



Wrapped
In A Rainbow

A LOVE LETTER
TO THE POOR IN SPIRIT

ROY KEY

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By
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FORWARD

Those of you who have high self-esteem need not read this book... unless you care about the rest of us.

Unless you would like to see and hear what makes us tick. What makes us cry. What makes us laugh. What can turn our lives around and make self-preoccupied people the sensitive, caring souls they really are.

For those of you with low-esteem this is a labor of love. I know your pain, your fear, your dreams. And my prayer is that this message may be a grace-gift to you. That it may help ease your pain, dispel your fear and make your dreams come true.

Let's see.

I dedicate this work to "Dora," "Philip" and that host of the lowly whose destiny it is to inherit the (heavens and the) earth.

Wrapped in a Rainbow

HOW THIS CAME TO BE

Much of my 50-year ministry has been spent in counseling, and this book was born in an attempt to help people during their desperate days. I'll mention two: a woman and a man, but we'll deal more with the woman.

"Philip" (a pseudonym) was a Ph.D. candidate with alcohol addiction and suicidal tendencies. "Dora" was a mother approaching midlife, who had for years been under psychiatric care, whose sense of self-worth was dangerously low, and who, also, at times thought of taking her own life.

The insights and exercises were part of a larger ministry of love and support, attempts to help these people move beyond an intellectual nod to the gospel. They grew out of my question, "How do you help people who have heard the gospel time and again, who quarrel with none of its premises and promises, who are their own implacable judges, and who can't seem to accept the gift of God's love and/or their own new nature?"

It was "Dora's" coming that triggered this response. After her initial visit I sat down and wrote a first draft of this book. Its purposes was to enable:

- 1) a grasp of the truth that the loving God both wills and executes the death of the old self-centered self and our resurrection to the new life empowered by the risen Lord, and
- 2) use of an exercise through which we "regard"(*see*) ourselves dead to Death and alive with Life in Christ Jesus.

How helpful has the instrument been? In dealing with the spirit we cannot demonstrate so many pounds per square inch of lifting power, nor measure the degree of turn to the right. Numerous people tell me they are helped. Their ability to cope lends credence to the words.

Those for whom the project was undertaken responded positively. At the end I will include a statement from the mother, who later became employed in a responsible, service-oriented organization. The doctoral candidate completed his work and is in a highly-sensitive technical vocation.

Not only that, but I have found the process proposed here to be itself God's gift to me, as I will indicate later when I take you through my own inner struggle. I suspect that I am not unlike many I have served whose self-image has been terribly low. In fact, you might know (or be) such a one yourself.

Like me, you may have in some small group been given a piece of paper and told, "Write on this sheet, things about yourself that you dislike." It wasn't difficult. A few minutes later the sheet was full.

Then we were told, "Turn the paper over and on the back write things about yourself that you like." Do you recall how we sat and struggled? At last we got down two or three lines, leaving the rest of the paper blank.

Our feeling is illumined by the story of a child. When dropped off at the church nursery, she always asked her mother to leave with her a particular piece of jewelry. The mother thought she was attached to this object. However, years later she revealed, "That way I felt my mother would always come back for me. I didn't think I was worth it, but I knew she liked that jewelry." This handicapped child thought that if she could not run or play with all of the other children, she was worthless and therefore unloved.

The evidence reveals that many of us have little about ourselves we can heartily endorse, things that we like unashamedly and will robustly affirm.

At least, I can now fill both sides of the sheet, and I can do it with joy. With a sense of victory. Nor is there either a vest-popping or breast-beating accompaniment.

For these reasons I gratefully share what has been a grace-gift to me... as well as to many I love and across the years and miles have sought to serve.

I

FROM OUT OF THE STORM

Cry in the Night

Standing at my study door, she seemed extraordinarily fragile. "I shouldn't bother you," she said huskily, her words partially drowned by the clamor of Preschoolers from the room above. "I know how busy you are."

"Come in, please," I urged, taking one of her hands. The other clutched a tiny, twisted handkerchief. "Let's sit over here." I motioned to a corner where two cushioned chairs sat at right angles to each other, a small table to the side, topped by a seldom-used lamp. It all added a touch of informality, contrasting to the massive desk across the room. I didn't want that barrier between us.

Cosmetics covered most of the redness about her eyes, but couldn't conceal their swelling. Stiff and silent she sat, both feet flat on the floor, her back not touching the chair. "I don't know where to begin," came a second apology, "but I'm tired and afraid, and I didn't know where else to turn."

"I'm glad you came. There's no need to rush," I tried to reassure her, "and you can begin wherever you choose." Compulsively her hands clasped and unclasped. Now and then she dabbed at her eyes. Finally she began.

The story came out in bits and pieces. She was a younger-middle-aged mother whose family was reared, who for years had been under psychiatric care, and whose sense of self-worth was low. I did not know how dangerously low, nor that she functioned daily with the assistance of drugs.

She was the youngest of six children, three boys and three girls. She talked about the family and the way they interacted, her narrative uninterrupted. Later she grew more reflective. "I'm sure they loved me," she started, "but..." The sentence trailed away. "There were times you didn't feel loved." "Many times." "That hurt a lot." "Yes...it still hurts." She sought a dry spot in her handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes again.

Her self image emerged more clearly. The ugly duckling. The incompetent. The house maid. The butt of cruel jokes. The one always chosen last. The one who laughed loudest to cover the deepest wounds. The clown who made others laugh, but could not make them love. Who when the party was over and the house dark, cried herself to sleep. The one assigned chief responsibility for aging parents, and on whom father and mother levied the heaviest guilt when she missed a weekly visit.

The picture moved more sharply into focus. A poor mother, she protested, and a poor wife. She had tried too hard to direct her children. She still did. That was where she and her husband disagreed most, over how to let go of the children. Desperately she clung, for they gave to her life its meaning.

She piled up self-accusations... mercilessly. Her husband was a marvelous man, she insisted, patient, tender, incredibly understanding during those nightmarish months when she was confined to the psychiatric hospital. She certainly did not deserve the love of her husband. She did not deserve the loyalty of friends or trust of employers. Above all, she should be able to cope, but her strength was continually drained.

Then the crushing blow. She learned that her doctor had feet of clay. He was in trouble both with his colleagues and the law. Having leaned too heavily on him, she now confronted the panic of his not being there for her any more. Her cellophane world was struck by lightning, and everything about her cried out for help.

A Second Cry

As I listened it was as if a bowling ball smashed into my chest and shoved it down into my stomach. I knew that I could not plunge with this soul into the maelstrom of her fear and faith. The responsibility of mediating grace to one so severely buffeted felt like a millstone. For a moment I let personal inadequacy grab the center of my attention.

Quickly I sought inner assurance. Didn't I have all those courses in Psychology: General? Child? Adolescent? Abnormal? Mental Hygiene? Character Development??? And what about graduate studies in Pastoral Counseling? Together with nearly forty years in the ministry?

Right now, though, it all seemed fruitless. Inside I trembled as the question charged back and forth through my brain, "What if this time should be one more failure for her?" I was afraid to imagine. I prayed the prayer prayed in a million desperate circumstances, "God, help!"

Calm came, and I was granted grace to continue listening. Echoing. Questioning. Praying. Seeking to "feel" what she felt and at the same time what the Easter People "felt" as they broke free from bondage and death – all the while remembering how dangerous it is to play amateur psychiatrist, and how terrible the risks.

On the East wall of the study across from where I sat hung Hook's "Head of Christ." It was given by a couple who wanted me to have an image of Jesus not simply gentle, but with rugged power. As they brought the picture in, the husband remarked, "He looks like it's the half at the Notre Dame football game." I never got the moment pinned down. At one time it was early morning after an all-night fishing venture, rewarded by a catch. At another it was that fateful night when the promise held firm, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

Crack in the Door

That was the assurance I needed and needed to be able to mediate. But I couldn't give it. I knew that well enough. Nor could God give it until it could be received. I knew the Source of help, but how could I get her to accept it?

"What would you like me to do?" I asked. "I don't know." She paused and then continued, "It helps to have someone listens who understands." "I'm glad to listen, but you are asking for more than a sympathetic ear, and I can't answer you with clichés." She nodded.

"There are two things I would like us to do for the time being," I told her. "We have to take some kind of action. We have to move off dead center." I handed her a sheet on which I had written several passages of Scripture, partly for myself and partly for others. Its title: "Prescriptions For Peace." It can be effective I knew, but only where it is ingested. I knew something else, too. The anxiety level in some people is simply too high for effective ingestion. I must be careful, then to refer when I see a person is beyond my area of ministry. Yet, I will not neglect this "Prescription" in instances where one is able to function at home and accept major responsibility for his or her own action.

