

From Abstracts to Absolutes © 2011 Krish Dhanam

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to Zig Ziglar and Carol Mayalata Michael

Maya Michael (1934-2010), my saintly mother-in-law, who demonstrated Christian love in the life she led, the family she raised, and the positions of influence held. Her dignity and poise will always be remembered, her words of encouragement etched on my heart, and the evidence of her presence here forever. Thank you, “Mom,” for welcoming me into your family and showing me how to live for Him.

Mr. Z is the most consistent man I have ever known. Thank you, Sir, for your lessons of a lifetime taught to me for those fifteen years when I had the privilege to watch you encourage the world from the back of many a room. Your inputs in my life and your insight into life have allowed me to see much of the free world. I am grateful for your courage, moved by your resilience, and comforted by your love. You led me in the sinner’s prayer and showed me a new way.

Testimonials

Blaise Pascal says: “Clarity of mind means clarity of passion, too; this is why a great and clear mind loves ardently and sees distinctly what it loves.” And so one word describes this book: “CLEAR!” The answers to questions we have been asking, they’re clear. In a world where the line between right and wrong has become a blur, Krish Dhanam passionately presents truth in very clear and absolute terms and every honest truth-seeking person who wants clarity in life should read this book.

Francis Kong

Inspirational Speaker, Best Selling Author

Media Business Commentator

Manila, Philippines

Krish does a masterful job of bringing every person’s greatest questions into simple yet profound truths. His unique life journey offers a rare perspective that amplifies the absolutes.

Jonathan Shibley

President, Global Advance

At a time where moral relativism has knocked down the fortress of absolutes to a questioning and searching generation, God has raised up a former Hindu—now a passionate follower of Jesus of Nazareth—as one of the most dynamic and skillful communicators and defenders of the faith of our times. *From Abstracts to Absolutes* is a fantastic read that will point every reader to the truth of the person of Jesus Christ. Krish has weaved the God narrative throughout this book with a brilliance that only Krish can do. This is a labor of Krish's love for his Master and his passion for the harvest. Just like his speaking ministry, which is producing an incredible harvest, I strongly believe this book you are holding in your hand will change the destinies of millions.

Sujo John

*Cultural architect and Gospel proclaimer,
Dallas, Texas*

Krish Dhanam has led the way in helping those around him see the beauty of life's most important relationships. So it is with much delight that we as a team at RZIM Life Focus Society, India, commend Krish Dhanam—an admired motivational speaker, faithful “husband of Anila, loving father of Nic” (as he prefers to be identified), and a man whose erudition makes it possible that the art of communication be reflected as a science without the science losing its art! Krish believes that all of this is possible only because of his “Master, The Grand Weaver.” Here is a man who is in the league of the Designer's Specials!

S.D. Reuben

*Chairman, Ravi Zacharias Ministries,
India*

A life with the right relationships has impact. I have known

Krish Dhanam for fifteen years and have interacted with him both as a corporate salesperson and currently as a pastor. As I read *From Abstract to Absolutes*, I was reminded how Krish has profoundly maximized the right relationships in his life. Whether he is addressing a corporate client, a filled-to-capacity sports arena, or a church congregation, Krish's unique ability to communicate with ease what some may consider difficult ideas makes this book a must read. Our culture has lost sight of the simple truths (absolutes) to live a healthy and significant life. In this book, Krish shines light on the confusion to provide a guidepost from which to build your life. Apply these absolutes and prepare to build a life of impact, relevance and influence.

Jay Hellwig

*Pastor, Covenant Church
Carrollton, TX*

You can almost feel the streets of India as Krish walks through them into his journey of faith. Having been a part of that journey as his pastor for many years, I know that his words do not rest in the theoretical, but are lived out every day in his personal faith and practical application with his family, friends, church and interaction with the world. This is a beautiful testimony from the heart of a warrior for Christ.

Jim Ozier

*New Church Development & Congregational Transformation
North Texas Conference, United Methodist Church*

I wholeheartedly recommend *From Abstracts to Absolutes* by Krish Dhanam, a captivating story of one man's relentless personal journey to find God and God's truth. Krish parallels his physical journey, emigrating from India to the United States, with his spiritual journey from the polytheistic religion of his native country of India, to his life-changing encounter with Jehovah God, all the time dealing with the challenges of navigating the traditions and culture of family and homeland. Along the way, Krish creatively intersperses the questions common to man—Who am I? What is life all about?—with the desires that are common to man—the desire to be happy, to be healthy, to have security, and to have peace of mind. A fascinating and compelling read.

Steve Rogers

President, Adrian Rogers Pastor Training Institute

“Krish's personal history is extraordinary. He has traveled a remarkable journey, from a humble beginning to the ultimate encounter. He communicates with sincerity, deep respect, humility and love. Read it! This is an opportunity for personal growth.”

Paul Horgen

Former CEO, Think Mutual Bank

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my bride Anila, who graced me with her hand in marriage. Her words have been a source of strength and her presence the gift of certainty that every man should have. Thank you, Sweetheart, for being a woman of prayer, a mother of encouragement, and a daughter of obedience. To my son Nicolas, I thank you for your continuing display of belief within your own life. Sharing the date of my baptism with you will forever be the highlight of an itinerant life.

My father-in-law Raj Michael has my immense admiration for the pillar he has been within the church universal.

Dr. Ramesh Richard has been and continues to be my

spiritual mentor. His trust in me as a layperson sparked my love for missions, and his example in fortitude and selflessness ignited in me the desire for evangelism. Anna (big brother), I will always be in your debt for your graciousness in introducing this journey in text and encouraging it in reality.

There are many friends and family who have guided my steps along the way. Sujo John, my co-laborer, you are a true inspiration to the word *focus*, and I want to publicly acknowledge you as a friend who has taught me more than you will ever know.

To the many benefactors of Mala Ministries (Brad Huff, Mathew Bennett, Gus Constantine, Doug Parker, The Friendship Class, The Bereans), you know who you are and you have my gratitude forever. A special thanks to Marjory Kent Vickery of Flower Mound, Texas, who gave me her reputation at the launch of our ministry, and Jay and Bettye Rodgers, who funded all my early aspirations of leaving a legacy. Victor Abraham my heart overflows with love for what you have done in my life.

There are many others who played pivotal roles in this journey of preaching, reaching and teaching. To Ravi Zacharias I owe my desire to begin learning again to be an effective vessel. Thank you,. Sir, for allowing me to be a small part of your ministry! To the late, great Adrian Rogers I would like to publicly offer my thanks for having used many an illustration while giving credit whenever possible. I hope this acknowledges the guide you have been to me as the prince of all preachers. My beloved pastor, Jim Ozier, will always have my love for leading me in baptism.

Dad and Mom, I will always admire you for allowing me the freedom to choose in partner, prayer, and person. Thank you for being open to dialog and encouraging of my choices. For the heartache I caused I am sorry, but for the love I have inherited, I am thankful that God chose you to be my earthly parents.

Julie Ziglar Norman and Laurie Magers have always been the constructive critics every writer needs. Thank you!

For those I missed, we will have eternity to share and then our thanks will be unending.

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FOREWORD

Life so easily fits the “story” genre, or is it the other way around? Neither fictional nor poetic, our narratives present a clear beginning, the necessary tensions and resolutions, sufficient complications and climaxes, and an eventual end.

We live life in this genre. We hear it in story form and share life in stories. For a person then to write his own life in story form is not unusual. It might convey overconfidence that attends any motivational speaking, unless there is a humble agenda behind the life story.

In this part-biography and part-manual, a motivational speaker who often addresses thousands comes down the podium steps to personally speak to his family and friends

about his most important discovery.

Krish Dhanam's unique and specific story (like all our seven billion stories at present!) has a message to get across. Having nearly missed out on personally participating in the One Ultimate Story by using religious excuses, cultural questions, and relational implications, he finds himself salvaged.

He doesn't want you to miss out either.

Here and now, he plays his part in the Grand Narrative. For those who have heard him, Krish Dhanam is a public speaker par excellence. You can almost hear him *live* as he writes with heart, humor, and hope to recommend how his search for God's true identity progressed.

He not only found the Way, the Truth and the Life. He was found *by* Him. Yes, by Him. A Person. The Person.

Our lives can attempt to draw principles and prescriptions from the accumulated wisdom of the ages, cultures, religions and philosophies. Unfortunately, they have little to offer since their solutions are abstractions, treating personal life like it were an extrapolation of their theories.

Instead, as all intuitively and already know, abstraction and

concretion cannot be intrinsically and beneficially connected with mere ideas about life. If there were a reliable *personal* bridge between the absolute and the eternal Person and unique and relative persons, the personal search would come to an end. Or else, we would keep on praying, yearning, searching, doing, and never finding. Or being found.

If you would like to get found by the God who pursues you regardless of your success or failure, your caste or culture, your religion or lack of it, read Krish's story. It personally conveys the Only Story written by the Divine Narrator, who lived out His unique and specific story among us, so He can save humanity from sin and its destined consequence.

This book is written for family and friends. I am honored to be considered among them, and humbled that my story and Krish's story overlap. We would be too happy to have you included in this global story. Let us know as soon as possible.

Ramesh Richard ThD, PhD,
Spiritual Philosopher
& Global Counselor
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PREFACE

Who am I? Where do I come from? Whom do I credit with where I am in life today? What makes me laugh? What will make me cry? What will give me hope? Questions like these and countless others plague the human mind every single day. As we traverse the broad expanse of Planet Earth, people from all walks of life and every socio-economic and political climate ask questions similar to these. You must have asked at least one of these six questions during your own lifetime. The answers to these questions do exist, and they are not as complicated as one might think. In seeking to explore the relationship between man and his quest to find inner peace, countless books have been written and many theories espoused. As one such soul who searched and found the answers in one single place, it is my hope to weave a thread of optimism

for you, the reader, so that your search may end in this same place.

The origins of my personal odyssey began in the rural part of southern India amidst confusion and disharmony. The societal structure at that time was hierarchical and the order of the day was a caste system and a class system that had a deep dividing boundary between those that had and those that did not. Unfortunately, for many like me in the middle class that formed a bulk of the one billion plus people in India, we never really knew whether we were poor, self-sufficient, privileged, holy, wealthy, or just different. In a sea of humanity that has everyone living within an arm's length of each other, it was difficult to draw lines of demarcation. My friends included the societal elite who were the entrepreneurs and industrialists who were shaping the landscape of that small town. My colleagues also came from the other side of town, as did most of my family. Our sustenance was sometimes limited to one square meal a day, and every extra bit of currency was being salvaged to mop the brow of future indignities that are part of the social fabric of India.

Call it foresight, divine providence, or just plain luck, but one of those things led me to be educated at a private Christian

school that cost more money than was available. My parents belonged to the high caste of holies called Brahmins. Our lineage was distinctly orthodox, poor in belongings, rich in spirit and abundant in servitude. Helping each other by pushing forward as one big tidal wave of familial joy, our family experienced the worst and the best, usually side by side. Death by disease, alcoholism, suicide and betrayal existed as if they were the norm. Amidst such chaos and confusion existed a passion and devotion for the gods of this world that were responsible for lives that finished and those that were going to be given another life on earth. Devotion in this high caste of people was not limited to the most pious, but was visible in every walk of life. The invocation of God through ceremony, rite and tradition seemed like an endless parade of praise for the unknown and the unknowable.

At the Christian school I would hear prayers of a different sort being broadcast over the intercom before class and during assembly. These prayers made specific mention of a living God. Deity was referenced as a “He.” Divinity was said to have walked the earth as the unknowable became knowable in a barn in Bethlehem. God supposedly sent His own Son to die for man’s transgressions. It made for good post-assembly debate among the young and restless of

rural India. Ideologies were being shaped into a reasoning that would take more than twenty years to manifest. What began as humble curiosity to find answers to life's simple questions would culminate in the bowing of a knee and a confession of a tongue almost thirty years later in a fairly crowded chapel roughly half a world away in a place called Texas.

