be the questions themselves that are changed, only the heart with which you ask them. For there he stands on the other side of your death, alive with healing in his wings. A woman glances up from inconsolable weeping. He says, “Mary . . .” and she is consoled.

If this is true—and, my friend, it is—then there are new thoughts for you to think, and God himself will pour them into your weary mind by his own comforting Spirit—that his love is unfailing, that you can trust him, that your spirit rejoices in God your Savior. These too are the thoughts of Psalm 13. Read it to the end. The “How long, O LORD?” gives way to a new thing, fresh from him.

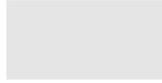
“I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.”

I realize that it seems God has given you more than you can handle, that it seems like far too much for you to take . . . yet here you are. The miracle is that people who have suffered the most are often the ones singing loudest at Christmas, “Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.” Not because God’s peace and mercy are *supposed* to be in them, but because they *are*. Theirs is a heart-pounding intimacy with God, of a kind and a strength never dreamed of by people who have never known pain.

“‘I will be found by you,’ declares the LORD.”

There is a depth to these people, not *in spite* of the things he has allowed into their lives—he doesn’t do it lightly—but *because* of them. God has taught their knees to

bend before the holy child of Bethlehem and their mouths to sing those words: “God and sinners reconciled.” It’s the real me . . . and it’s really you.



The disciples were getting beaten by the storm on the Sea of Galilee. The wind rose up and battered them. They rowed till their arms ached, past 3 A.M., getting nowhere. Where was Jesus when they needed him? He was watching and aching, sighing and crying. It is he who left heaven and entered the very center of human distress to pray to his Father *from there*. And, at just the right time, he was on his way.

“It is I. Don’t be afraid.”⁸

And he’s on his way for you. So be strong. Hold on. Endure. “When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”⁹

My God will know when to say “When.”



*“How can
there be a
good God
when
the world
is such a
bad place?”*

He got old. That young man who leaned on Jesus' chest the night before the cross, the one who bested Peter in the early morning dash to the tomb—the first one to see the empty grave clothes and believe their mute testimony—finally slowed down.

That John got old is not a remarkable fact all by itself. But then consider that he was the only one of the 12 disciples to accomplish it. He endured, with a mix of sadness and swelling joy, the brutal martyrdom of most from that intimate circle of friends. History records how the people would carry John, the last living link to the One and Only, up to the front of their assemblies so he could deliver his sermon in five words.

“Little children, love one another.”

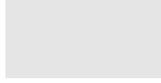
The man had the mind of Christ.

And the day arrived when the Breath of Heaven moved John to write it all down and gave John the very words for the gospel that bears his name. And so he wrote his marvelous treatment on the subject of Jesus, his Lord and his Friend, so that we would know and believe that Jesus is the Son of God. The hand moved. The page filled. And this is what it said:

“In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light

shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”

(Please read John chapter 1.)



“How can there be a good God when the world is such a bad place?”

I appreciate this question. It’s born of good instincts. It comes from conscience, that undeniable sense of the way things ought to be. The problem? A God of absolute Power as well as absolute Goodness seems incompatible with a world filled with pain and death.

I begin with a borrowed analogy. What if there were no such thing as light? Imagine if light just plain didn’t exist and eyes to see it did not exist either. Would we be forever asking why it’s so *dark* around here? I don’t think so. We would not be able to *imagine* such things as light and dark. We would not find ourselves missing the brilliant color of a sunset or aching to see the look on a loved one’s face. If there were no such thing as light, these things would be utterly inconceivable, thoughts our minds would not know how to think, words without meaning to us. Sure, it would be dark around here.

But would we *know* it’s dark?

Now . . . is there really no such thing as God? Please think about it. What does it mean when we lie on our beds thinking of the way the world *ought* to be? It means that we know there is an Ultimate Goodness to which the world does not conform. Our minds want to say that the idea of a good God doesn’t fit our experiences in a world where children suffer and loved ones die . . . but our hearts give us away. These things are bad, and we know in our deepest parts that they are. So what we really believe, we are startled

to discover, is that there is such a thing as Goodness. There has to be. We know what the word means.

A friend of mine was recently overpowered by the awfulness of the world, so much so that he asked me to lunch just to talk about it. Shaking experiences had come to him in quick succession, from a grisly crash on the highway to a startling image on the evening news that managed to sneak past his defenses. But it is precisely this feeling, finding and knowing ourselves to be in a bad place—the longing, aching, and missing the way things ought to be—that shows us what we really believe. The dark torments us precisely because there is such a thing as Light, and we know it full well.