"This is step *one*," I said firmly. I want you to promise me that you will faithfully follow this prescription. You know how important the instructions are on the bottles in your medicine cabinet back home. These are every bit that important.

"You need to know that God has some effective medicine wrapped up in His 'exceeding great and precious promises.' But, it's totally ineffective unless it's *taken*. Will you *take* this?" "Yes, I will," she promised, and I handed her the sheet. Here it is:



PRESCRIPTION FOR PEACE

1. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1).
2. "My God will supply your every need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).
3. "He has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (*Hebrews* 13:5b).
4. "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up" (*Psalms* 27:10).
5. "Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares for you" (*1 Peter* 5:7).
6. "He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall run and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (*Isaiah* 40:29-31).

7. "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (*1 John 4:4*).
8. "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand" (*John 10:28-29*).
9. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (*John 14:27*).
10. "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Romans 5:1*).
11. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (*2 Corinthians 5:17*).
12. "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (*Philippians 4:13*).
13. "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (*Philippians 4:6-7*).

(Instructions:

Take one before meals and at bedtime. You may take more than one, if you choose. However, you should not take them at a gulp. They are to melt in the mouth, or be chewed slowly and carefully. This medicine does not work with mechanistic determinism. Its chemistry is of the spirit. Relax... and let it happen. Continuous feeling your pulse, looking at your tongue and checking the eyes of your faith, will only impede progress. Get on with your tasks at hand, and give God freedom to heal. He can, and He will!

"There's a second matter we must work on. I'll ponder our time together, pray about it, and ask God to give us further direction. I want you to do the same. Will you?" "Yes, I can surely do that." "You can, and it is imperative that you do. We've got to act as a team... the three of us. If you get a beam of light on our direction, call, and we'll get together as soon as possible. If I get additional light, I'll call you, and we'll arrange to meet right away, Otherwise, we'll check signals a week from now. Is that all right?" Quietly, firmly she answered, "Yes."

One more thing, if for any reason you should begin to feel particularly low, give me a ring. Will you?" She promised, and we parted.

2

IN SEARCH OF A STAR

Surprise!

When the door closed behind her, I said to myself, “I know she is helped temporarily. She feels better. But, what can keep her off the emotional roller coaster? What can I realistically expect of the ‘Prescription?’ What can I reasonably hope that one in her condition can accomplish from going over and over those passages of Scripture?

“They, too, can be pious platitudes,” I cried inwardly. “There are all kinds of people like this who already know the promises. They can recite the Christian ‘Story.’ They know about Jesus and have heard our affirmations time and again. God, what will help them (us) *internalize* the words? What can make our nod of assent become a passionate embrace?”

In silence I waited... I know not how long. At least, the phone did not ring, nor another visitor knock at the door. At length there began to emerge an image. No words. Not even a clear concept. Only an image. The image of Dora, of Philip, of others, and me, all together enfolded in the covenant-love of God. “Wrapped in a rainbow!” I whispered. In search of a star, I was wrapped in the promise of “amazing grace.”

“*This* is the reality we must affirm in a disciplined way, continuing to do it over and over until the conviction steals into the subconscious, until it burrows on down into the substratum of emotions, until it digs deep enough to be linked to the primitive instincts. Until there is an unclogged artery between the head and the heart. Until the Spirit is free to flow through the total being. *Then* the words will have *power!*”

Then! Not till *then*.

The image came clear, a rainbow arched itself above baptismal waters, and a wave of “good news” from *Romans 6* flowed over and around me. I was drawn into the picture-promise of God -- by means of His out-going, self-giving love in Jesus – making us new. Bloody footprints led right to the water’s edge, and above the flood the promise rang clear: “dead!”... “buried!”... “raised!”... “*new!*”

A Journey Backward in Order to Move Ahead

My own pilgrimage came torturously back across the years. I remembered what it is to feel unworthy, unloved, unlovely, inadequate. I dared to look again at the image of God I held as a child: the Holy One who can tolerate no wrong, the Righteous One who demands absolute righteousness, the King who banishes forever the servant who cannot or will not obey.

Memories that first came timidly now flowed in torrents. And I let them. From way back in childhood when I dreamed often of “the Judgment Day” and always tumbled headlong into the lake of fire. I recalled the fear that dogged me to my maturity, until

that day in intellectual and emotional exhaustion I fell on my knees in my dormitory room and gave up

For years I had sought to reconcile Paul and James on the matter of “justification by faith” and “justification by works.” I couldn’t be content with what to me was an easy, superficial harmonization. There was no way I could pretend I had kept the whole “law” and no way I could pretend successfully that God didn’t mind since I had kept the important part.

It was easy enough to see both Jesus and Paul contending that we are “saved by faith.” It was clear that such faith is no mere mental assent to truth. But, I was afraid to trust the Holy One to accept the unholy one until I could shape up and be what I knew I ought to be.

Like scenes on a movie screen. The images clicked past. Then vividly came that day when with all the pretenses shot and defenses down, I gave up. I could only cry, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” In a motionless heap I sensed a warmth stealing around me, enfolding me in some strong, gentle embrace. The realization stole in that this was God-in-Christ welcoming a prodigal Home, receiving a once-proud Pharisee who had turned into a lost and frightened child, but who in the dark had been sought and found.

Then the joy! That distant yesterday I got up, not asking if I were new, but knowing that the relationship with God was most certainly new. Tears flowed. Silent songs were sung. I had no new information, but there was a rapturous newness about all the old information. If the day before I had been asked, “Do you believe God loves you?” I would have replied, “Of course.” Today, however, there was a facticity about it I had not previously experienced, the reality of “amazing grace.”

Temptation to turn off the memories and devise some practical instrument for helping Dora, Philip, and others like them move into that same serenity had to be resisted. I must not hurry. I recalled what it is to nestle in the grace of God as “forgiveness,” and I knew well that I would not have dared use it as license for lawlessness. The joy of knowing that, though unacceptable. I was *accepted*, was the best news I ever had.

And yet... Following that first flush of excitement, I knew that the full Gift had not been given. Or, the full Gift I had not yet accepted. I knew grace as “forgiveness.” I did not so clearly know grace as “power.” At least, it wasn’t mountain-moving power. Not power to witness to the Gospel of Christ as I saw the apostles witness. Not power to deny *self*, pick up the Cross and follow along to Golgotha. Not power to “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” In fact, I saw that much of the time I still held a self-image that was weak, unlovely, inadequate... without the promise of newness and power.

That picture for years hung as an anvil around my neck, serving as a self-fulfilling prophecy, an artist’s vision of despair. Fighting against it etched it deeper in the soul. The law of reversed effort worked overtime.

I continued to let the memories roll in and over and through me, for I wanted to be keenly, painfully aware of my caller’s condition. Then I could go back and walk with her that same fearsomely-wondrous path, hoping that light would break through the storm and together we would be wrapped in the rainbow of God.

The picture was quite plain: here I was, a soul that puzzled and prayed and pored over its predicament until at last it quit fighting, and lying still before God, experienced a sort of inner dialogue. “How would you feel if somebody continually beat your child

over the head?” “Why, I would be indignant! I would feel terrible, and I would try to stop it” “Then how do you think *I* feel, when someone continually beats *my* child over the head? Don’t you think I feel terrible and want to stop it?”

That Face in the Mirror

No Nathan was needed to spell it out for me. I recognized my own biography as it was narrated and saw starkly my face in the mirror.

It was as if the dialogue did not immediately cease, though I saw plainly the face of the child abuser. “Why do you not believe me when I tell you who you are? For I tell you not only that you are a child abuser, but you are a loved and accepted child, one made over, whose very nature you offend and reject by your unbelief.

“Why do you exclaim. ‘No! You are wrong about that. You don’t really know me, know how powerless and inadequate I am. You don’t understand that I can’t play the game of “Let’s Pretend.” I can’t pretend to have power just because I’m promised it. I’d make a fool of myself attempting tasks that I know are beyond me.’ “Why do you insist on changing places with *Me*?”

Sobered, I quit struggling, and another revelation stole in. Not as a flash, but as a quiet, gentle pressure... a silent steel-like resolution. “I will not drive the second spear into the side of my Lord! I will not live the rest of my life as a child abuser. I will, by God’s grace, quit beating His child over the head! I will not claim for myself what I do not believe, but I will try to look at *this* child through Jesus’ eyes, just as through these same eyes I will look at others.”

The picture of *Romans 6* came in a fresh rush of power. “There buried in that watery grave – risen, alive, made new – is another picture He has of me. In fact, these are two actions *on* me that are now at work *within* me, and I will affirm that what He says of me is true. I confess that it is not my doing, but His grace-deed. I confess that what He has done *for* me He swears by all the might of heaven to do *in* me. It’s not my power that I affirm, but His, and I will quit taking refuge in the powerlessness of God!”