The answers to my own queries and a possible path for your curiosity are the purpose of this book. I hope you will journey with me as we cross the majesty of this created world. Viewing the unfolding drama of simplicity, intrigue and hope through the innocent eyes of one who experienced two worlds in one lifetime will give you a unique perspective. My ultimate victory by claiming the grace of "The One" who conquered death, and His joy in the extension of unmerited favor of mercy and compassion, will give you new and unique ways to shape and mold your own journey. The pages are designed to give you a glimpse into the eternal purpose of man, where the questions will be answered once and for all.

Krish Dhanam

Flower Mound, Texas

INTRODUCTION

The opportunity to experience freedom of worship is denied to many people in this world. However, many seem to have found religion, and in most cases are open about the acceptance of a “higher power.” Some found it through missionaries, others through lore and customs that were handed down. Still others gained knowledge of the omnipresent through divine revelation. But the debate about the origins of religion and the status of daily worship rituals that make each group unique will continue to exist in the minds of many who read this book. Add to this the debate on the true identity of God and His plans for the masses that inhabit earth and you have a quandary that perplexes most people. This always leads to the most famous question about the identity of God and whether

a single group of people practicing a certain religion have figured it out. My story began amidst such uncertainty and observation and culminated at an altar where all that was required of me was acceptance of forgiveness. That God could be personal and reveal Himself to me if I sought a relationship with Him was both promising and liberating, as all the other things I was praying to and for were not producing any inner joy.

The journey from a belief that was “different” to the acceptance of salvation that promised me an eternity with a risen Savior is the purpose behind this effort. Drawing parallels between the two religions that I have been exposed to, and the reason for choosing a relationship that was so different from any of the lore I was a part of, will be the goal of this effort. I pray that you will look at this with an open mind and constantly ask yourself the same questions I asked on an odyssey that is almost three decades and counting. While in my earthly roles I cannot judge anyone for their beliefs, I write this with a clean heart, believing that someone who can forgive me removed all condemnation for me at a cross. God became man so that He could suffer and die for anything I ever did or will do. This, to me,

was a freedom like none other. Is it possible for everyone? This book is not designed to shatter your belief in your own practices and rituals or to convince you of my methods. The questions that I want you to answer are not designed to force you to believe in what I say, but to allow you to believe in a God who might want to reside in you.

I have often heard it said that both fear and faith have the same definition. Both are based on the unknowable and the unquantifiable. I am not an expert on either fear or faith, but a qualified authority on how my fears, when replaced by my faith, brought life into perspective, ambition into focus, and promise into the realm of possibility. I had learned as a child to pray to God and ask for God's mercies on my family and our problems. I had learned to recite the prayers with cadence so as to invoke the mightiness of deliverance into a life that seemed chaotic at times. I never questioned authority for fear of repercussion. I never knew what invoking the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in you could do for a boy searching for wonder and a young adult seeking direction. My prayer is that this book will deliver you into a free relationship with the living God and all that He has in store for you.

CHAPTER 1



THE LORE OF TRADITION

The air was filled with a deep brown haze as the inhabitants of the small Southeastern Indian town were awakening from their slumber. The sounds of this morning were the same as those of mornings past. The busy cacophony on the street in front of my parents' home had the usual contributions from livestock and humanity that were sharing the water supply like every other day. My mother was beginning her daily ritual of worship, and the offering being given was specific so as to seek a blessing that was uniquely needed. It was another typical morning in the house of a devoted family whose orthodoxy in ritual was preceded only by a lineage and ancestry that was steeped in tradition. I was the youngest in a family of many. The immediate family was comprised of only four,

but the extended family that included both the giving and taking of support was quite large. Dad was a hardworking man whose bootstrap success story was the conversational focus of many a small group dreaming of escaping poverty. I have always loved my family and all they stood for. Our ancestry had certainly lived right for them to be enjoying this life—reincarnated in such blessings and happiness. A roof over my head, food to eat, creature comforts like indoor plumbing and running water, were gifts that could have only come by the good favor of a god who had given us this life as a token of appreciation for living the previous one with reverence and piety.

Today on my way to school I would say a special prayer and give the high priest an offering to a god who was the mythological embodiment of strength. There is a special set of prayers that every child is encouraged to learn to give him/her continued protection. As I left home that morning, I knew that my mother would be happy that I was going to stop by the temple on the way to school. The school I went to was a school that had been started by Christian missionaries and was named after a saint who had died in India of cholera. This Christian school was a haven for the

children of the elite, as this was the best education money could buy. In the seventy-odd years since its inception, the passing rate of high school graduates was almost a hundred percent; making it one of the more prestigious institutions that one could belong to. Everyone who was anyone in that small southeastern Indian town sent their children there. The waiting list was long, and in some cases people applied for admission even before the child was born. I would never graduate from this school, but the formidable seeds of spiritual change that would serve me on another continent many years later were being sown here into a young and impressionable mind.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse (Romans 1:20).

I remember stopping off at the temple on many occasions and giving the priest a few coins and a whole coconut I had as an offering. The coconut was then cracked open and the milk was poured over a miniature idol of another god in the outer courtyard of the temple. Here people

were within a stone's throw of the inner sanctum. I never understood why I could not pray to God directly and be blessed by God directly. Instead, I had to settle for a lesser blessing this day. Maybe this was my lot in life and I had to make do with it. The priest sprinkled some holy water on my head and applied a dash of red powder to my forehead. I skipped merrily along to attend school. This would be another ritualistic day in the life of a young lad in the peninsula that had seen many things, including occupation and territorial rule from the Queen's armies for over two hundred years.

In school I was an average student. I did not love school, but did not despise it, either. After all, only the privileged were able to attend school and deity had to be praised for this blessing. The reader needs to understand that the curse of poverty in India is so huge that the distinction between those that have and those that don't is more rooted in the class system and the caste system than in any other thing. This makes the angle of religion and piety great fodder for the ones who are elected to represent the others. The Indian infrastructure that is little more than six decades old in its current free form is actually built on a foundation that is

centuries old; a foundation that saw kingdoms and fiefdoms advance the role of indebtedness and karmic destiny to the downtrodden masses who toiled for generations, accepting their life as a curse from unhappy gods.

THE TRADITION OF TRADITION

Children in every generation are taught the time-honored principles of gratitude and respect, which, in turn, help them succeed wherever they choose to flourish in the world. From the crazy ideas and idiosyncrasies of the emperors who ruled her, all the way to the last emissary of a monarch who helped her become free, this land of Gandhi has always placed tradition and lore in the forefront of everything that could be accomplished. My family was no different. We were told to respect our elders and not question the tradition of the family. The innocence of youth, coupled with the seeming bounty available amidst perceived misery and confusion, was enough to let me continue in the ways of my family.

So continued the age-old questions of *Who am I? Am I a child of tradition and a by-product of lore, or was there a*

divine plan for me long before I was a twinkle in the eyes of my earthly parents? Could there be a God who had a concept for creation that included His own orchestration of which I was a significant part? The search for the answers to some of these questions was an ongoing part of my quest for spiritual peace and holy discipline. We never rebelled because it was uncivilized and disrespectful to do so. We never challenged the myths of mythology or the shallow responses given to us by the so-called “knowledgeable” regarding some of the practices and their origins. *Why are only some animals sacred and others unholy? Did not the God of all creation create all living things? Why is there this disparity among those that have and those that don't? If we were supposed to be the most tolerant of people and despised another country for subjugating the masses of my motherland for two centuries, why did we do the same to the “untouchable” class? Slavery is a curse to all humanity and the West was vilified for the treatment of the slaves and rightfully so. Why, then, does there exist the abuse of humans in the trafficking of their flesh and the parading of their innocence for the lustful consumption of the rich?* It was strange that all this debauchery co-existed with piety on the banks of the same rivers and crowded streets of almost every town.

The innocence of the countryside, coupled with the imagination that sprung from poverty, led to a certain peace that seemed to exist in spite of the confusion that surfaced in many facets of everyday life. I wanted answers, but was happy to be able to have a ball to play with. Looking around at the destitute millions who would not have the privilege to line their stomachs, leave alone their minds, I developed complacency about my own search for significance. All around me I saw the degradation of the human spirit. Today when I travel through the land of my birth, I weep for not realizing that the love of God has got to be what keeps these people moving. Somewhere in the dark mazes of the slums infested with refuse there is an incommunicable joy that is actually the human spirit destined to survive the conditions. Some refer to these survivors as “the forgotten diamonds who are yet to shine.”

A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit (Proverbs 15:13).

TRUTH AND GOD

Part of my belief system of predestination and preordination,

as it dealt with a life whose purpose had already been foretold, was that whatever happened did so for a reason. Christianity would show me that coincidence was, is, and always will be, God's way of remaining anonymous. This simply means that God does preordain us but for His purpose. With this new understanding, it became easy to believe that God had a plan for me. Making an allowance for being liberated this way does incredible things for a heart that seeks absolution. It seems that it is only later in life when we begin to understand that a heart that was created for adoration of majesty and grandeur will always feel slighted if not given that opportunity.

The information of my youthful pilgrimages taught me that the curses of a person's modernity were a result of the transgressions of their past. Christianity stated and continues to state that the past is forgiven by the shed blood at Calvary and the future is assured at the right hand of God. One view is a promise of permanent cleansing and the other an illusion that forces us to speculate about our own future. The mind that is created for imagination and a heart that is designed for love begin the conflict with each other in an illogical world.

The choices, when you begin to understand them, are really simple. Yet the feelings in my heart were being shaped by a series of such coincidences that had spanned three decades. How many good deeds could my ancestors have done for me to have a roof over my head and clothes on my back and food in my stomach? How much worse could the ancestors of the child knocking on the window of my car have done to be subjugated to begging for morsels of food in tropical heat that makes asphalt melt? Can the God of creation allow this, and does He promise misery to the bad and luxury to the good? If so, why do so many of the good people do such bad things behind the high walls of their secluded living? God has to be someone who can see beyond the rituals of piety conducted in His name by day and the shameful atrocities committed at night. God must have a plan that, to the naked eye and simple mind, would seem like a coincidence.

TRUTH FOR MAN

The disciplinarian-headmistress of that Christian school was an influence early on and some of the prayers she prayed and the morality-laced stories she paraphrased had an impact.

She was an educator born on the 4th of July. Could God use a person whose own life would later be challenged to save a soul? He selected people with worse reputations to save humanity, so that answer would be a resounding “yes!” Marriage would bring a union of God-fearing people and the extended circle of influence included a mother-in-law who was an educator. A multi-lingual inspiration who read the Bible in three different languages, she, too, was born on the 4th of July. This marriage would be an inter-caste and also an inter-faith marriage. God’s salesman, who will be introduced later, would be the catalyst that would change my life and bring me to a confession on my knees. He was a motivational speaker *born again* on the 4th of July. A principal of a school in Southeastern India, an educated botany professor from Northern India, and a cookware salesman from Yazoo City, Mississippi, would be the people God would use to give me the same information, all with a connection to the same date of July 4th, the birth date of my adopted homeland. God chose a definite date so that I would never doubt how He fuses the stories that need to intersect for His glory. I feel that this journey was a deliberate plan from the Almighty seeking a loving relationship with me. When I started to piece together

the map that God weaves for each and every one of us, I began to understand what an ostrich feels like every time it takes its head out of the sand.