“How can there be a good God when the world is such a bad place?” Rather than try to answer, I really should be insisting that you justify the question. Does it even make sense? By stating the problem the way you do, you clearly believe that you live in a moral universe, that is, one that is supposed to be one way and not another. Why else would you frame the question in a moral way? You are actually assuming the existence of an ultimate Moral Lawgiver, because that is necessary for Good and Bad to have any objective meaning or independent reality. (Without God, Good and Bad are nothing more than human constructions, thoughts in our own heads, and certainly not valid arguments about anything.) So this persistent protest about the sorry state of the world, in trying to deny God, unconsciously appeals to his Reality. What is really going on? To be separated from God by virtue of our own sin is to be cast into a bewildering darkness so deep that we insist it is all there is. Yet our visceral complaints about the dark are our unwitting homage to the Light.

The really startling thing is finding out, in the middle of our gravest doubts about God, what we actually know to be true. I refer to the natural knowledge of God, around which, it is only fair to warn you, an agnostic can never be too care-

ful. Your observation that this world is home to unspeakably bad things may refute such popular notions as pantheism easily enough—is the god-who-is-everything both evil *and* good? both hatred *and* love?—but it swings you closer to Christianity than you realize. Christianity, this ancient faith, has always painted the portrait of an achingly beautiful, tragically spoiled world in a way that conforms perfectly to reality and to the experience of every human being.

So too is the Bible’s explanation for the origin of evil perfectly compatible with the existence of a God whose goodness and power are both infinite. Our culture is committed to the notion that freedom of choice is the highest good and that people must be allowed to make their own moral choices. If there’s anything we would be willing to call evil nowadays, it would be someone exercising brute power to negate that freedom. Why does it not follow, then, that evil might have originated when a good God gave a good choice to the first human beings and did not use power to prevent them from actually making it? (And anyway, if you want a question that does *not* logically self-destruct, it is that of Saint Augustine: “If there is no God, why is there *so much good* in the world?”)

Clearly it’s not enough to show inconsistencies in the question this article addresses. Deal with the logical problem as we might, an existential one still remains, precisely because pain does. It hurts to be here. Sometimes a little. Sometimes a lot. If you can just admit that your rational argument holds a contradiction, there will be so much more for you to say to the new questions that may sneak past your defenses.

Michelle was the friend of a friend. At a dinner party, off in our own small corner, we got to talking about religion. She voiced the objection, “How can there be a God of love when the world is the way it is?” Then followed the litany of sorrows—the things she had seen happen to others, the things she had experienced herself. I let her talk. And when

she was all through, a response occurred to me that I hadn't thought of before.

"It must be hard," I said slowly and softly.

"What must be hard?"

"To live in a world like this *and to have no God besides.*"

She got quiet for a moment. Then she simply admitted, "Yes . . . it is."

"May I show you a side of God you haven't seen before?"

And with that I began to quietly speak to her about Christ. After all, we had finally come down to the question her heart was really asking. Not "How can there be a good God?" but "Where is he? How do I find him in a place like this? I don't see him anywhere." I answered with the God she was missing; he is found hanging on a cross. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."¹⁰ That's what I said to her. I explained the reason she had lived so long without God. Her guilt both offended him and terrified her. Her sinful will always resisted him and held him at arms' length. But look, there he dies for her, because he loves her anyway. Completely. Eternally. If she trusts him now, one day everything will be what it's supposed to be.

"When you put it like that," she said, "I think I understand."

Not only does the question of this chapter need to be justified, but those who ask it have the obligation to supply their answers as well. Pain is a problem for everyone, not just the Christian. Deny God all you want, the sorrow remains . . . only then it is hopeless sorrow, the suffering is meaningless, and you can't think of one good reason not to give in to despair. (Scrawled repeatedly in the diary of renowned atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair were the words, "Somebody, somewhere, love me!") Of course. How else could she have felt?) At the end of the day, there really are just two possibilities in a world such as this. There is either eventual terror in

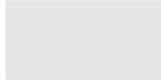
a world where anything can happen, a world that is all we have, or there is trust in the unfathomable love, the joy, and the coming dawn of Christ. There are no other alternatives. No halfway house. No middle ground. With tears I ask you, would you think about it again?

The Father you're missing.

The Son dying to redeem us from this guilt and pain.

The Spirit not leaving you alone, even now.

The real heaven that justifies this undeniable longing for home.



“How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? . . . How long must I . . . every day have sorrow in my heart?” So wept David, a man after God's own heart, in Psalm 13.

It is sad but true that many people question God out of sheer arrogance and raw unbelief. But, if you're a Christian, do not let your own heart condemn you. There is also a questioning that arises not from unbelief but from faith. It is precisely the fact that you know he is Good and you know he is Right and you know he is Love . . . that your very soul cries, “Then why, dear God!?” And the answer he gives reaches beyond the realm of words and ideas. He gives himself.

The answer is God on a cross, crying “Why?” with the whole world, crying for the whole world from no safe distance away. It is him then standing on the other side of the grave, beaming, “Don't be afraid.”