Taking from my desk a copy of the New Testament, I turned to *Romans 6* and read it again... slowly... letting the pictures come as fully developed as they would. They came with no naive, romantic view of human nature, no pretense that sin is but the dark hues in Life’s lovely painting, necessary for contrast. Pictures breaking free from the text included “slavery,” “the power of sin” and “death.” Afterward, though, they were eclipsed by scenes of “resurrection,” “freedom” and “life.”

A battery of questions stood up and demanded, “Will you take seriously the power of Christ’s death and resurrection? As seriously as you do ‘the power of sin and death?’ Or will you go on in inverted pride asserting, ‘God can handle every case but mine.’ Is this not some defiant cry of despair? The questions would not let up: “If you are as stupid and rotten as you contend, how can you at the same time be smarter and more spiritually sensitive than God. Do you honestly think that your eyes are purer than His? That you see yourself more clearly than He does?”

I listened intently to Paul describe that faith-identification that brings union with Christ. I *saw* that trust does, in fact, permit an interpenetration of personalities. It makes

possible a contagion of spirit that is far different from some mark in a Celestial Ledger, canceling out recorded guilt. The question knifed through, “Is this true not in theory, but in flesh-and-blood people? Not in general, but in *me*?” The response came, “If it is not true for you, it is not true at all.” “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!”

If This Is Really True...

At my own “Jabbok” faith and doubt wrestled at midnight. In the morning faith limped away, a sunrise in its face. I asked for the glimpse of a star in the night. I was given not a gleam in the dark, but an embrace by the Light; a tender, compassionate Light. Enfolded in beauty. Held close by an incredible Mercy, the covenant-grace of the “God [who] was in Christ, reconciling the word to himself” (2 *Corinthians* 5:19).

Able now to relax a bit, I leaned back and relished the rainbow. The sight that awakens a kind of racial memory and makes something stir deep inside. Looking afresh at the story in *Genesis*, the bow reflected the radiance of a many-splendored, over-arching grace. A visual echo. A fresh affirmation and renewal of that first covenant between Creator and Creation.

An intrusion from childhood’s story land slipped in the “pot of gold” at the rainbow’s end, the consummate prize. But to an adult the sign of a reality for which we yearn, but can never realize. Then came the impossible thought, “What if at the end of that arc we found an inexhaustible store of ‘amazing graces’!!!!? What if *that* were ‘the pot of gold?’”

For awhile I let the question romp and play, teasing the mind. If we *really* made that discovery, we could rejoice in it, like children splashing in the ocean, not fearing we will splash it dry, no matter how high we jump nor flat we fall. We could take others to our special spot and have fantastic fun as we watch them jump and fall and splash, as we do. Afterward we could together have the time of our lives jumping... splashing... falling... laughing... hugging... singing... even swimming, if we like.

As the children wouldn’t have a smaller ocean when they shared it, our pot of golden “amazing graces” wouldn’t be any emptier when we shared. We would need to be sure of that. We must be certain that sharing “amazing graces” is not like giving half my bubble gum to my sister. For I know that however good I feel, I’ve got 50% less bubble gum when it’s over.

Wouldn’t it be surprising, if there really was a “rainbow” with a “pot of gold” at its end? The kind of “gold” we most want? the kind we long ago decided doesn’t exist? The kind that the more you share the more you have? An inexhaustible supply of “amazing graces” (God’s equivalent of our “positive strokes” or “warm fuzzies”)?

For me this special period included a mental recess, not where the mind goes blank, but, rather, where it is allowed to run outside and play. It was no game of “Let’s Pretend,” because I already knew this game was real. And, I knew the answers to the wonderment, “Could this be?” There really *is* a pot of gold at the rainbow’s end. I had found it. Only it was more as if I had been found.

What I must do now is help Dora find it, too. See the “self” she wants to be, the “self” she finds God wants her to be. Help her look at it until a mental snapshot is made,

developed and framed. Admire it. Love it. Not in narcissistic fashion, hypnotized by a face in the pool. This is a self in relationships. It is from these relationships that security comes, not because a “perfect” self is brought to others that they cannot but accept.

As she sees that this is the self God wants, her confidence in its creation can come to rest in God and not in herself. She can let go and lean back on God to finish His “new creation” in her. This is what I was eager to tell her. So, with joy, I called her and said, “I think our prayers have not gone unheard. I have something I would like to give you and have you try.”

We agreed to meet again the next day.

3 RSVP

Initial Response

During the night I sat down and put together the leaflet containing a significant part of what I have written here. The vision of a self nestled in the arms of God. A self adequate for life and love, whose relationships are creative and whose daily life is rewarding.

I wanted to make certain that Dora would see that image and know that its reality is what we are after, nothing less. The second step for me, the first for her, therefore, became one of attempting to get that special image etched on the photographic plates of her mind.

Risky Proposal

I proposed that she look at the picture long and hard. Drink it in. Think it up. Pray it down. Admire it. Love it. Feel it. Till it seeps deep... deep... down into the subterranean caverns of the soul. See it so clearly that with eyes tight shut the vision remains. See herself enfolded in the divine embrace.

The third step was to gain acceptance of the fact that one cannot only *see* the rainbow, but *walk* in it. Walk into it... through it... under it... wrapped in it. One can walk bathed in beauty, a beauty one snuggles into and rejoices in. Can relish the way it feels to be enfolded in it, like children snug in a flannel blanket on a cold December night. Can enjoy the way one is affirmed and loved so much that not one of us would trade that affirmation for any *thing*.

The fourth steps was to come to grips with the fact that there are other competing visions battling for the lordship of our minds. They seek to storm the citadel of our souls and retake it. Visions of a self we don't like and don't feel good with. An incompetent, unlovely and unloved self. A self that we despise, that others reject and that we insist God can't love. A self that is a loser today and will be a loser in every tomorrow.

We must recognize the temptation to embrace that self... affirm it... identify with it, and in a thousand ways declare, “That’s who I really am.” “I’m bad.” “I’m weak.” “I’m a coward.” “I’m a failure.” “I’m a divine mistake and a human reject.” “And I’m never going to be any better.”

The fifth step is the discovery that we do not have to welcome this intruder. We don’t have to open the door, invite it into the living room, serve it tea, and plead with it to stay all day. It’s *your* house and *your* dream. You shape it as you choose. Nobody else and nothing else compels you embrace as “self” what you don’t want to embrace. Unless you enjoy torturing one of God’s children, you will be surprised by an “amazing grace,” power to look to the rainbow.

Each time we look to the rainbow the old unwanted self is weakened. The image has only the power that we give it. As we refuse to welcome, soothe, nurture and pet it, it becomes more and more unfocused, more and more emptied of its power. Each time we envision the self we like, that we know God calls us to be and is now busy creating, we experience the Spirit breathing into it the breath of life. It becomes more and more focused... dynamic... real. As we accept God’s “amazing graces,” we welcome and nurture this new self. *The crucial discovery at this moment is that we can keep the vision alive **one day at a time.***

Our approach is not an apology for one more method of lifting ourselves by our own eyelids. It’s a recognition that in human creation God has invited us to share the Creative Adventure. In a more breathtaking sense than we ever dreamed we are co-creators together with God. Then we must get clear the picture of the “new creation,” together with a sanctified, stubborn desire to get on about our business.

To enhance the process and make it specific rather than general, I presented an instrument to be used daily. It is sketched below.

“AMAZING GRACE” BANK FOR POT-OF-GOLD DISCOVERERS

(Record For Non-Income Tax Purposes)

Pot-of-Gold Piece Discovery Re: Me	Pot-of- Gold Piece Discovery Re: My Situation	“Amazing Grace” 1	“Amazing Grace” 2

The instrument is simple. It encourages discovery and celebration. In its use we note these places and circumstances where “good news” breaks in on us, and we record them. A form of journaling. Since we work against a long-engrained habit of taking note of “bad news” and mentally recording all of it, then as a reward giving ourselves a bunch of head-knocks and law-lashes, we need help in an action that breaks the pattern and reverses the process.

Here is the way the instrument is used. In the following manner Dora majored in head-knocks and law-lashes: “I seem to bungle every situation. I butt in where I shouldn’t, and when I ought to take the initiative, I hold back.” (Discovery of “The Rotten Me.”) Being the youngest child, I think my parents cling tighter.” (Discovery of “My Rotten Situation.”) “I know I should handle this better, but I let resentment, fear and inadequacy foul me up over and over again.” (“Head-knock and Law-Lash 1”). “I should learn from it, I know, and quit demanding the impossible, but I never seem to.” (Head-knock and Law-lash 2”).