Christian apologist C.S Lewis puts it in a stunning way in his book *Mere Christianity*. He says, “The map is admittedly colored paper, but there are two things you have to remember about it. In the first place, it is based on what hundreds and thousands of people have found out by sailing the real Atlantic. In that way it has behind it masses of experience, just as you could have from standing on the beach; only, while yours would be a single isolated glimpse, the map fits all those different experiences together.” The concept of God to me, in my understanding of the pantheistic worldview, was like a glimpse from a beach into a vast foray of speculation and imagination. However, when I encountered the teachings of the Bible I felt that a new birth, coupled with a new insight, allowed me to re-chart the course for a new voyage with God as my captain and my anchor. That God would choose me to take on this journey, just as He had done for others who sought Him through all of time, made the voyage tempting and the offer irresistible.

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (John 3:3).

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit (John 3:8).

IS GOD A SPECIALIST.

The caste wars saw a certain kind of people relegated to the ranks of the untouchables, whose primary role was to pick up the refuse of those above them on the social altimeter. It seemed that just a couple of decades earlier a man had died trying to establish equality for all of God's people. People exalted that great soul with the title "Mahatma." He had called those untouchables "Harijan," or "God's people." His reward was being assassinated by a fanatic who believed that too much had been given to Pakistan during the partition of the two countries at the end of Colonial Rule in India. I remembered, through many a history and social studies class, that the efforts of those that fought for India's peace and harmony always had non-violence and civil disobedience as the themes. Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr., a preacher and civil rights leader from Atlanta, Georgia, traveled to India to understand the architecture of a bloodless revolution. His efforts led to an entire race of people proclaiming, “Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last!” While discrimination still exists, the African American populace has made great strides in the world. Here I was, born into a free and liberated India around the time of Dr. King’s visit to India, wondering if God had a plan for me.

I came to the conclusion at a tender age that I was not responsible for my heritage but would indeed be held accountable for my future. Thus began a discovery of what religious differences were all about. Perception had to be replaced with a fact-finding odyssey, and the search for truth was more than a passing thought. I was now beginning to get into trouble for challenging all religions, and this included making fun of Christians as well. They wore unconventional dresses, worshipped only on Sunday, and celebrated twice a year at Christmas and Easter. More important, they ate cake a lot and sang all their holiday songs in English. They also seemed to have this specialized God for less than two percent of a population. It was apt

that since they were a minority they probably needed only one God for all them.

Back in my school, new thoughts and ideas that came more from force than willful acceptance were being placed in my mind. The prayers bothered me, as they had specificity in their cadence. The words seemed directed to a real God, asking for His mercy and grace. Forgiveness was petitioned on others, and we were asked to pray for the sins of people who were in my eyes bad people, and God was asked to intercede on behalf of nations and principalities. The stories of biblical lore that were shared during pageants had a unique blend of morality, belief, and more importantly, hope. For the first time I felt that even though I was not a Christian, maybe the God of Christianity was real.

Be still, and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10).

Christians in my childhood were a minority, and their worship patterns and expressiveness for the joy in their own hearts had to be curtailed, in most cases, for fear of reprisal. After all, this was India coming off two hundred-plus years of colonial rule by so-called Christians who did

vile and dirty things in the name of the Queen, who seemed to invoke the name of the Lord in all of her proclamations.

The consensus was then that this Jesus was just a holy man who, like other deities and idols, was a prophet of good news. I would learn later that Christ Himself left no room for the assumption that He was one of many who could do good deeds. In His own words He emphatically proclaimed that He was *the way and the truth and the life* (John 14:6), a certain divinity by proxy of affiliation, yielding something a little more holy than mere mortals could comprehend.

Jesus lived in an obscure part of the globe under Roman rule 2000 years ago. He did not travel more than 200 miles on a single journey in His lifetime; He never wrote a book and did not speak a foreign language. He lived under the stigma of an illegitimate birth, was in public ministry for only three years, and died a criminal's death. Yet His influence has spread far and wide throughout the world. Christians claim that this man was unique, and the evidence seems to overwhelmingly sustain it. Even those who would rather dismiss Him have difficulty denying His incomparable mark on human history. As

biblical scholar F.F. Bruce notes, “Some writers may toy with the fancy of a ‘Christ-myth,’ but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar.” Jesus’ life in and of itself is distinctive; that He remains a life of influence is truly exceptional.

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Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

THE FEARFUL GOD OF MY YOUTH

As I kept asking the question of who I was, the image of a rigid God who punished faults and rewarded good deeds seemed to recur. This confusion manifested into a dull tolerance for the beliefs of my parents and a meager curiosity into befriending the different. I started to pay attention to the stories being told over the intercom by the headmistress of the school. Here was a strict lady who,

for all practical purposes, because of her disciplinary ways could have been representing the heat of another side. I had been reprimanded by her and beaten physically on more than one occasion for transgressions that were minor in the eyes of a seven-year-old. Years later I would publicly thank that lady on another continent for the influential role she played in shaping a mind that sought out answers that were difficult, unpopular, and full of pain for those affected by them.

One of the stories told by some adults in our town was a narrative about two truant kids who always got into trouble. They would sneak into some of the houses and steal a bit of candy or take something that had been kept aside for an important occasion. One day, someone stole something of significance from a house where a wedding ceremony was in progress and these two boys were immediately suspected. When the elders noticed the two kids hiding behind a banyan tree, they grabbed the kids by the scruff of the neck and brought them forward. Each one would receive his punishment from an ethically neutral village elder who was summoned. The boys were now scared. The first boy went in and the second boy was asked to

wait outside. The elder reprimanded the child physically while repeatedly asking the child where God was in their lives for them to do something like that. Not sure what it was they had supposedly done, the child kept saying he did not know where God was and this only infuriated the elder even more. Physically hurting from the punishment and trembling from the verbal tirade, when the first lad emerged the second child wanted to know what they were being accused of. The first child said, "I don't know, but it seems that someone has stolen God and they think we did it."

The gods of my youth had roles and responsibilities. Some protected me from evil and others equipped my intellect. Some could rain prosperity on you while others could bring about destruction. There were figures that promised the blessing of creation and mythological movies made about the god of death who seemed to want you for his own purposes. Was there "One" that could give me life and wash away my guilt and prepare a place for me with Him for all eternity? Was there "One" that was promised that would deliver us from ourselves? Christianity offered that solution in Jesus, who ransomed Himself to Himself.

The only hostage situation ever in which the ransom was paid to the world by One who came into the world so that when He died He was able to say no one will ever be held hostage if they believe in this perpetual ransom.

A Chinese proverb states that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. These baby steps of trying to lift the veil of curiosity and gaze into a beyond of promise would lead me to challenge the beliefs being instilled in me. And most of the time I would rebel against the norms by fashioning arguments that were mostly superficial and sometimes humorous. Nobody took me seriously and many laughed at the comedic side of a spiritual search. Years later, when my conversion was complete and my new lineage began as a result of the choices I made for my own son, I became an outsider to my upbringing. The so-called religious tolerance of the live-and-let-live kind in a society that seemed to gain and lose by its platitudes of pluralism seemed to disappear when the decision was made.

I was reminded time and again by the friends of my past and advocates of a different worldview that whatever I did I had done to impress a bride who came to me from a

different faith. Others would say I sold out to the West to become like them so I could gain a monetary advantage in a fledgling sales career that was going nowhere and not getting there quickly enough. A tradition of thousands of years was competing with a small spark of joy in the heart of one who was just glad that he could talk to and be delivered by someone as personal as a living Savior.

Here I was at the crossroads of doubt and uncertainty. If you are there, I hope God sends you His personal salesman to sell you on the only product you will ever need. It comes with a lifetime warranty and batteries are unnecessary. With it come spiritual health, riches, and joy (which is more than happiness). To educate all of humanity He delivered His Son unto the world. To witness to individuals who need personal attention, He uses a sense of humor and sends a servant who looks like you, talks like you, walks like you, yet this person seems to have an indefinable quality which you want but know is not for sale.

CHAPTER 2



ENTER GOD'S SALESMAN

“**T**he most important and most thrilling discovery in life is finding the way home to God. There are signposts that point us home to Him.” *David Shibley, Founder, Global Advance*

When I was twenty-four I married my college sweetheart and migrated to the United States of America. Needing to find a profession that was less discerning with regards to accent and ethnicity, I chose the profession of selling. Here I struggled until one day I heard from one whom chance puts in your path and protocol beckons you listen to. God's very own salesman, talking about all that life has to offer to a crowd of thousands who were simultaneously searching for some part of the total package he was selling.

The concepts on success that were shared by this motivator over a three-hour period definitely piqued in me a new interest. The legendary orator and gifted statesman known to the masses in the West as “Zig,” shed a new light on the principles of success. It was a unique irony that the day was the 26th of January, 1989. January 26th is celebrated as Republic Day in India, when a young fledgling democracy wrote its charter that manifested into a journey of social, cultural and economic liberation.

The unique nature of his message was the simplicity that surrounded the principles he was espousing. Time and again he revealed that he had a personal relationship with a Savior whom he called his “Heavenly Father.” He reiterated that though he had lost his earthly father when he was just five, he found his Heavenly Father when he was forty-five, and this “Father” he could never lose. He stated that there are only eight things everyone wants in this world, and that we tend to complicate the imagery of success by increasing the scope of our wants, needs and desires. **The eight things everyone wants are happiness, health, prosperity, security, peace of mind, good family relationships, friends, and hope that tomorrow will be**

better. That day I made my first set of notes about a success that was not purely monetary.

Even though I have traveled many miles since that day, I often find myself going back to those early messages and being re-enforced by their simplicity and consistency. Mr. Ziglar has stood the test of time on the national and international stage as the standard for unapologetic, unabashed and undiluted spirituality. I vividly remember a time when we were in Phoenix and he had just finished a speech and was told by someone through a note that they did not appreciate his boldness for his faith. After all, this is a country that has to respect the “separation of church and state” and, in their mind, this was obviously a violation of that edict. He looked at me and simply said that reacting to one person who disagreed amongst a crowd of four hundred was not only foolish but also bad marketing. I began to ponder as to how many things in my own life I had agreed to because of tradition and had not challenged because of curiosity. Is there more to matters of the heart that remain unchallenged? Is the human mind in a constant state of flux as it tries to reconcile what is expected versus what is being felt? Why was I so enamored with a man who

had nothing in common with my own identity? Why did he care so much for me that he was always eager to share his faith with me? So many questions and seemingly so little time as I was truly obsessed with making a living and chasing the stuff that the American dream was all about.

At the opposite end of my own thinking was how I was taught as a child to blindly accept our god-given fate and live with a condition that had seen me accept orthodox tradition, unseemingly difficult rituals, and worship patterns that were not explained. In addition, we learned that your present was a by-product of your past life and your next life would be a result of the works you did in this one. Listening to Mr. Ziglar provided the line in the sand between lore and progress. He showed me clarity between the abstracts that had defined me to the absolutes that would liberate me. The solutions he provided were not qualitative but actually quantitative. In addition, the answers to every question I had were not designed to show me his mind but reveal his heart. He was not interested in winning an argument with me—only in having a union with me that would defy geography and genetics. Finally, a place in life where the impossible becomes possible as a published

author and international icon befriends a telemarketer, not for profit but for eternity. I was beginning to appreciate this newfound friendship.

The traditions of my youth where age and wisdom never intersect with innocence and naivety were being challenged. Here was a man of great accomplishment seeking to guide a child and doing so not for personal gain. He has since been a surrogate father to me and a man who revealed to me how to live life. His only reward was the words he would hear on the other side when his Maker would say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

NOTHING IS THE ABSENCE OF SOMETHING

Every time I talked to people from my own roots, their opinions changed and their ideologies about faith, relationships and interaction with society seemed to change. God became a convenience that need not be understood—just accepted. Questioning something usually was followed by long periods of silence for fear of societal reprisal. This was the chorus of response from the so-called literary and scientific elite—the quantitative minds who seemed to accept geology and zoology in the same breath as astrology and numerology.