As users, we start where we are, not where we wish we were. Here is what I sought to help Dora do:

Say: “Since it seems that things continually get fouled up, there must be a reason for it. I want to know the reason and, if possible, do something about it. If I can’t find the reason, there may still be something done to alter the situation and modify the consequences.

“At least, I know that I don’t like the situation as it is, and that’s a start. Better than being stupidly oblivious or callously uncaring.” (“Pot-of-Gold Piece Discovery About Me.”) “God must have squeezed through a crack somewhere to be able to work that much in me.” (“Pot-of-Gold Piece Discovery About My Situation.” “Thank God for that!” (“Amazing Grace 1.”) “Say, that was celebration of a grace-gift, instead of another put-down! That must be God at work, burrowing still deeper.” (“Amazing Grace 2.”)

It becomes exciting to work with the instrument when we realize that we are not usurping divine judgment in handing out “amazing graces,” but are in gratitude accepting what God wants to give, but cannot until we will receive. A second “amazing grace” can be accepted simply for refusing to reject the first.

That Pattern of Rejection

Here are a few of the ways that Dora (and we) have kept inviolate that pattern of rejection. “O, it’s wasn’t anything, anyway.” “Somebody else would have done it better.” “I must have done it for the wrong reason.” “It was an accident.” “I’m surprised I didn’t flub up again.” “It’ll probably turn out wrong yet.” “It’s about time I did something right.”

We break that pattern as we come to realize that even the discovery of blocks in us can be seen and accepted as an “amazing grace.” Such discovery does not inevitably lead to a putdown, head-knock or law-lash. I can recognize that God has surprised me with another new insight. It is that very revelation that I need to be able to grow up. I rejoice in the grace granted to see more clearly, because now more than ever I can affirm the “me” I want to be. For that revelation I am grateful. I accept the affirmation and enter both the **”Pot-of-Gold Discovery”** and **“Amazing Grace 1.”**

Do I feel guilty about accepting an “amazing grace” for seeing that cloud between me and the rainbow? Why should I? Is that not one of my greatest blocks? If I give myself a law-lash for feeling guilty, do I recognize that such action is neither what God wants nor what I want? Do I not see that now I can refuse to continue internalizing that response pattern? Can I not recognize God at work in my inner turmoil making it possible for me to affirm grace, rather than guilt? If so, I am being freed not only from that particular guilt, but from the guilt pattern to which I have been enslaved.

I am being set free!

As I am freed to deal more honestly with myself, I recognize that I could have been blaming everybody else around me. At least, I have not done that. While I have unrealistically internalized guilt, I thank God I have not been irresponsibly dumping on others. And now I am resolved to quit dumping on *this* (God’s) kid... this kid on whom I have dumped for years. I celebrate the gift of that resolve. I see the options I am *not* going to take. For it all I thank God.

I begin to realize that others cannot make me turn off the rainbow and blot out the dream. I decide about that. An occasional miracle comes as I say, “Hey, look at this. I didn’t lay a bunch of head-knocks and law-lashes on myself crying, ‘Well, I really botched it this time.’ I didn’t say, ‘There I go again,’ digging out a carload of ‘I always manage to foul it up’s. I am beginning to see that God can’t ram grace down my throat or cram it into my pocket. I must let Him give it. I will. I have.

A Gift With the Engraving—“Pass It On!”

First I must recognize it as a “gift.” Some psychologists talk of the “warm fuzzies” and “cold pricklies” we give ourselves and others.” Certainly, we need “warm fuzzies. And the Lord knows we are generous with “cold pricklies.” But I am not talking about rewards we give ourselves, except in the sense of recognizing what *God* is holding out to us, waiting for our response.

Once we are convinced that what God and we want are one and the same, and that there is an inexhaustible source of “graces” to guarantee the “new creation,” we are Home-free. We can take to our heart’s content. We can lay off the head-knocks and law-lashes. More and more we can rejoice in God’s fresh, abundant surprises.

Then we are free to share what has been given to us. Until we know ourselves secure in the love of God, we cannot offer that love to others. Our thin little shawl of God’s grace will not cover our own nakedness, much less wrap around another. We see no rainbow enfolding us and cannot point it out to anyone else, no matter how dear to us that one may be.

My attempt with Dora, as well as with Philip, with others, with you... is a simple two-fold one:

1. To assist us in accepting the image God has of us...raised from the death of the old self-centered self to that new life empowered by the Living Lord, and
2. To galvanize us into so identifying with the dying, buried, risen Lord that we will know *ourselves* dead, buried and alive in Him.

It was this gift that I sought to pass on to Dora as the next morning we met. “Do you understand what I am asking you to do?” I inquired. “At times it seems vague, but overpowering,” she responded. Yet, I see enough to begin. If I get confused, I’ll call you.”

I was concerned about her response. Not sure that the instrument would seem appropriate. What if she regarded it as juvenile, something like kindergartners gluing stars on reports to take home? Or even worse, as futile? She might politely accept it with sinking soul, crying inwardly, “I come for help, and he gives me another piece of paper. I had hoped...”

“Thank you,” she simply. I believed that she meant it. “I will call you in a few days when I have had time better to assimilate what we’ve talked about today.” She nodded and turned away.

The door closed softly behind her.

4

A WORD FROM THE RAINBOW’S END

The Surprising Letter

Weeks went by, and Dora did not contact me. A time or two I tried unsuccessfully to reach her. Then came a letter that let me in on the struggle in which she was engaged. I present the material as it came to me with only the names changed. [Of course I got Dora’s permission.]

‘Wrapped In a Rainbow’ is another of your wonderful prescriptions... prescription for what Dennis [the husband] might call ‘practicing Christians’... but I’m afraid I haven’t responded in quite the way you wanted.

I’ve read it through many times, but when it comes to really ‘breaking it down’... or making my deposits in the “‘Amazing Grace’ Bank,” I’m having problems. I don’t know why, because I’m quite sure I understand what you’re saying, and I know very well how it applies to me, but I just can’t say *anything* so *simply*. I just naturally make it *hard for myself*, I guess. That’s always been a big problem for me. I *make* things difficult for myself. I would like to come in and talk to you about this, and complete the record for the I.A.D.D.A... (Internal Amazing Grace Discovery Association)...(Oh, my!)

I should have explained first that I wrote this around 3:00 a.m. the Sunday morning of January 8. Just another one of those nights I couldn’t sleep, but I don’t worry about it so much anymore. Anyway, I had not been to church for several weeks for various reasons, and had *not* seen the questionnaire concerning the activities of the “Good News,” so I didn’t write it at all with the idea in mind of ‘witnessing’ during the week.

I’m sorry that I’ve written such a lengthy ‘dissertation’ (?), but as I said I can’t do anything the easy way, it seems. I’m also sorry I’ve been so slow in responding, and trust you did *not* feel I was just not interested, for I was truly

trying to clarify some of these things in my mind, and ‘Wrapped In a Rainbow’ came at a vital time for me

When you’ve had a chance to read this, and I know you’ll take time to read and understand, I’d like to hear from you. If it’s confusing at times, I guess I was writing at times as if I were talking to a group and at other times to God, and maybe at other times to you personally. (Remember it was 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. and was spontaneous.) I’ve changed it very little from my notes so badly scribbled that morning..

Thanks so much for sharing the rainbow with me, and I know it will be helpful to many others.

Also, please excuse my hurried typing. As usual, everything I do, I seem to do in a hurry. There’s probably a message there, too!!! Is it later than I think?

Apparent in this letter is the turmoil of a continuing struggle. The message is filled with put-downs, head-knocks and law-lashes. In addition are the fervent attempts to please, together with appeals for help. Yet, the note of desperation brought to my study earlier is gone. A glimmer of hope has appeared.

One can see, too, a healthy change appearing in Dora. The title of her enclosed statement indicates that the almost total preoccupation with self has given way to a desire to say something helpful to others. Here is her statement as it came to me:

“Is This Witnessing?”

I like me. I’m discovering some things about me that I ‘love.’

And you know something else? I like others, too. Well, it sounds crazy because I’ve known this for years, but I guess it kind of scared me to be able to express this love, so I’ve always ‘played it cool.’ At least I think that I have always known that I felt this love, but there’s always been this... invisible ‘something’... barrier... mask... call it whatever you wish... that has kept me from being able to express the feeling.

I think what scares me most... yes, still... is that people will feel I am not sincere. Oh, I’d like to think that my love and concern for others *shows*... both by my actions, but also in my facial expressions. But, I’ve practically been told almost the opposite is true at times. I guess my ‘first impression’ quotient is pretty low, for some of my dearest friends once thought I was... ‘pretty cool’... (in the non-complimentary sense),

I’m not nearly as cold and calculating as I must appear behind these rather dark-rimmed glasses. And I’m *SURE* not as full of all the self-confidence that some people tell me I appear to possess. In fact, just the opposite is true. But maybe I’ve missed my ‘calling’...I must be some actress to put across that image!!!

The problem is... or was... (I PRAY it can be in the past tense most of the time) I could tell very few people ‘I love you’ because as I now realize, I really

hated myself. Now this is *no new* information that has suddenly come to me. I've been told over and over.... read it over and over.... 'love thy neighbor..... but I just couldn't seem to get the job done!

After 50 years (in about a month) of internal strife.... REAL BATTLES with me.... and I.... and, worst of all, with GOD, I'm finding some things about myself that I feel kind of good about, and certainly less guilty about.

I must make this point very strongly.... There has been no flash of lightning, no rolling thunder, no SUDDEN awakening of this feeling within me. (And I've stopped expecting that kind of experience!)

I have spoken with close friends for several years of the times when I have briefly experienced this warm, glowing feeling within me, and I was sure it was the Holy Spirit. I believe this, for the feeling is with me more and more as I strive to be more understanding and forgiving, both of myself and my family and friends.... or those I would have once called my enemies.

There are a number of words and phrases that I wish had never been a part of the English language as I understand it, or that I wish had never been introduced so early in life! Words like 'Inferiority Complex'---- 'Nerves'---- 'Nervous Breakdown'---- 'Emotional Collapse'---- 'Mental Depression.'

Some of these words I heard frequently as a child from my mother, who, with all good intentions 'diagnosed' a couple of her children with these labels and, unconsciously 'diagnosed' us to tragedy. Too late, I realize this. I'm not sure if she does, but I'm not worrying about that now.

Authors, the Television Industry, Book and Magazine Publishers, 'Analysts'... some sincere doctors have made millions of dollars overusing and mis-diagnosing human beings with such terminology. Rightly or wrongly, and I must give credit where it is due, doctors could drive some of those feelings right out of the human brain and change personalities with this treatment or that pill. Sometimes, I am sure that there is no other course of treatment. There are still many questions in my mind.

In the final analysis I am turning to God (I wish I could say that I have *totally* turned, but that would not be true or a sincere statement) supported by my loving husband most of all, and by my loving and trusted companions in my life. Many times I have said, 'Look, God, I'm really confused, and I've messed up my life and the lives of my loved ones.... and I need HELP!!! As I look back, I know You were *trying* to reach me. You undoubtedly were tempted to shout (you probably did!) but I just didn't know HOW to LISTEN. You came from all directions, but I turned away, not recognizing You.

Now before my halo dazzles You.... I must say this.... my 'love affair' with life has just begun.... I know there are many mountains to climb and valleys full of shadows to pass through, and there always will be, but now I feel You so much closer. You are holding me at this very moment, trying to quiet my pounding heart and steady my quivering hands.

I've prayed over and over for a greater understanding of those who voice their love of Jesus and of their fellowmen with such sincerity, yet I doubted them. I was judging them.... and I felt judged *by* them. I still do, but God,

You're doing better and better, or my hearing is improving, for while I still don't always understand, the bitterness is leaving. I pray that *now* it *does* show, the warmth that is replacing the bitterness, especially to those I have *most* misunderstood, and to those who misunderstand me.

We all come to God by different paths, and some bear heavier burdens than others, and cannot turn those burdens over to Christ until we come to know and understand Him better. I'm still 'dragging my feet' at times, but I think I'm doing better. I sure hope so!

Now my family would probably readily attest to the fact that this 'magnificent glow' I speak of so glibly is not always so bright. In fact, they'd say the only glow coming from me is the anger in my eyes.

But I'm so much closer than I've ever been before, that even in those times of total darkness, I can feel it, even if I can't express it. So I pray for help in making it stronger with each test.

If, by the grace of God, I can only be as supportive of His Kingdom and works, and of my family and friends as God and they have been of me, I shall feel my life does at least have one redeeming feature.

But until I stopped working for 'brownie points' for Dora.... and started working for the glory of God and love of Jesus Christ, none of what I have related could have happened to my attitude. You probably don't see anything different about me yet, because so much of it still needs to be expressed, and my attitude still needs so much work, but at least I believe my eyes are open, and my hearing is improved. I hope it shows.

This lengthy statement is not what I had expected. It did, however, reveal what I anticipated – a fierce struggle by no means over. The struggle had reached the crisis stage, and grace was at work in the way we had hoped and prayed. Dora still knew full-well what it is to be enveloped in suffocating darkness. She, also, knew what it is to be wrapped in a rainbow, and could say so.

Dora's statement was almost the reverse of the *Psalms*. The Psalmists often begin on a note of frustration, anger, impatience or near-despair. Then in looking at the grace-gifts of God, the song becomes stronger, the spirit more buoyant, until it all ends with the sound of triumph.

At first I was fearful that Dora had begun on the mountaintop of victory and would end in the valley of defeat. Rather, her route was up and down, back and forth, head-knocking and grace-accepting, laying on law-lashes and then accepting glory gleams.

As we met she seemed somewhat subdued, unable to verbalize as freely as she had written. Yet, there was a quiet strength present that I had not earlier observed. We attempted to face the struggle that lay ahead, to see both the Vision and the Void. I did not want to toss sand on her desert flame. But neither did I want her to be inundated by unanticipated storms.

We covenanted to stay in touch and to pray regularly about the journey. As she closed the study door, her step was lighter, and so was my heart.

5

THE VISION AND THE VOID

The Choice We Can't Escape

How can we nurture this fragile but radiant reality? This nestling in the arms of God? I cannot grasp Dora's face between my hands and keep it turned toward the rainbow. I took a tough cue from a crusty psychiatrist with whom I had done battle. What I could do was point to the alternatives.

A lovely woman, devoted wife and mother was hospitalized, suffering delusions and hallucinations. When I went to visit her, I found her in the psychiatric ward with those experiencing the most severe trauma and exhibiting the most bizarre behavior. Infuriated, I confronted the doctor. "She is not nearly as removed from reality as are these people. Why have you placed her in this bedlam?" His response was crisp and decisive, "She has to see where she is headed, unless she decides to alter her course."

If We Are to See

If the sky from East to West blazes with color, we still must look to see. It's possible to walk through spangled splendor with eyes tight shut or glued to the ground. Even if we look, much depends on the eyes with which we see. We can look through eyes dulled with pain, seeing nothing but the rain, or squinting distrustfully at a reality long since labeled "mirage."

It is as truly possible to look only for the sun, pretending that there is no rain. Sauntering through gales while whistling Pollyanna tunes. That's not the problem for most of us, however. Certainly not for Dora. And sooner or later even the Pollyannas have the pretense stripped away. We all lift faces to the heavens. There we see – the Vision or the Void.

Viewing the Void, we see life empty. *Others* are empty. And our *relationships* are as empty as we. It doesn't seem to matter that we can repeat the Twenty-Third Psalm or Lord's Prayer – the words are empty. Beautiful, but empty. They are full for people around us, but for us they are empty. At times *that* has been the reality for many of us. It had been for Dora, who now looked to me for hope.

The paradox is that this terribly vulnerable one must become more vulnerable still. Even the soul must become more vulnerable still. Even the props to which she intermittently clings must go. The very things she has clung to for life. Her ability to make people laugh. Her super devotion to her children. Her frantic efforts to please her parents. Her vain struggle to please God. Now her fresh desire to please me.

It's not that she should quit her genuine expressions of love, but that she must quit trying to *buy* love, even with the most passionate devotion. The whole concept of becoming *worthy* must go. She must see that God loves her anyway, and accepts her, anyway. She now says that she understands, at least most of the time. We have to stop the vacillation.

Yet, it is not likely that such vulnerability can come except in the presence of those who are themselves vulnerable. The vulnerable God must come to us in vulnerable others who will neither compromise with us nor leave us. Then we test them thoroughly. We go on to act in ways that almost certainly fulfill our prophecy. “I am not lovable. Sooner or later you will find that out.”

Nevertheless, a strange thing happens, These whom we rebuff keep reaching out wounded hands. Echoing a Gospel from Golgotha. Evidencing a power from Pentecost. As one young man asked two days ago, “Are these people for real?” They are, but Dora is afraid they may not be, or at least fears that if she changes, they will not regard her as *real*. They will not believe she is “sincere.” At length, however, we are able to drop our guard, take off our blindfold and see...

The rainbow is first glimpsed in the eyes of a friend. A friend in whose eyes is the reflection of the Friend.

Anyone who bothers to read these lines is one who at least *wants* to glimpse the glory. Quite simply I am saying to you, “You can.” I invite you to journey with me to a spot where you will see. But you do have to come outside.