I would later learn that truth by nature is exclusive, and everything cannot be right at the same time.

God's salesman never wavered. His message on the cassettes of the '80s was the same as the CDs of the '90s and the DVDs of the new millennium. Whether the group was a pastoral staff of ten or a stadium filled with hope-seekers in the thousands, "Zig" always preached prosperity and eternity in the same way. I wanted to have everything that Zig was selling because it sounded so definite, but I was skeptical as to the true identity of the God that this man claimed to know personally. That couldn't be possible; only those with the appearance of a deep spirituality can comprehend the workings of creation. Solitude and silence must be a precursor to wisdom and teaching. Here was a simple man proclaiming love for his earthly family and his Heavenly Father, and there was something about his genuine passion that made me want to know him. As I write this I have finished two decades of observing him and he has not changed his message for anyone in all that time. He was always learning and always teaching. Every time he bought a book that challenged him, he would buy one for me. I wondered why he would want to do this and asked

him. He replied that it was his heart's desire to ensure that I was equipped to answer the questions I had in my own mind. But, like all skeptics, I still had questions—many more questions.

The questions I asked myself were – *1. What is this “Good Book”? 2. Does it really offer advice on living? 3. Can God be called a Father and would He want to have a relationship with man? 4. Are the principles of success really in the Bible? 5. Does every holy text offer such sound advice and can ordinary people understand those texts? 6. If God wanted to talk to man whom He created, would He not make it simple so they could understand Him? 7. Can the thread of life and death and a divine plan be actually proven? 8. Can a mere mortal have a relationship with God, or does he always have to go through someone more pious, more pure and more pristine?* The journey of the next fifteen years is the rest of the story.

The answers I found –

1. **What is the “Good Book”?** The good book is the Bible and it is a living document where prophecies have been chronicled and many of them have already

come to pass. Thirty-three or so men wrote the sixty-six books of the Bible over a fifteen hundred-year period on three continents and in three different languages, and yet it shows an accuracy and consistency unlike any other text.

In no other case is the timeline between the writing of the original document and the date of the earliest existing manuscript as short as in the case of the New Testament. No scholar of ancient texts would listen to an argument against the authenticity of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates just because the earliest existing manuscripts of their writings are thousands of years old. We take the content and their explanation at face value even though there are only a few copies of the original manuscripts that have survived. Yet the New Testament is constantly called into question by critics, even though we have more copies of the original manuscripts available.

“After I set out to refute Christianity intellectually and couldn’t, I came to the conclusion the Bible was true and Jesus Christ was God’s Son.” *Josh McDowell*,

author of Evidence that Demands a Verdict.

2. **Does it really offer advice on living?** *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12).

From the laws of Leviticus still practiced with great stringency by the orthodox Jew, to the lessons of Paul to the churches in Asia Minor on how to live godly lives, we see the Bible as an inextricable document as it interfaces with humanity. No other book takes on the pursuit of life from infancy to adulthood with such clarity as the Bible. Many other books offer advice on living, but to some degree this advice is not open for interpretation and is usually given by the one who is allowed to read the musings on behalf of others. The Bible is a different story. As Adrian Rogers put it so eloquently, the Bible is God's love letter to His people. If you don't understand it, then you must be reading someone else's mail. From advice on disciplining the child, to marital relationships and romance, the Bible

differs in the personal touch it gives its reader.

3. **Can God be called a Father and would He want to have a relationship with me?** ... *no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord* (Philemon 1:16). A Christian's status as a member of God's family transcends all other relationships. The brethren in the Christian community consider themselves children of God, and the extended family worshipping a risen Savior where one common vision transcends all other beliefs. Compare this to the possible doubts caused by those who felt allegiance to one temple versus another and one god versus another. For me, the pantheon of options became confusing and the simple answers with one book and one God for solutions made more sense. Why would God deliberately make a relationship with Him difficult?

4. **Are the principles of success really in the Bible?** *That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers* (Psalm 1:3). When

Scripture says that “in all they do they prosper,” it does not grant us immunity from failure. Nor is it a guarantee of health, wealth and prosperity. What it means is that if we are obedient to the message of the Bible, and stay wise to its instructions, the fruit that we bear will give us prosperity and we will in turn have received God’s approval.

Contrast that with offerings made out of fear of reprisal; sanctions made through sacrifice to ask God to smile His fortune on you a little more than your neighbor because you were better at the discipline of rituals. Sometimes we need to pause and ask ourselves if God is truly honored when rituals take priority over reverence.

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father (John 14:12).

5. **Does every holy text offer such sound advice, and can ordinary people understand those texts?** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with*

God, and the Word was God (John 1:1). What Jesus did and what He taught are tied inseparably to who He is. John shows Jesus as fully God and fully man. The Bible is filled with narratives that focus on God's need to rescue humanity from sin.

Compare this to the belief that you can never be totally forgiven, and your goal in life is not an eternity based on God's doing but an endless cycle based on your own doing apart from God. Couple this with the fact that it might take you many lifetimes and your own goal is to actually become a god, and you can see the reason why few are learned and the others just follow them. Opinions are easily formed, because with so much to grasp and so much to understand, it is easier to follow someone who claims to have knowledge.

Pastor Jack Graham of Prestonwood Baptist Church says that knowledge is learned and wisdom is lived and that there is no wisdom apart from God. If a religious text was complex in its offering and provided no real help for daily living from diet and work to charity and love, then one would need someone to interpret what it

meant to the individual who was reading it. Andrew Szabo, a marketing strategist from Dallas, Texas, offered a narrative in one of his lectures where he shared that the Bible is the only text whose author appears every time you open it to read it. This means that you feel a personal connection to the spirit of the author every time you read it.

- 6. If God wanted to talk to man whom He created, would He not make it easy for such a dialog to take place?** *The concept of man communicating directly with God in a conversation was alien to me. Even more difficult to experience was the possibility of God talking directly to me. God was Someone who knew you were alive but had nothing to do with your life. Your penance and prayer was to petition a blessing, but there were so many rituals and superstitions that worship became a habit and idols just represented a visible presence of something believed. When I learned that there was a man named Jesus who walked the earth and whose sole purpose as the Son of God was for mankind to see His humanity before they experienced His divinity, my perspective on organized religion changed. The*

conversations I could have with this God were real and personal and the prayers were simple. His instruction to all—Wherever you are there I am also. The need for an omnipresent God that would find me instead of the other way around was one of those transcending moments.

7. **Can the thread of life and death and a divine plan be actually proven?** *One of the basic tenets of all major religions is the need for proof. If God has to prove Himself for man to be faithful, that frailty does not exist because of the absence of proof but because of the presence of ignorance. One person laid out the following four scenarios and asked man to draw his own conclusion on belief.*

1. If you believe in God and He does exist at the end, then you win.
2. If you don't believe in God and He does exist, in the end you lose.
3. If you don't believe in God and He doesn't exist, you have led a shallow life devoid of purpose.

4. If you do believe in God and He does not exist, you have led a life of purpose.

The only thing that leads to a productive life is a belief in something bigger than all of science, philosophy, logic and reason. Thus, when it comes down to proof, sometimes the simpler things might be easier to believe, like when someone avows that they will rise from the dead and then they do and that is witnessed and recorded—that's all the proof that is needed. The whole premise of belief is the story of the resurrection. No other religion or text talks about a living Savior whose birth, death and resurrection were prophesied. Maybe we all need to ask the questions, *how best can God understand the suffering and plight of the world He created? Is humanity better served if God became man once or if millions of men became gods forever?*

The truth is sometimes so simple it is easy to miss the main points of what it reveals. Maybe the answer lies in the simplicity. If God told man that He would send His own Son to die for the sins of humankind, then that kind of love should be understood as a solution to

our despair in turbulent times. In a world filled with mayhem, doubt and uncertainty, is not the promise of compassion and benevolence the answer for those that seek a small glimpse of hope? **Why would you want the proof of God to be your suffering? Why would you not want the proof of God to be His suffering?**

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 (John 3:16).

8. **Can a mere mortal have a personal relationship with God, or does he always have to go through someone more pious, pure and pristine?** The question of a relationship with God is like any other relationship. Christ's relationship with the church is like that of a bride and groom. His relationship with man is that of a father and a child. His relationship with God was that of a Son. His relationship with the early apostles was that of a brother. His relationship with the people was that of teacher. I began to see that God did want to have a personal relationship with me.

Francis Thompson, a brilliant Englishman who suffered from his own addictions and struggled with the concept of God, was on the run for most of his life. He was given laurels for his writing and yet was a stranger to his own journey as he spent most of his life chasing himself through London.

The Kingdom of God

*O WORLD invisible, we view thee,
 O world intangible, we touch thee,
 O world unknowable, we know thee,
 Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!
 Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
 The eagle plunge to find the air—
 That we ask of the stars in motion
 If they have rumor of thee there?
 Not where the wheeling systems darken,
 And our benumbed conceiving soars! —
 The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
 Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.
 The angels keep their ancient places—
 Turn but a stone and start a wing!
 'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,*

*That miss the many-splendored thing.
 But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
 Cry—and upon thy so sore loss
 Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
 Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.
 Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
 Cry—clinging to Heaven by the hems;
 And lo, Christ walking on the water,
 Not of Genesareth, but Thames!*

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Outlined with great clarity is the thought that when we choose not to run then the God of the universe will reveal Himself to us, not in some indescribable paradise but in our every walk of life. As you read this further, I am hopeful you are drawing nearer to a search for truth that is absolute and an identity of God that can reveal to you the specific and personal plan laid out for you before time began.

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5).

CHAPTER 3



EVERYONE WANTS TO BE HAPPY AND HEALTHY

“**G**od is not merely good, but goodness; goodness is not merely divine, but God.” *C. S. Lewis - Christian Reflections, 1943*

Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, LORD. They rejoice in your name all day long; they celebrate your righteousness (Psalm 89:15-16).

Growing up in in India, I had never learned how to equate happiness as something that I deserved. Teachings of fate and destiny taught me on an ongoing basis that God was to be idolized and revered, but never to be questioned. The premise then was that you petitioned God through

endless sacrifice and ritual to give you a blessing, but were doing so with a pre-existing understanding that your life was a result of previous ones. The process seemed to defy logic, but was so steeped in tradition that it never mattered what you thought. Today I simply ask the question, *Are the thoughts and attitudes you have based on knowledge or lore?*

How can you petition God to give you something when you don't know what you did to deserve what you already have? If God will not forgive my past and give me a blessed assurance of a future beside Him in eternity, what is the purpose of life? The closed nature of the process led me to ask many questions about the pursuit of happiness.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

Just imagine being able to decipher that purpose and finding happiness in what you do in this world. This approach was alien to me in that I had the image of God being angry with me because of something that was directly my responsibility or the indirect attributes of my ancestry. As a

child of such surroundings, it was almost a welcome relief to know that God saw me as His child, and just as my earthly parents toiled and labored for my comfort, my Heavenly Father was going to provide me discipline and guidance through His Word. This kind of love and happiness I could understand and comprehend, because the concept of God being a God of grace and mercy is easier to live with than thinking God is waiting to punish you.

To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind (Ecclesiastes 2:26).

It was easier to comprehend the benevolence of wisdom and happiness as a result of seeking God than an unending cycle of deeds based on tradition.

CAN YOU HAVE HAPPINESS THROUGH OTHERS?

In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among

women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" (Luke 1:42-45).