First of All

First, get clear in your own head how you feel about God showing His Face in Jesus Christ. Do you think you could say “Yes” to Him there? Here’s how one man did, as told by a famous French bishop to his congregation;

One Good Friday three university students from Paris walked along the road and noticed throngs of people going into the churches to make their confession. The students began talking about these ‘superstitious’ and ‘unenlightened’ souls, wondering how religion had survived.

Suddenly two of the students turned to the third, the leader among them, and said, ‘Will you go into the church and say to the priest what we have been saying to one another?’ ‘Sure,’ he replied, and they went in. When his turn came, he said, ‘Father, I’ve come to tell you that Christianity is a dying institution, and religion is a superstition.’

The priest responded, ‘My son, why did you come here to tell me this?’ The student then told him of the conversation with his two friends. The priest listened carefully and said, ‘All right, I want you to do one thing for me before you go. You accepted the challenge of your friends and came here; now accept my challenge. Walk up to the chancel, where you will find a large wooden cross and on it the figure of Jesus crucified. I want you to stand before that cross say these words, ‘Jesus died for me, and I don’t care a damn.’

The young man went and returned. ‘I’ve done it,’ he said. ‘Do it once more,’ he was told. ‘After all, it means nothing to you.’ He went back and stood looking at the cross for along time and once more stammered out the words, ‘Jesus died for me, and I don’t care a damn.’ He came back to say, ‘I’ve done it, and I’m going now.’

The priest stopped him. ‘Once more,’ just one more time, and then you can go.’ The young man went back to then chancel and looked at the cross again, and at the One hanging on it. He came back and said, ‘Father, can I make my confession now?’ The bishop concluded with these words: ‘And that, my dear people, that young man was myself.’

You may not need at all to say what this young student had to say. You may be ready to cry, “O, I do care. I care intensely. It’s that I can’t believe God could care for the likes of me!” Then I ask you to change the words. Look at that Good Friday scene of Jesus agonizing on Golgotha, and say, “Jesus died for me, but *He* doesn’t really *care!*” Say it over and over. You may need to change the words, but if you are really serious, you will find other words that fit you. “Jesus died for everybody... but me!” “Jesus loves me, but God hates me.” “If Jesus were God, He could help me.”

The main point is to open your eyes and look at Jesus. Keep looking till you are no longer able to tell lies about Him or the Father who looks out through His eyes and reaches out through His hands. Keep looking until more than anything else, you want to see as He sees... including His image of you. Wait, soul ajar, to feel what He feels about the lost and lonely ones around Him... including you.

You must make sure how you feel about Jesus. Is he truly your clue to God? Is He trustworthy? *Is Jesus worth trusting your fate to His care?*

That Deadly Roadblock

What we need to see and want to see (all of us) are not two different realities, but one. We want to see a self whose inside looks like its outside. One who is joyful, because fear has fled. One who can love her family as she knows herself loved. Who can let go of her children, because she is secure. Who can care for her parents as she is able and not feel guilty about her failure to do all they expect. He wants to accept himself, believe that God accepts him, and be assured that others accept him. Not because he can make them laugh, nor because he works himself to death trying to please them.

But right now some people can’t do that... not without help, Dora couldn’t. There’s a gap between wanting and being. Between wishing and risking. Between desiring and deciding.

For that gap to be closed we must have a God with a new Face, the unobscured Face Of Jesus. *He* closes the gap. However, for many insecure souls the gap is not closed because what we believe in our heads we do not yet believe in the depths of our souls. We may be able to sing,

Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so...

but the reality doesn’t come alive in our emotions, our nerve cells, our bowels, our instincts... creating a union of our inner and outer being. We hold on desperately to our thin little creed, but do not feel ourselves held by it or its embalmed Christ. We *say*, but don’t *see*.

We need help in *seeing*. Sometimes the Scripture alone is sufficient. At other times it needs an interpreter. “Do you understand what you read?” Philip asked the Ethiopian Nobleman as he read *Isaiah* 53. “How can I,” was his reply, “unless someone guides me?”

The guidance, though, is not always in a cerebral grasp of the text. More often it is in letting Jesus Christ step into the center of the picture and letting self slip out. In reality this is to affirm the necessity of faith and repentance. But simply to preach self-renunciation and Christ-affirmation *bare* is to lift up a requirement (a “law”) that such souls cannot yet obey. What it can and does accomplish is that it keeps the self centered on the self in its never-ending death-struggle and self-condemnation.

What is needed here is a flesh-and-blood person standing in the gap. One who has been along this torturous trail. Who has also found it difficult to accept the self Christ accepts. Who knows what it is to feel unworthy and unloved. Who is willing once more to be vulnerable. Here. Now. With Dora, Philip. Me. You. Who will risk all over again. Who will witness, not only to what God did once-upon-a-time, but is doing right now in this situation... *with us*. It came painfully clear to me *who* was called to be that person in the gap for Dora.

The strongest among us know that there are times when we can but stand on tiptoe and look through the eyes of another’s faith till our own comes flooding again. Just so, there are pregnant moments when we are privileged to be present and let others see through our eyes until their own can focus on the healing, helping Lord.

Faith is caught, as well as taught.

My prayer became:

Lord, give me a faith contagious enough for Dora, for all the Doras You bring, even as You have given to others a faith contagious enough for me. Help me to be completely honest with them. To let them know that many of us first ask, ‘Is it fancy or fact?’ It seems too good to be true, and we suspect an over-active imagination at work.

“But, help me go on, God, and be honest about the rest of it. The sense of wholeness that does come. The sense of caring and being cared for. The sense of shared relationships that are real. Of feeling a heartbeat at the center of Reality. A whisper that ‘the Universe is friendly.’ Of being embraced by beauty. Of being wrapped in a tender-toughness that we can only call ‘Love.’ Keep me from being too embarrassed or ashamed to share that.

Then, God, help me to do the toughest thing of all. Confront them with the choices that they are now making and the choice they must make to survive. The choice that enables them to grow up in Spirit of Jesus Christ,

In whose name, I pray. Amen.

I am under compulsion to keep in mind that though some souls seem easily wrapped in glory gleams, others do not quickly glimpse the Vision. Only the Void. The destructive feeling does not easily fade: “The Vision is for the virtuous, not for me. I feel more like a street child or a cosmic convict.”

I am, also, under compulsion to remember that once the gaze is turned in the right direction, we have the possibility of a breakthrough. There is available an oft-unrecognized, sometimes-rejected means of grace. Something that can actually help us *see*.

Seeing Visions—Dreaming Dreams

One of the signs of Messiah is “recovery of sight to the blind.” While He alone as “the Great Physician gives vision, He does it through various means. Though Jesus did simply touch sightless eyes and say, “Be opened!” or, “Go, your faith has healed you,” often He saw the need for an act reinforcing faith. “Go wash and see.” On one occasion He spat on a man’s eyes and then touched him. On yet another He spat on the ground, made mud of the spittle, rubbed it on the sightless sockets and said, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam.”

No one thinks that mud or spit heals blindness. Nor the waters of some Near- or Mid-Eastern pool. Nor the act of washing. However, Jesus knew that people, blind a long time, have lost hope, and need to get up physically and move. The body and spirit help propel one another. Consequently, He called for the response that would heighten expectancy, galvanize action and exercise faith.

The One who used mud made of spit and clay would not shun a powerfully potent procedure that is ready at hand and available to all. In fact, He made use of it constantly. It is what I sometimes call “a baptized, sanctified imagination.”

Once I did a study of the language of Jesus in the Gospel of *Luke*, and I came away shaken. It changed me and my style of preaching. In college I received tuition scholarships for debating, and my sermons were carefully crafted debate briefs. The kind that silence when they may not convince.

Now I was stunned to find that the language of Jesus was not like mine at all. Rather, it was picture language. Moving picture language. Before His hearers He flashed one scene after another, expecting them to *see*.

He pictured God as “Father,” “Heaven” as “Home,” the Kingdom as a “Banquet,” and Hell as the city’s burning garbage dump (“Gehenna”}just outside Jerusalem. His images often marched in pairs, one short and the other tall, one loving and the other selfish. Gnat and camel. Rich man and beggar. Mountain and mustard seed. Anxious souls, carefree sparrows and lilies arrayed in splendor. Before His hearers He sketched two roads, one narrow and the other wide... and left them to choose.

His favorite instrument was a simple story (parable). By it He painted portraits (or showed videos not only of the Kingdom of Heaven, but of His hearers. Then He held those images before their faces and waited for recognition. With a lightening flash and thunder clap it came to those who had not already tampered with the eyes of their souls.

God as Artist-Lover has created in His own image little artist-lovers, and given to them much of His creative power. One of the greatest is the power to see visions and dream dreams. To preview that which potentially exists or envision that which exists “somewhere out of sight.” Consequently, we (like God) possess sight, insight and pre-sight. Power to see the eagle in the egg. The King in the baby. The saint in the sinner. Tomorrow in today. Power to see in and with the soul *images* that no camera can record.

A little girl, hurrying into her parents’ bedroom, looked back at her own and cried, “There aren’t any good dreams in there.” We live and die by our images, and so we need

real images and good dreams. Fear can become destructive and faith creative. Both begin to call into existence what they see. We tend to turn into the kind of people we “reckon” ourselves to be, the kind that we keep *telling* ourselves we are.

That is a grace for us see and talk about ourselves (and “neighbors”) as Jesus does. The problem is that for many of us what we do and say is quite different from what our Savior describes, both about ourselves and others. We have trouble believing Him instead of our own condemning hearts. The crucial question, then, becomes one of willingness to be captured by the right images and to dream the good dreams.

The Sight We See – The Dream We Dream

It would be cruel glibly to assert that one can blink and, like pressing the button on your projector cord, advance the slide. One doesn’t flip automatically to Vision from Void. Nor is the Vision a reward for work done. Still it must be reverently said, God cannot give it where it will not be received. There is no rainbow to the blind. There is no embrace to those who tear themselves away, protesting their unworthiness. There is no glimpse of the Kingdom for those who will not look through the eyes of a child.

Even when you truly *want* to look, you will ask yourself, “First, am I to look for something concrete? Or simply attempt to empty myself and wait on God’s initiative? And, second, how can I double check the ‘Vision’ to determine whether it is fancy or fact?”

In this instance you do look for something concrete. The need is to envision clearly the kind of God who wants you to trust Him and let Him wrap you in His love. Then envision the “you” you want to be. Envision the relationships you want, the feelings for which you yearn, the adventures you hunger to share, the “you” that you dream about in your truest, most-honest moments. Not you as “rich (wo/man)..., doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief,” but you as accepted by God, yourself and others. You aglow with the peace and joy that nobody will or can ever take away.

When the picture is firmly focused, check it against the picture revealed in Jesus Christ. The record is clear as to how He pictures both His Heavenly Father and all those who trust themselves to His embrace. *That includes you.*

If, however, you are like me as I was, you listen, also, to the Apostle Paul. In shame, I confess, I had to come to Jesus by way of Paul. It took a legalist like him to reach a legalist like me. Jesus’ message sounded just too good to be true. Paul was the person in the gap for me, and I find that he sometimes serves that same gracious function for others. Let him paint for you your portrait as you really are “in Christ.” If what he says and shows is consistent with what you truly want, you can be sure that this is not merely your private dream. It is at the same time what God wants for you and what you hunger for yourself.

Then why on earth is it not yours? What keeps you from feeling wrapped in the rainbow of God’s gracious care? And what would make your dream come true... for you?

6

DISCOVERING THAT “POT OF GOLD”

One Sure Path

Already I’ve indicated to you the path, but, I have, also, found for the bruised the truth must be affirmed again and again. This time I want to take you step by step. I know the way well, for it’s my own. That’s the reason I know it leads to the rainbow’s end and that golden find of “amazing graces.”

Since the simple gospel of Jesus found in *John* 3:16 seemed to me to be too good to be true, my guide turned out to be Paul. It was clear that he felt my sense of guilt, my futility,, my desperate struggles, my dark despair..., and he came *through* it. Did not simply stay wallowing *in* it. He knew not only what it meant to be “dead *in* sin,” but what it is to be “dead *to* sin.” At, least, that ‘s the way I read him, and I knew that’s what I needed to know – truly know

I let Paul paint the picture of the faith-union of the believer with Christ, “Dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus!” It was there in Romans 6:11 and stopped me dead still, my gaze riveted on the injunction, “Think of yourselves” this way. I pulled down every translation I had (a dozen or more) and read from them all. “Reckon yourselves...” “Consider yourselves...” “Count yourselves...” “Look upon yourselves...” “Regard yourselves as dead to sin, but alive to God in union with Christ Jesus.”

The question came, “Is this ‘reckoning,’ ‘considering,’ ‘regarding,’ ‘counting,’ ‘looking,’ a way of accepting the offered gift? Is the Gift so personal that a refusal to ‘regard,’ ‘consider,’ ‘look,’ in fact, to *see* self as ‘*dead* to sin and *alive* to God,’ a refusal of the reality? Is this what it is to ‘receive’ or ‘reject’ the Gift?”

It became clear to me that such an *imaging* is not a version of “Let’s Pretend,” but an exercise of, or perhaps even a form of faith. What we see becomes *not* the creation of a self-centered and self-serving imagination, but of an imagination made captive to the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

I am well aware that many Christians read the word “imagination” only in a negative sense. They point to its negative use in Scripture. Of course, in our “fallen” condition, the imagination, along with every other creative power, is bent to destructive ends. (Cf. *Gen.* 6:5; *Prov.* 6:18; *Rom.* 1:21). Yet, *2 Cor.* 10:5 declares, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (NIV). *Every thought!* Here is imagination obedient to God, at home serving its creative purpose. It is this creative power that can and must be harnessed to assist the faith of the spiritually bruised.

“I must get that picture clear,” I realized, “and keep looking at it long and hard. Walk into it. Become familiar with it. Become friends with it. Think it. Dream it. Admire it. Love it. Pray for it and in it. Feel it...till it seeps down deep... deep... deep... into the tissue of your soul Look and keep looking till you see that splendid splash of color arc through your sky so clearly that when you shut your eyes the vision lingers.

It's a dream that lasts through the night and does not fade with the morning. It works. I know. That's the reason I could commend it to Dora, Philip and others.

Though I am persuaded that one should be better able to take the images of Jesus and more quickly find the "amazing graces" at the rainbow's end, I could but witness to my own experience. And that I did.

I saw that what I wanted to happen was what God wanted to happen. To be able to see what God sees... about *Godself*... about *me*... about *others*... about *my world*. I knew in my brain. I wanted to know in my soul. In my heart that beat too fast. In my stomach, churning out too much acid. In my imagination that kept denying the reality God affirmed.

It became clear that only in changing the pictures in my mind would reality as I see it and as God sees it become one and the same reality. Once that came clear, there was reason to hope. For then I knew who chooses the pictures for that art gallery. Who it is that selects one instead of the other. That it is *I* who hang them up and *I* who take them down.

My heart began to sing. I saw that reality can be what I want it to be. The relationships I want. The feelings for which I yearn. The adventure I hunger to share. That you and others like you can be the "**you**" that in your truest, most-honest moments you dream you are. Not you as "rich man (woman)... doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief," but the "new person" being created in Jesus' image. He and we are seeing the same image, dreaming the same dream.

I put a lot of stock in His dream. I believed it was God's dream. And I was quite sure that God's care is not a sentiment about which we coo. Not a Babe powerless in a manger. Not a Messiah dead on a Cross...or sealed in a grave. It is the divine Oath-in-action, the Eternal's promise and pledge stretched all the way to Calvary. Nailed down. Sealed up. Breaking loose at Easter. Sweeping up, bundling together and filling with Power on Pentecost. This covenant-giving, covenant-keeping Source of Love overarching the whole creation (including me and those to whom I reach out) is something of what I saw and see in the vision I have called "Wrapped in a Rainbow." And that is the way I found myself at its end.

You can reach it, too.

You... can... reach... it..., too!!

The "'Amazing Grace' Bank" can be for you the exercise that keeps you on the way.

A Simple Tool

First, let's review the instructions already given:

1. Let someone who is competent serve as your spiritual guide.
2. Decide once-for-all that Jesus is trustworthy.
3. Get clear in your mind His image of both God and you.
4. Decide that you will not drive another spear in your Savior's side, by being a "child abuser," continually beating yourself over the head.

5. Recognize that *you* choose your mental pictures.
6. Faithfully follow “*The Prescription.*”
7. Look squarely at the alternatives: Vision and Void.
8. Let your imagination work *for* you, rather than *against* you.
9. Make use of “The ‘Amazing Grace’ Bank.”
10. Stay focused *one day at a time*. Renew the Vision as you go through the day, and especially as you go to bed. Let the creative, healing image of you rocked to sleep in the arms of God, be the one that nurses you through the night. You can summon up *that* vision! And you can do it *one day at a time*. People in A.A. stay sober a day at a time, and so can you.
11. Be alert to the temptation to turn off the rainbow. Say to yourself, “I’m setting a mental alarm to go off whenever the old image shows its face. Each time I begin to give myself head-knocks and law-lashes, the alarm will ring. That’s my signal. Immediately I will change pictures! I’ll hang up the one that show me wrapped in the rainbow of God’s grace, and I’ll stand right there before it, however long it takes, till the old picture fades.

Since some people have difficulty in making their deposits in “The ‘Amazing Grace’ Bank,” let me take you through that process once more.