Elizabeth was awaiting the birth of her own child, yet expressed joy in Mary's selection as the mother of the Messiah. Just like in this instance, the Bible is filled with situations that talk about happiness and joy. Christian love is unique in that it is birthed deep inside each person, as a personal relationship with God. There is no middle man to tell you that your happiness is dependent on anything other than unadulterated, undiluted, pure worship and arduous reverence. When I think about the grace you get by reveling in another's joy as an edict from God, it is comforting. Contrast this with the belief that another person's fortune is because of something in their past and you can see why conflict in ideology exists. Giving a Creator permission to rule His creation is actually more liberating and open-minded than the narrowness critics of the Gospel claim. However, it is to be noted by the reader

that skeptics, when told about this Gospel of love, are always quick to interject the horrendous deeds committed in the name of Christ during the Crusades. Common sense and historical revelation tell us that no philosophy is to be judged by its abuse. We do not vilify Benjamin Franklin for inventing electricity because it has led to the use of the electric chair. Dr. Ravi Zacharias states clearly in his defense of Christianity that more people have been killed by atheistic minds than by theistic minds because atheism has no justification in it to separate right from wrong. If there is no belief in a Creator of morals, then the natural progression does not need to adhere to a moral law. Time allows us to look at the totality of abuse and its reconciliation in the same way that we look at supposed good actually doing more harm than the good it intended in well-meaning social causes.

LORD, SPARE MY SON

In a seemingly unique twist of fate, the unexpected happened. It was the spring of '94 and I was celebrating professional success and feeling invincible as I began to climb the proverbial rungs of the ladder of success. One day, while

reveling in the immediate moments of a sales victory, I got carried away and decided to go celebrate with colleagues. Most accomplishments are usually fodder for bragging rights at boring parties, anyway! Unbeknownst to me, my little son, only ten months old at the time, took critically ill and had dehydrated quite rapidly because of a stomach virus that was playing havoc with his insides. My bride tended to him with concern, consternation, and an undoubting resolve that comes from her strong and faithful roots. When I arrived at the house, the sight that greeted me sickened me. I got a motivational speech from my bride who, with a quiet strength that can only come from blessed assurance, whispered to my son, “Don’t worry, Daddy’s home.”

That physical moment a vision of hope passed through me. I was reminded that I was a success professionally but a failure as a husband and a disappointment as a father. I remembered hearing about winning in all areas of your life and not just in one or two that were socially acceptable and morally comfortable. I had to change, and it was time to ask God to spare my son. But what came out was a different kind of prayer. I remember saying something like, “If you will let my son come through this

unscathed (he spent a week in the hospital), I will forever change my definition of success.” Happiness will not be a by-product of accomplishment or the satiating of a want, but a precursor to joyous living. I would do everything as if it were unto the Lord.

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (Mark 8:36).

Aside from the few well-wishers who came to the hospital, our circle of influence was small and shallow in matters pertaining to fate or faith. The only visitor was God’s salesman. He waltzed into the hospital with his unmistakable Mississippi drawl and poured on the charm to an unassuming staff of medical personnel who knew he was famous but could not quite place him. When voice recognition was complete and identities matched that it was indeed the legendary Zig Ziglar who was in that hospital, nurses gave him napkins to autograph. Then they asked him who he was there to see. He replied without hesitation, “My grandson, of course.” Half a world away, twelve thousand miles from where I was born, a man claimed lineage to me by proclaiming that we were a family. I have never felt lonelier than the moment

when I saw my son with an IV sticking out of his head. I never felt more encompassed in a ring of happiness and compassion than when my mentor said I belonged to the Kingdom of God, and hence was his kin.

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands (Acts17:26).

CAN A SPIRITUAL MENTOR HELP?

Monotheistic religions claim joy as a by-product of belief. Polytheistic religions claim actions as a means to happiness. My spiritual mentor, Dr. Ramesh Richard, is, in my mind, my belief, and yes, to my joy, the most humble and faithful servant of God. I remember one example from a couple of years ago when he was briefly detained in another place and the prayer chain e-mail messages that rapidly spread, asking God to spare him and bring him home safely.

Contrary to mentors who make their role more significant than the ones who look to them for guidance, Ramesh

Anna (big brother) showed me personally why only a relationship with a living Savior can bring happiness. I vividly recall the encounter I had with him a couple of days after he returned home. He sat across from me with the radiance and warmth that always comforts my egotistical doubts. In trying to get the story from a spiritual warrior, I was pressing him for details about his captivity so I could have bragging rights later on as I lived vicariously through his struggle. Calmly he inquired about my job, my bride, my son, my boss and many other things. I realized as I responded that he was more concerned with my well-being. He calmly reiterated that if I claimed him to be a mentor then I should see a spiritual victor and nothing else. This was a lesson on spiritual happiness that was learned from someone who is secure in his happiness.

Having an Indian spiritual mentor brought happiness to my parents, who reminded me many years later that even though I had become a Christian they were happy that my Christian role models were of Indian origin. Querying as to why it mattered, my father said that this convinced him that my faith did not come from Western pressure but from true revelation that was personal. He also quipped that

he was sure that this journey was helping my intelligence because when he paid for school the results were less than stellar. That is the mindset in the land of my birth where the teacher-student relationship is taken so seriously. Is it possible for God to be a teacher in your life who can give you happiness through His teachings? The answer is a resounding *yes*, if we will only listen.

CAN GOD BE HAPPY?

The following is excerpted from G.K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*.

Christianity satisfies suddenly and perfectly man's ancestral instinct for being the right way up; satisfies it supremely in this; that by its creed joy becomes something gigantic and sadness something special and small. The vault above us is not deaf because the universe is an idiot; the silence is not the heartless silence of an endless and aimless world. Rather the silence around us is a small and pitiful stillness like the prompt stillness in a sick-room. We are perhaps permitted tragedy as a sort of merciful comedy: because the frantic energy of divine things would knock us down like a drunken farce. We

can take our own tears more lightly than we could take the tremendous levities of the angels. So we sit perhaps in a starry chamber of silence, while the laughter of the heavens is too loud for us to hear. Joy, which was the small publicity of the pagan, is the gigantic secret of the Christian. And as I close this chaotic volume I open again the strange small book from which all Christianity came; and I am again haunted by a kind of confirmation. The tremendous figure which fills the Gospels towers in this respect, as in every other, above all the thinkers who ever thought themselves tall.

His pathos was natural, almost casual. The Stoics, ancient and modern, were proud of concealing their tears. He never concealed His tears; He showed them plainly on His open face at any daily sight, such as the far sight of His native city. Yet He concealed something. Solemn supermen and imperial diplomatists are proud of restraining their anger. He never restrained His anger. He flung furniture down the front steps of the Temple, and asked men how they expected to escape the damnation of Hell. Yet He restrained something. I say it with reverence; there was in that shattering

personality a thread that must be called shyness. There was something that He hid from all men when He went up a mountain to pray. There was something that He covered constantly by abrupt silence or impetuous isolation. There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth.

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Knowing a God who has feelings for His creation moves us closer to grace and unfastens us from the cosmic chaos and seemingly endless cycles of thought that become more circular in their appearance and less logical in their demands. When I began to realize that there is a celebration in heaven when one sinner repents, it gave me great solace to discover that God could experience joy at my life which He created for His purpose.

*Now when David had served God's **purpose in his own generation**, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay. Therefore,*

my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: (Acts 13:36-40) [emphasis added].

THE JOY OF A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LIVING SAVIOR

On a recent trip to my motherland, I was given an idol of one of the gods that make up the religious pantheon. I was told that this particular god showed favor on a certain element of my being and if the stars and planets lined up favorably, I would get a blessing as a result of keeping this idol on a shelf in a public area to bring blessings upon the house. Torn between the good faith of the gesture and my own rigid belief in the statement *You shall have no other gods before me* (Exodus 20:3), I gave the idol to my mother, who would probably do it more justice. She has it proudly displayed in her prayer room with many other idols. The contrasting absolute from the Bible is very clear as to how you gain a blessing. In fact, it states that my future is assured.

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21).

This allows me to live life with a plan for attaining favor with God by fulfilling His promise for me and not the other way around. If I prayed to a certain god each day of the week and blessings did come my way, which god should I thank? If no one gets the credit then why have gratitude at all? I hope you, the reader, can see the dilemma in this scenario. Let us assume I was asked to pray to one god for health, another for wealth, a third for education, a fourth for sanctity in relationships and so on. When my health gets better but I fail the Chartered Accountant exam or do not get into IIT, whom should I doubt?

Let them give glory to the LORD and proclaim his praise in the islands (Isaiah 42:12).

Would it not be simpler if man, in his infinite wisdom, decided to forgo trying to be God and just tried to know

God? Would a track and a path to having such a knowing relationship with a living Savior actually provide clarity? The question in having a relationship with a living Savior always goes back to proof. One thing I discovered in my journey from the belief in reincarnation to the acceptance of salvation is that those that seek proof actually prefer existence without it. Some of the most accomplished and brilliant minds whose life's work is based on the quantitative are overly eager to let the qualitative govern them. Faith is unconditional belief and seeking proof in altruistic ways, while refusing to believe that a single entity that loves us and created us can be confusing. My humble opinion is that knowledge that does not trample on lore and negate tradition is accepted, but knowledge that is apart from those two is different and okay to pursue.

OTHER PEOPLE CAN GIVE YOU DISPLEASURE

My immediate family and friends are as devout and traditional in their practices as is expected of them. On one occasion many years ago, I found myself playing outside the house in the front yard of our home in India when I was summoned

inside. I was told that on the next pilgrimage we were going to embark on we would pick up my paternal grandmother along the way, as she wanted to go to the temple that was our destination.

I was livid and angry and completely beside myself at the thought of having a fifth person in our car. The journey began with a temper tantrum that got worse with each agonizing mile. Then I was informed that we would stop at some relative's place instead of at a motel. Here I was told that we would be picking up another passenger who also wanted to visit the same shrine. Now I was at my wits' end. Two new, older passengers meant giving up a window seat in the car. More tantrums, automobile trouble, and reprimands later we arrived at this place.

Much has been forgotten about that trip, and still less can be recalled about the specifics, but I knew that I prayed empty prayers. I felt a sense of isolation from a belief that was designed to give pleasure that was momentary instead of true happiness, which would result in a joy. At that young age I realized in a small way that is hard to define that penance and prayer that were based on rituals pleased

those around you and never bought you closer to a living God. I was honoring my lineage, which is right and just, but was not equipping myself to make a difference. Even at that young age I was searching for answers.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field (Matthew 13:44).

SEARCHING FOR THE GIFT OF HAPPINESS

To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind (Ecclesiastes 2:26).

If man's ultimate desire, according to the original teachings of my childhood, was to become wise, why is wisdom not the foundation of every worship-journey? Why is the focus of worship to only please others engaged in the same rituals? If man's desire is to know and experience God, why

would the work you do be contrary to searching for Him? How could you pray differently because of the object of your prayer and ask for blessings specific to a particular role or responsibility? If it is hard for an innocent mind to comprehend the reason behind the number of gods, does it stand to reason that one may choose to react spontaneously to tasks instead of a surrendering to the spirit of God within? These questions became real as adulthood manifested, and I decided to search for the answers of whether true happiness was indeed possible, or were the cards already dealt for me?

I do believe that this life was preordained, but I would like to think that my journey is a manifestation of a Creator's image for me. I remember fondly the times when I would pray at a temple or in a room in a house that had been designated as the prayer area. My excitement was to get as close to the flame that was presented and to receive the biggest portion of the delicacy that had been offered to God to be blessed. I remember how we would take the piece of coconut or a sweet of some kind and bow down in a way that would allow us to take our cupped hands to each of our eyes that were closed. There was fear that if you did not do that specific action then whatever you ate would

somehow harm you. The same could be said of many rituals that were well-meaning in their demonstration but with no additional information in the execution of the same.