- 1) *You look for **attributes in yourself*** that you like and that you believe God likes in you. As you recognize each one, accept it as an “amazing grace” and enter it on the chart as “**Amazing Grace 1**”.

You regard it as a gift. You thank God and rejoice.

Whenever you begin to deride either the gift or yourself, recognize your action and stop the down-playing, poor-mouthing, head-knocking practice, you enter that victory on the chart as “**Amazing Grace 2**”.

You regard it as a gift, thank God and rejoice.

When the discovery doesn’t fall on you as a sudden stupendous prize, simply receive it as it does come, piece by piece and bit by bit.

- 2) *You look for **aspects of your situation*** that help you to be the kind of person Christ says you are and to do the kind of work He calls you to do.
- 3) When your mental alarm sounds and you realize that you have lapsed back into down-playing, poor-mouthing, head-knocks, you give yourself an “**Amazing Grace 1**” for *recognizing* the situation. When you stop the process by replacing the picture, for *changing* the situation you log an “**Amazing Grace 2.**”

You regard each as a gift. You thank God and rejoice.

This tool is a way of helping you “count your many blessings” and “name them one by one.” You really will be surprised, when you resist the creative excuses that intrude, which will be nothing less than ingenious.

To insist that you don’t *have* to keep the chart may be one more destructive rationalization that checks the inflooding grace. Faithful recording is an exercise that strengthens your openness and acceptance. Using the chart is a way of ratifying God’s

action in and through you. Your celebration. Your “Amen!” And *that* you do *have* to give. The very thing you at this juncture need help in doing is what the chart assists you to do.

A Helpful Model

Recovery, Inc., offers valuable insights. This remarkable self-help fellowship, composed of those who suffer emotional distress, shares and offers emotional support. Members recognize the pervasiveness of their low self-esteem and their constant temptation to devalue both themselves and all that they do. As companions-in-pain they work together on the problem when they are together and when they are apart.

That work includes following a strict discipline. Members of the group may call one another during the week to share problems, but they cannot play the game of “Ain’t it Awful.” They must limit their complaints to a short specified time, three to five minutes, as I recall.

When they gather, they take turns going around the table and telling how things went while they were scattered. Again they are limited in the time they can take. No one can interrupt another as she or he speaks. On finishing, the speaker is affirmed by fellow-members. “I affirm Dora for recognizing that she fell into the old destructive practice of poor-mouthing herself.” “I affirm Philip for taking action when he blew up at his son. First, he got up and walked outside, keeping the confrontation from becoming violent. Later he went back in and expressed regret and affection.” “I affirm Tom for recognizing just now that he had another fruitless run-in with his boss. It’s clear that he wants to move beyond excuses to alter his work habits.”

Members not only affirm one another, but accept one another’s affirmations. While **Recovery, Inc.** is not overtly “Christian,” anymore than is **Alcoholics Anonymous**, it utilizes the kind of support and care that Christians offer as they reach out to one another in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. In fact, many of the group members are active Christians engaged in intentional ministry.

The ideal situation is to have a support group within the congregation where both an under girding mission statement and the order of life together is intentionally Christian. Since in most congregations this is not the case, I’m suggesting a next-best alternative. The spiritual counselor or guide provides initial support, and the chart helps maintain discipline.

Be vigilant in ferreting out those images that unfocus the vision and wash out the rainbow colors. Don’t hesitate to mark down an “amazing grace” for every such discovery. Immediately recognize that once you would have given your self a head-knock for that very insight. Recognize, too, that once you might have laid the blame on something or someone else. At least, you would have given yourself a bushel basket of law-lashes, but you took none of those options. You didn’t say, “Here I go again, botching everything.” You didn’t do a carload of ‘I always manage to foul it up’s. You *saw*. To put it terms not of “law,” but of “gospel,” God revealed to you the “gold” at the rainbow’s end.

Once you see that inexhaustible supply, you can take and take to your heart’s content. You really can lay off the head-knocks and law-lashes and simply rejoice in the incredibly-surprising “amazing graces.”

Begin as a grateful child of God, and have fun. By His grace you will.

7

THE ULTIMATE QUESTION

Put Squarely By Jesus

“Do you want to be well?” Jesus asked the lame man at the pool (*John 5:6*). How cruel!

“Of course, I want to be well,” he might have snapped. “Do you think I *enjoy* being crippled? Do you think I *like* hobbling to this pool day after tedious day, hoping some unlikely soul will put me in the water while it’s still bubbling?” Do you think I relish being waited on by others? Not earning my own way?”

Well, yes..., that’s entirely possible. You see, not every sick soul wants to be healed. Illness has its advantages. You don’t have to set the alarm and punch the time clock night after dog-tired night and morning after burnt-toast morning. You don’t have to be responsible for others, not even fully for yourself. If something doesn’t get done, you can murmur weakly, “I’ve been sick.” Then bask in the sympathetic glow of those who listen to the pitiful details.

It’s a pertinent question, all right. For one way we deceive ourselves is in fancying that we would like to be whole when health is a very scary prospect, carrying a lot more responsibility than we are ready right now to accept.

A Daring Decision

Many of think we have answered “Yes” to Jesus’ question when in reality we said, “Not yet.” As Blaise Pascal put it, “[People] often believe... they are converted as soon as they think of being converted.” The passing thought is taken for the definitive deed, but the fanciful do not count the cost. We simply cannot choose the comforts of illness and the responsibilities of health.

To choose health is at Jesus’ word to get up and walk... action. To pick up one’s bed and carry it away... making no provision for failure. To quit complaining, “The reason I’m not well is that nobody will help me into the pool, and when I’m trying to crawl in, somebody else always gets in front of me.”

To choose health is to give up the control we have over those who love us *because we are ill*. We will no longer have them hurrying to our bedside at our every whim or whimper. The mother will not develop asthma to get her children home. The father will not contract arthritis to keep his son on the farm. The child will not produce ulcers to keep from going to school. Such illness is an escape from the reality they are unready to face. To choose healing is to choose the responsibility for living a healthy life, and to embark immediately upon it.

Impossible Response

“Take up your bed and walk!” Jesus told the paralytic at the pool. The very thing he could not do! Yet, it was precisely what he *had* to do, if ever he was to be whole. To drive the paralysis from his body would not have healed him, as long as it gripped his mind and soul. He needed more than strength in the knees; he needed courage in the heart. He needed new sight, insight... into himself, his world, his calling.

Unlike the self-righteous, the self-pitying admit the illness. They doubt the cure. What the Great Physician does is face the illness with the paralyzed, that they may face the cure with Him. Unless they shut Him out, they are lured to look from His perspective. Faith forms. Fear fades. The impossible becomes possible. They are nerved to do what they couldn't do, wouldn't even have dared to try. They pick up their beds and walk.

Parting Word

After his healing the paralytic went to the temple. Maybe, to thank God. Perhaps, to report to the authorities who healed him, as they charged him to do. At any rate, Jesus thought it best to find him and give him one last solemn warning. “See, you are well,” He said, “Go, and sin no more, that nothing worse happens to you”

I have no wish to lay added guilt on any guilt-laden soul. It is folly, though, not to recognize that the non-vigilant can fall back into the self-destructive pattern that paralyzed him or her in the first place.

Two years ago I experienced a massive heart attack (apparent death on the operating table), resuscitation and quadruple bypass surgery. Recuperation was long and painful. It was an experience I have no desire to repeat. Today I get up and walk three miles briskly before breakfast. A discipline I keep. No option. I'm constantly tempted to say, “One day won't matter that much.” “It's too hot (or cold) this morning.” “I'll make up for it later.” Then I remember pain I thought no one could endure without lapsing into a merciful unconsciousness.

As I see the drama unfold again, I *image* that old self-situation I could barely endure. “Go,” I hear the Great Physician saying, “and change your behavior, that nothing worse happen to you.” I don't ever want anything *that* bad again, much less worse.

That 's the way it is with you. You don't want to live in the “hell” you've already known. Then walk and talk with Jesus. Look through His eyes. And when He says, “Pick up your bed and walk,” do it. Don't stand around deciding how much the thing weighs and how many pounds you can bench press – pick it up! You'll find a strength that 's not your own and a song, indeed, that is.

But don't try to make the journey alone. You can't. Even if you could, it wouldn't be any fun. We're made for sharing. No one wants to view the Grand Canyon alone. At a breathtaking sight we turn, if need be, to a stranger and point, “There! Just look at that!” We draw her in, and our two lonely worlds are in a moment (for a moment) one. That's the way it is with the rainbow. And one reason I want to share it with you. Only, for God's children the mystic moment is eternal.

Then, be sure you tell your friends, “I'll see you at the rainbow's end.” And, for heaven's sake, don't disappoint them.