The reason I say that there was no depth is based on the time when I asked a priest why it took so long to memorize what he was chanting. He said, “The times of a thousand lives are on your side, why would you want to hurry?” My desire to know God, and to know about His mercy, was predicated to some degree on the disparity all around us and the difference between the classes. So we, as the uninformed, were left to participate in rituals, while those closer to God became the vessels that we would follow. In short, we were reverent to the people who claimed to have a closer relationship with God. The uniqueness of Christian happiness as offered by the Bible is that God’s desire to bring us happiness and joy is both personal and immediate. When the thief on the cross understood that he was being crucified next to the Messiah, his dying words were that he be remembered when Christ came into His Kingdom. The answer of Jesus was also comforting when He said, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” I have said it a couple of times in this book and it bears repeating. If all things

were equal, would you not want a God who has defied all aspects of humanity and still stands as a timeless figure?

The words of Malcolm Muggeridge printed below signify the transcendent nature of Jesus Christ as the only true giver of happiness across the centuries and throughout the world.

We look back upon history, and what do we see? Empires rising and falling, revolutions and counterrevolutions, wealth accumulated and wealth disbursed. Shakespeare has written of the rise and fall of great ones, that ebb and flow with the moon. I look back upon my own fellow countrymen (Great Britain), once upon a time dominating a quarter of the world, most of them convinced, in the words of what is still a popular song, that "the God who made them mighty, shall make them mightier yet." I've heard a crazed, cracked Austrian (Hitler) announce to the world the establishment of a Reich that would last a thousand years. I have seen an Italian clown (Mussolini) say he was going to stop and restart the calendar with his own ascension to power. I've heard a murderous Georgian brigand in the

Kremlin (Stalin), acclaimed by the intellectual elite of the world as being wiser than Solomon, more humane than Marcus Aurelius, more enlightened than Ashoka. I have seen America, wealthier and in terms of military weaponry, more powerful than the rest of the world put together, so that had the American people so desired, they could have outdone a Caesar, or an Alexander in the range and scale of their conquests.

England, now part of a tiny island off the coast of Europe, threatened with dismemberment and even bankruptcy. Hitler and Mussolini dead, remembered only in infamy. Stalin a forbidden name in the regime he helped found and dominate for some three decades. America haunted by fears of running out of those precious fluids that keeps their motorways roaring, and the smog settling, with troubled memories of a disastrous campaign in Vietnam, and the victories of the Don Quixotes of the media as they charged the windmills of Watergate. All in one lifetime, all in one lifetime, all gone. Gone with the wind!

Behind the debris of these solemn supermen, and self-styled imperial diplomatists, there stands the gigantic figure of One, because of whom, by whom, in whom and through whom alone, mankind may still have peace: The person of Jesus Christ. I present Him as the way, the truth, and the life.

Source Public Domain

Imagine reading that God desires us to work according to what He calls us to do and knowing through such reading that God works for good in all those things. This is so different than knowing that God exists and that your ways and His ways are on a collision course that has no origin or no destination. How can one have happiness in that belief—and even if there were those moments of glee, would not the mind automatically attribute that to luck or chance instead of divine appointment? I do not know about you, but I have a greater appreciation for my day and my life when I believe that there was a beginning and there will be an end, and that I am not a by-product of time + chance.

For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us” (Acts 17:23-27).

Reading the Bible as a comparative text was part of my early search for happiness. I read it to compare it to the other holy books to see for myself if there was more to this person called Jesus, or whether He was just another holy man as was proclaimed by all who taught me. The answers in the search allowed a life that has faith as a cornerstone

because God is the guide and happiness is the result that He bequeaths on all who trust Him and call Him by name. Every worship experience gives me the happiness that if I call Him, He will answer. If you doubt what I am saying, pray this prayer right now and watch the load lighten in your life immediately.

THE SINNER'S PRAYER

Lord, I know that I am a sinner. I confess with my tongue and accept with my heart that you are God; that you came to earth to free me and sacrificed yourself for my eternity. I believe that you rose from the dead and were resurrected to eternal life. Please accept me into your fold and walk with me as my resurrected Savior 'til we meet face to face in Heaven. Amen.

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

OPENING THE PRESENT

Many festivals enveloped my youth and all of them had a pomp and ceremony about them that brought gaiety and mirth to the people. Regardless of the abject squalor surrounding the decrepit conditions that created boundaries between the rich and poor, there was a festive mood in the air. Tradition had it that you would wait until one of these many festivals to get your ceremonial new clothes. The cloth that would be purchased by the bundle to be taken to the tailor would be blessed by a god. I, too, lined up eagerly for the moment. The difference in the look between siblings being outfitted might have been an extra loop on the trousers or a different design on the shirt collar. However, for the most part, wearing something new and enjoying a gift was the custom we lived for.

In my book *The American Dream from an Indian Heart*, I alluded to the importance of custom and the need for tradition, so please bear with me as I try to correlate how tradition and lore can exist apart from religion. I respect my parents for the role they have played in my life and the qualities and characteristics they have allowed me to

inherit. I did not understand why I would have to seek their blessings every time I got new clothes. Gratitude, then, was usually out of guilt, and true reverence was never achieved. I wish my parents, who have given me so much, had told me that God loved me and that our benevolence in the midst of expected ritual and visible discord was just that—a blessing.

WHY ARE SOME DESTINED FOR UNHAPPINESS?

The root word of happiness originates from the Greek word for happenings. In modernity this has been diluted for humanity that looks for happiness in happenings. Couple this with pseudo intellectual definitions of what constitutes happiness and man gets to be liberated from his soul as the march for righteousness begins with indignation, hate, and jealousy. Caste-based rituals and class-based consciousness convinced the masses that a life of joy depends on happenings. Gautama Buddha saw loneliness and destitution outside his palace walls and gave up a life of abundance to derive the meaning of nirvana. The Beatles took everything with them, including drugs, to attain the same nirvana. Peter

said to the crippled beggar searching for alms, “Look at me.” The crippled man was healed and walked again. The Bible does not tell us whether the crippled man who begged at the entrance to the Jewish temple was a believer or just an opportunist trying to escape misery. What we do know is that God will heal those who believe in Him.

By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see (Acts 3:16).

HEALTHY MINDS AND HEALTHY BODIES

My maternal grandfather was an incredible man who had a sense of humor and charm that was contagious. I was named after him and shared a bond with him that I have not shared with anyone else in my family. I loved it when he visited and brought goodies to spoil me. I always believed that he loved my mother, who was his oldest daughter, more than the others and acclaimed me as being the best grandchild he had. It may not have been true, but I believed it. He smoked a rustic stogie that reeked of toxicity and

he never seemed to have a care in this world. One day in 1978 when I came home from school, I was greeted by a strange silence in the house. With insensitive jocularly I asked if someone had died. They told me my grandfather had passed away. I was devastated. How could a loving god do this? Why my grandfather? What would he be reincarnated as? Would I have a chance to see him again? A heart attack all of a sudden in a bathroom in a strange town was the end of my Grandpa. I grieved personally for a while and then youth and exuberance took over. I began to accept his demise and moved on with my life.

One of the things I heard at the time of his passing was that God needed him more than I did and that's why he had to die. I did not care for that response then anymore than I do now when well-meaning Christian friends suggest the same reason as to why people die. But the part that caught my attention during those days was my understanding of the Hindu religion and the lack of importance of health as a spiritual edict from a creator. The concepts of yoga and all the other physical activities that were suggested in the name of God were done so that man could become closer to God through meditation, and in this new transcendental

stage eclipse suffering. It made no sense to me. If so many people were meditating and reaching levels of consciousness that were supposed to give them immortality, then why were people dying? Could there be another explanation for the need to be healthy?

Maybe a healthy mind and a healthy body were designed so that man could invite God into his sturdy temple that is the life of each person that He so lovingly created. But if we do not believe in creation and support the theory of evolution exclusively, or ignore the possibility of intelligent design, then the search for physical well-being is meaningless. Why stay alert to any possibility of betterment if in the end the fate of the “now” has already been decided by the actions of a “then”? It has dawned on me since that had my grandfather not smoked, he would still have died. The difference in my belief came in wanting to be healthy because God wanted to be with me, not so I could become God.

That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him (Jeremiah 17:6-7).

CHAPTER 4



EVERYONE WANTS TO BE REASONABLY PROSPEROUS

On a recent mission trip to Egypt where I was invited to participate in a pastors conference, I was confronted by two stark realities. One was being part of a group of believers of the Lord Jesus in a land that, in the majority, shared a different worldview. The second was seeing abject poverty live side by side with relative splendor. Amidst the cacophony of the blaring loudspeakers instructing people about their time of reverence were the visible signs of street urchins rummaging through trash to find any signs of discarded recyclable treasures that could be sold for second-hand grandeur. The scene was no different from my youth and the question no different from the beginning of time: Does God want us to be prosperous? Maybe the question is whether God wants us to be successful at all. If seven

billion people walk this planet during our lifetime, why the huge disparity in material goods and the wide gaps in what people have between necessity and luxury? If people poor in material possessions see/hear a man of God, regardless of religious affiliation, claim that God wants us to be rich, those that are poor believe in condemnation before they even have a chance to rationalize and marvel at creation. Hate and envy are then just an inciting message away, and destruction of anything that does not believe the way we do is sure to come by way of organized “spontaneous” weekend riots.

When I heard God’s salesman (Zig Ziglar) talk about material possessions, he seemed to prescribe a formula for twenty-four-hour living teaching people how to be rich in their personal, family and business lives. Prosperity then became something which man could not only plan for but achieve. The signs of maturity were then drawn out from within as you sought to do more with your life. God’s edict was that if you trust Him as the source of all your possessions, then giving Him a portion of your possessions is not only the right thing to do but required. This was the first time in my journey where I had a religious text actually show

a simple formula. The formula was the same whether you had a lot or a little, and it made sense that God creates us and gives us free will, which allows us to turn to Him or away from Him.

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it” (Malachi 3:10).

Speak to the Levites and say to them: “When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the LORD’S offering” (Numbers 18:26).

The word *tithe* means offering. God asking for a portion of your earning through His Word is different from man saying you must give more because you have more. Giving is a noble and generous deed, and those that give feel better about having done so. However, this was the first time I saw it written that God was asking me to give one-tenth of what I was earning to the temple. Not only was I being asked

to do so as part of the law, as mentioned to the people in the Old Testament, I was being asked to do so even before I catered to my own needs. Then I was informed through Scripture that if I did obey, the treasures of heaven would be unleashed upon me. As you read this, ask yourself the question as to how many people ask you to give of your excess and remind you that your obligation to give comes from your blessing of abundance? The odds are you can think of many instances when someone asked you for money or possessions and because of guilt it probably drove you to give some of your abundance. But if the God of all creation is specifically saying *do not give of your excess but give before you keep for yourself*, and the percentage is also listed, it becomes a disciplined approach that takes belief that He will indeed unleash the treasures of heaven unto you if you choose to be faithful.

Like everyone on this planet, I wanted more than I had and was willing to bargain, barter, beg and borrow to get more. Here was God saying *if you become disciplined and give me a tenth of what you are given, and do so before you take care of what you need, then watch me increase your bounty*. How can I keep only nine-tenths of what I am given and live

on that? After almost a decade of obedience, I found out that it is easy to live on ninety percent. It might mean a smaller house, a lesser car, and one fewer trip, but it will assure a peace of mind and give you clarity in vision as you follow the Living Water.

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on" (Mark 12:41-44).

I now began to understand the concept of giving and the true meaning of prosperity.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WEALTH AND RICHES

In December of 2000, I was sitting and having a conversation with my father at our family home in India. The topics ranged from joy to agony, and doubt and consternation to happiness and fulfillment. The surreal nature of the tone of the moment had to do with choices I had made and chances I had taken, including, but not limited to, my personal choices. At issue was my claim of happiness with my Savior versus the abandonment of culture and tradition and the insults that would result in our family geography. Meaning simply, there is no need to be vocal about your choices; I was not ashamed of my choice either, so there we were in another pickle. The conversation slowly moved to the topic of inheritance and how my father would have liked his home and belongings to be shared with his progeny, which included my brother (the more accomplished) and me. As the finite details of money and its disbursement met the surface of deservedness, I simply said, "I do not deserve anything." This shocked my parents, and my confession of abandoning them in their time of need for my own selfish desires brought cleansing tears to the dialog.

I had inherited eternity with my Heavenly Father and did not want the mere materialism of earthly reflections to complicate relationships and diminish my earthly father's great legacy. I wanted at that moment for them to feel the joy I have in my life with the assuredness of knowing that someone already paid the price for my transgressions, and with that the wealth I have inherited is everlasting. My parents, however, saw in me a maturity they never expected, and the wounds of periodic infliction that come with familial bonds seemed to have healed. When my brother reads this, I want to assure him that my tone is not of righteousness but respect, and not of defiance but submission, as I know and feel that he has a bigger right and claim to my father's inheritance than I do. The reason is he maintained a physical proximity to provide for the safety and security of my parents while I was half a world away.

This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

At what point in the pursuit of fame and the search for the elusive prize do human beings realize that there is a finite point to their wants and needs? Billy Graham decided, while still in the infancy of his eventual world legacy, that there should be a point at which we all define our satiated fullness. This is hard to explain in cultures where materialism means superiority and class distinction is usually defined by monetary excess. Nowhere does the Bible tell us not to achieve, but everywhere God asks us to be good stewards. This was one of those significant points of difference between the belief of my forefathers and this newfound faith which liberated me to achieve and promised me excess if I was a good steward. The Lord Jesus Himself was a carpenter and the word associated with Him in the original Greek translation was *Tekton*, which means He was skilled. He probably sold some of the furniture He made. All the apostles were encouraged to work and preach. Business was encouraged as long as those that chose to proclaim understood the premise. The premise, then, was that money intrinsically was not evil but that the love of money was.

Why should fools have money in hand to buy wisdom, when they are not able to understand it? (Proverbs 17:16).

Greed that is based on control and desire that is based on self-fulfillment make man foolish in his pursuit. The Bible makes it clear that having possessions is not bad and no one is justified to more than any other. Following the advice of fiscal maturity laid out in the law of God from the beginning of time saw blessings of abundance on Abraham and wealth and wisdom for Solomon.

However, the turning point in the understanding of this principle came on one trip to my homeland when all the people who shared a faith different from mine talked about their houses and I talked about my home. They kept talking about beds and I was trying to explain a good night's sleep. They spoke of "not enough," and I said that what I had was more than enough. I realized that these people were just companions and the Bible had taught me about having friends for life. Suddenly, the choices became even clearer, as one more aspect of abundant living had been clarified in great detail in the Bible. In addition, I was raised to believe that some have more than others because of karma. But I

saw that my dad had more than his siblings and they came from the same genealogical pool. How can that be? Can God bless some with more than others and His blessings be tied to His expectation instead of man's doings? The Book of Job explains that in just the right way.

Job was well known for his prosperity. God gives riches at times, and riches are not necessarily wrong, by any means, although we are warned about the danger and deceitfulness of them. But here was a man whom God made rich. Yet, when challenged by Satan, God chose Job as the one that needed to be tested. The one who had it all was tested time and again to see if his faith would break. I challenge you to read this story and not be moved by how God works in the lives of those He blesses.

... and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East (Job 1:3).

CAN POSSESSIONS AND PROFESSIONS MAKE YOU WEALTHY?

For the last ten years, telling others about the wealth they can have in a personal relationship with the Giver of all gifts has become my main mission. I do not want to abandon the culture of respect and the humility of service, but I want to make sure that everyone understands that there is a difference between wealth and riches, and that one will buy you earthly security and the other will give you a peaceful eternity. Another car in the garage never gave anyone a better ride to the graveyard. A different emblem on the hood of that automobile never told anyone about the significant signs on your soul. In Egypt I looked at the chariots in the museum that were designed to give the Pharaoh comfortable passage into the next world. Maybe that's what some of the luxury cars of our time are designed to do. No one has ever been able to go from zero to sixty in three seconds in Dallas or Delhi during rush hour. God assures you that you will go from a hole in your soul to spiritual acceleration in no time, if you confess just once. The only gear you need to shift is the mental one that makes you cling to lore and tradition. Yet many in

the culture of my ancestors spend most of their working, waking moments talking about corporate position and bucks in the bank.

One of the great sources of debate, doubt and determination in almost every home in India is the whole lure of America. Our home was—and in some conversations still is—the same. Many constantly brag about how well their sons and daughters are doing in the U.S., or whichever country plays host to their families. It was fascinating that everyone who left India to go overseas has always ended up in a position of significance. Just to be a myth-buster, when I am asked about my life in the U.S., I tell people that I am an average guy with an average job, but an above average zest for life. Initially, my father would want to tell people that I had a significant role and then realized that this pride was more in how his own offspring stacked up against the progeny of the accountant, the attorney and the family doctor. All I really need to brag upon is the lineage to the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and

the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you (Deuteronomy. 28:11).

THE POVERTY MANDATE

I recently had the opportunity to watch a video on the love of a child among the underclass in India called the Dalits. These people, who come down from the mountains to the plains of a drought-stricken terrain, find that by moving closer to the trappings of modernity they feel less and less valuable because now their disparity is accentuated by their illiteracy. A group that proclaims the Gospel in India takes the children of this class and gives them the basic infrastructure of schooling and a couple of meals each day. The parents are just excited that, all things being the same, the kids will have a fighting chance because they will be able to read and write. While watching this video my heart crumbled and big tears ran down my cheeks as I realized that as a citizen of the planet I had failed to lift up my fellow man. More important, as a witness for the King, I had failed to stand in the gap.

Christ said that *whatever you did for one of the least of these*

brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me (Matthew 25:40). Christianity is then not a relationship but a roadmap from One who was fully divine and fully human. He used His life as a living example to tell us how to treat our fellow human beings. Growing up in India I was always told, *if you offer money to one of them you will be mobbed*. Rather than risk the position of being overtaken by someone screaming from hunger, I was raised to look the other way out of ambivalence. This is not to make any part of my childhood or anyone else feel guilty. What if one of those children who tugged on my shirt on the streets of Chennai was the God of all creation Himself?

Years later I had the opportunity to travel to the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains to meet a missionary couple that had spent a majority of their adult life in India. The scenery from their backyard allowed me to catch glimpses of the hills that rolled away as far as the eye could see. The entire panorama was bathed in the crimson glow of a majestic sunset, as if God had called a meeting with man to ask if they believed in Him. The humility on the faces of the two retired practitioners of Christianity revealed hearts so big and full of wealth as they embraced me and

spoke in fluent Hindi, inquiring as to the whereabouts of my in-laws. I looked around at what they gave up to go to the other side of the world to spread a message that would in most cases be rejected. The currency of Christianity is its own reward, and the interest received in trading in it is sometimes so great that we seem to forget that a lot of people are not buying it.

Much has already been discussed so far about the karmic nature of my origin and the traditions associated with that belief system. When looked at through the veneer of a different belief system, those traditions seem to come up short on challenges. God's salesman, who turned out to be my main liberator in those early days, talked about success in a balanced light but was quite vocal on how the principle-based living he was talking about would give me the prosperity I sought in this new frontier. Let us look at man's desire for basic prosperity and find out for ourselves if spiritual wealth is different from material riches, and if one can indeed become an alternate in a society that is riddled with cheap substitutes.

Webster defines prosperity as the condition of being successful

or thriving; *especially*: economic well-being. Friends define your prosperity as bucks in the bank and a corporate position. A king would define prosperity as the kingdom he rules. A Hindu would define prosperity as it aligns with his lot in life, and what he has or does not have based on the caste he is born into. A Muslim would define prosperity as the benevolence and mercy of Allah. A Christian should and would define prosperity as the redemptive life bought and paid for by the shed blood of a Messiah. Oh, to think of the awesomeness of God actually paying for my sins and buying me the eternal riches of glory with Him!

When I undertook the sacred obligation of writing this book as an explanation for my conversion, many a friend told me not to do so for I would alienate the vast majority of my friends and family from different walks of life who would now become convinced that I was jaded and narrow-minded in my pursuits. But almost every one of them works hard every day to amass treasures on earth while artificially building humongous castles to celebrate their own piety. All this while paying homage to gods they cannot communicate with, deities they cannot relate to, and idols they cannot visualize—as no two look exactly the same.

Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit nothing? (Isaiah 44:10).

Seeking wealth in and of itself is not a sin any more than using the talents God gave you to wisely labor in the world we live in, so that when our journey here is done and we arrive on His celestial shore we can hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” As I was exploring the imagery for this part of the book, I remembered the parable of the talents and how God wants us to multiply what He has given us. He also expects much from those to whom He has given much. Then the choices and chances visible on the landscape of human endeavor are not a guessing game, but a divine ordination of the One who created and is creating.

This is one of the fundamental differences in those choosing to follow an enlightened path of the truth, the way, and the life. The guesswork of who provides ceases to exist, and the manifest moments of gratitude do not need to be shared with a pantheon of divine beings that have many shapes and forms. Worship for blessings and reverence for miracles can be laid at the feet of a cross where man came to grips with his inadequacy to exist in a world riddled with

sin and needed a substitute that could keep him eternally prosperous.

DOES GOD PROVIDE FOR EVERYONE? DOES EVERYONE DESERVE PROVISIONS?

A question asked and answered too quickly. In my book *The American Dream from an Indian Heart*, I quoted Emerson who said that if you are going to pull someone up you must first be on higher ground. I also added that his quote never insinuated that everyone deserves to be pulled up. However, in the hallowed halls where theology, chronology, physiology, biology and criminology combine for a debate on the righteousness of the human race, the one that wins is an apology. God said to man, “Sorry, you cannot do this on your own.” God did provide for everyone. Everyone deserved and got His provision. The sacrifice of the Lamb was for all of humanity – many just don’t know it. In 1993 these words allowed me to publicly profess Jesus Christ as the CEO of my corporation and His words as the by-laws that would govern me.

“If standard of living is your number one priority, quality

of life almost never follows. However, if quality of life is your number one priority, standard of living almost always follows.” *Zig Ziglar*

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together (Genesis 22:8).

CAN FEAR AND FAITH BE THE SAME?

One of the other things I learned in my search that should make your search easier is the understanding whether fear and faith can have the same definition. They are both based on the unknowable and unquantifiable. In the lure of prosperity and the want for a better life, I saw my parents pray and seek blessings that had a lot of sacrificial undertones. Prayers for prosperity had a dual purpose. One was to ask God to bless them and the other was realizing that your lot in life was a predestined one. That creates confusion. How can you ask for more if you don't know what is coming your way because your only resume is of past transgressions in another life?

I remember early in my faith walk, even before I had experienced the new life of being born again, I contemplated this point for almost three years. How could I ask for more if I was not sure if what I had was my fault? If it was indeed my fault, and my place in the world in time and space was a result of a previous life, then where was and where is God who rules everything? I am faithful to Him for being God, yet my blessings in this world will be directly coordinated by someone else. Now, the purpose of this statement is not to challenge worldviews or mythology and whether people were blessed enough to realize fortunes. The purpose of this statement is to encourage a conversion experience. If you are searching for living water that will quench the desires of your heart, soul, mind and being for the rest of your natural life, and give you a guarantee of eternal prosperity, will you accept that? If the answer is yes, please email me at krish@malaministries.org so I can provide resources that will give you clarity.

WHO WANTS TO BE THE RICHEST MAN IN THE GRAVEYARD?

“Why do you work so hard, Daddy?” was the question

asked by me of my father when I was in the eighth grade. “Because of the responsibilities I have and the sacred obligations I have to fulfill to my family,” was my father’s reply. “But why don’t you seem happy with this sacred obligation?” I persisted, though not with the eloquence of a published author.

“Some days it is so hard, I wonder what on earth I am here for,” was his response. Years later Rick Warren would address that question in an international best-seller titled *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Looking back in retrospect, I realize that if my father had clarity in the fact that there was a risen Savior who had experienced all of man’s trials and tribulations, it would have been easier to have an unequivocal belief in something certain and absolute.

The following story is paraphrased from the book *Preparing Evangelistic Sermons*, written by Dr. Ramesh Richard. It seems a prominent man was giving a speech, talking on international television to billions of people on whether God has the right to sit in judgment of humanity. The rationale behind the debate was that God can never understand

man's plight and it would be arrogant for a god who is technically impotent to the plight of humanity to be put on a pedestal of worship. Granted, in the grand scheme of things, this analogy has less to do with belief in God and more to do with understanding whether God comprehends man. And if so, which one of the gods being worshipped on earth has actually been shown in that light by the ones who believe in him?

As the luminary in charge of the proceedings began, the waiter interrupted the speaker and suggested that there was One who is worshipped who understands the plight of humanity. He was born of a questionable union, was betrayed by His own people, had suffered humiliation in His own surroundings, was turned over to the enemy and sacrificed in the name of sanity. He did understand the plight of humanity, and He paid the ultimate price for all of us. This man is Jesus Christ of Nazareth, God's only Son, who had to live and die as a common carpenter. The architect of resurrection, and the master craftsman of destinies, hung shamelessly on a cross, with people casting lots for his clothes. Does God understand my plight?

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:3-6).

To spare us the misery of being lonely, only one conquered death to grant eternal life. No matter what you search for and how long you search for it, you will feel empty if the pursuits of accumulation fill the vault in your wall but leave a hole in your soul.

CAN MAN DEFINE PROSPERITY?

Bill Glass, the founder of Champions for Life in Dallas, Texas, asks earthly fathers if their children are walking around with a hole in their heart where the father's blessing needs to be. He has been in many hundreds of prisons over his career, ministering to incarcerated souls that society chooses to forget as they are locked up for past transgressions. As a seeker of the truth, I found this query answers a more

profound platitude. Why should I walk around with a hole in my soul when the great I Am said He wants to fill me with His blessings and claim me as His child? An eternal father's definition of prosperity for an earthly mortal child's quest for material want and superficial greed!

The blessing of the LORD brings wealth, without painful toil for it (Proverbs 10:22).

Man, in his quest for the mark that signifies his arrival, can only define prosperity as the accumulation of goods and services that the currency of work and toil provide. The more you work the more you will earn, and the more you earn the more you will spend to quench and satiate your thirst for having a valid mark in this world. The cesspool of cyclical chaos that results becomes a never-ending carnival ride that has only entrances and no exits. Prosperity then becomes a freeway like the autobahn in Germany, where the only thing you can do is have comfort in the comparative speed that your automobile can generate vs. others who also run the race with no finish line. Would it be easier if the God of all creation defined prosperity for us so man does not have to compete for false pride and societal accolades

that only earn brief luminescence in the form of bragging rights at boring parties where the spirit being served is not usually the holy kind?

That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit (Jeremiah 17:6-8).

I do not pray for adversity and recommend that you don't either, but after following the principles of prosperity outlined in the Holy Bible, I have been amazed at how God has blessed us. Not all His blessings have manifested into visible signs that the community can see when I drive to the next event. Some invisible signs of prosperity have been the smile on my bride's face when we feel we are in dire straits and she knows that all we have to do is believe. Early in my faith walk when we were at the end of our financial rope, we would tie a knot and hang on for dear

life—and He did provide exactly what we needed.

THE PROSPERITY MERCHANTS WHO PREY ON THE INNOCENT IN THE NAME OF GOD

As an author and speaker I have been invited to lecture all over the world. This has exposed me to audiences with a lot of faith, a little faith, and in some times no faith. Culturally I have been exposed to people who eat anything and on some days and in some venues people who eat nothing. I have seen proclamations made in the name of God as people bowed in reverence to a tree, a cow, a pig, and in one country a tomb where many thousand years prior to that moment a king had supposedly married a virgin, thus giving the commoner hope for marital bliss. In modern times, I have seen people wear white and perform healing miracles and exorcisms to drive out the impure in the name of the risen Christ, leaving people wondering if promising prosperity to the poor is a sign of spiritual maturity or just winning numbers to a fold who do not know why they believe in what they have chosen to believe. I know that belief in Jesus Christ will allow you access to prosperity. This prosperity is based on an eternal arithmetic that you + God = enough.

CHAPTER 5



EVERYONE WANTS TO HAVE FRIENDS

*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life
for one's friends (John 15:13).*

The purpose of writing this little book was to expose people to the truth that I know. The reader of this book has received this material in most cases from a friend who loves you so much that he or she wants you to experience the same thing that he/she is experiencing in the joy known as abundant life. My purpose for this work is to provide honest answers to those that consider themselves my friends. As I was growing up, it was understood first in India and then in my new home in America, that in the company of friends you never talked about religion and politics. The reasoning behind this edict was that friendships are lost

when you begin to cross the boundaries of personal belief, and it is easier to live and let live in the name of decency and sanity.

Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors and an object of dread to my closest friends—those who see me on the street flee from me (Psalm 31:11).

But I trust in you, LORD; I say, “You are my God” (Psalm 31:14).

WHAT IS A FRIEND?

Ravi Zacharias, famed apologist who has devoted his life to narrowing the gap between head and heart so that people can better understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ, says that Christianity espouses community. Philosophy, which is what one predominant worldview seems to be focused on, espouses university and diversity. Hermits, holy men and saints, seem to be all the rage as huge populaces appear to be fascinated by loneliness—a never-ending journey to find a meaning you can share with no one while communing with a god who cannot be defined.

This live-and-let-live approach seems to be driven from an almost existential nature that all is one and eventually it does not matter, so the quest for meaning continues. Existentialism catapulted the likes of Bertrand Russel and Jean Paul Sartre to mythical status as these intellects, who are considered giants of thinking, convinced an entire populace about the beauty of nothingness.

You are my friends if you do what I command (John 15:14).

It would have been incomprehensible in my youth to have a conversation with a priest or a holy man and talk about God as a friend. Not as a buddy, but as Someone who promises to walk with us and live within us. A Christian is not sanctified by what he or she has done, but is delivered by what dwells within. This was a concept that I had to wrestle with because the divinity of God seems to be separated from the humanity of God, and, as a result, friendship and religion seem to have this great divide. In Islam God supposedly needed man to make His claim on His creation and hence the reverence and the unquestionable edicts that are passed down as teachings of the one who supposedly befriended God on our behalf. Why the Mormons scorn

the Muslims remains a mystery to me, as the teachings of Joseph Smith are similar in origin as God needed man—again to stake His claim.

In Hinduism God came and lived as many different divine and sometimes not so divine yet revered “avatars” to show man the path to enlightenment. Buddhism had man become enlightened so that those that followed him had the path figured out.

Christ was the only One who claimed to be the Son of God and the son of man—a genealogy traced back to Adam and the beginning of creation. Even if it were passed off as fantasy, it has not undergone any change in the events of the last two thousand years. Despots like Mussolini and Hitler claimed to have the answer and fell by the wayside. Ashoka the Great occupied a place in lore, and his works are forgotten by the younger culture in a post-modern India who seems to want more things Western. Ashoka, himself a celebrated warrior, chose the path of peace and sent his children as emissaries of Buddhism to the East and the West. So what about the teachings that the mythological gods seemed to hand down? Does the average believer even

know what they are supposed to believe?

Part of the abstract of my youth was not having a clear mandate on what to believe. Compare that with my son who goes to church with me and sings for himself the song “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” Words that make religion something he can understand for himself. Words that make me realize that if all else were equal, just knowing that I will be with my son forever in eternity is enough to love him truly as my child. Just words, but enough to make a difference.

A UNIFYING FRIENDSHIP

People with no joy in their heart will very easily succumb to the notion that it is easier to describe pain than joy. The bandwagon of suffering is very rarely a unifier. Churches are not immune to hypocrisy. Denominationalism has turned the modern church into chaos, and competition from expanding suburbia has forced these houses of worship to become country clubs that focus more on community than prayer. Yet somehow they all agree that there is one God and His Son is Jesus Christ the Nazarene who was born

of a virgin, suffered under Pilate, and was crucified as an offering to Rome. They all agree that He arose from death, thus at least in one way defining unity amidst diversity, which is intended to be a friendly gesture amidst all the perceived differences and worldviews that exist.

The definition of camaraderie, and the myths and fables that form most of the fantasies of friendship, are more often than not relegated to tall tales from the past. True friendships that are formed by the bond created when one soul reaches out to another in the journey called life are rare. Occasionally we will hear of the bond that forms when one in adversity reaches out to one in power and a friendship that lasts a lifetime is forged. Such stories came out of the horrors of the concentration camps and from the scarred remains of mutilated humans who emerged from foxholes to tell of the bravery of another. Today you will hear about them through myth and reality as chain letters that come in your e-mail, asking you to pass the good news on to others who might need to hear about it. What about the good news of the Friend we have in Jesus? Who will we pass this onto, and how many people need to hear it? The societies we live in, and the pace we maintain to pay the

bills of guilt that finance those suburban dreams, have very little room for true friendship. It is almost unimaginable for a group of men to get together as friends and hold each other accountable so that they will be better husbands and fathers. This is what fascinated me about becoming a Christian. I was not only encouraged to make friends with men, but was allowed to share my feelings and emotions with them, and learn of the similarities in the problems that most of us thought were unique. Having my origins in a male-dominant culture where religion was not a choice but a distinct part of tradition and lore, this was a stretch of immense magnitude.

God had called me to befriend Him and seek a personal relationship with Him. His humanity and ultimate sacrifice showed me that He had lived and died and conquered death, but chose His friends to carry on his work. The Bible is the only text which talks about God's humanity and the way He was with His friends and the role they played to fulfill His purpose on earth. As you read this I want you to ask yourself a few questions and answer them in the space provided:

1. Who are your true friends? Name them.

2. Why do you like them, and why do you want to be around them?

3. Do they contribute to your life's purpose beyond the superficial in terms of commonality in wants, needs, professions, etc.?

4. Can you count on them for help that is more than physical and physiological? Can you trust them with the feelings of your heart and desires of your soul?

5. Can you allow yourself to be vulnerable in their presence and show them your weaknesses and frailty?
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Your answers will tell you a lot about your understanding of friendship. When I read the classic *See You at the Top* and read about the fact that everyone wants friends, I did not understand the true ramifications of friendship. It was not until I went on a spiritual retreat called The Walk to Emmaus (please e-mail krish@malaministries.org for details) that I understood what “bonding” was and how God in His infinite wisdom wanted me to learn from my friends how to better sanctify a world and be a good steward of the resources I have been blessed with in this journey.

TRUE FRIENDSHIP

The phone rang one hot summer day in Dallas. The opinions I had about life, and the pursuit of material wants and luxurious needs were consuming yet another day of existence. The voice on the other end was a Christian brother who

has been closer to me than any man I know. I chose him that day to be the confirmation sponsor for my son who would turn twelve four years later. The voice inquired about my day and told me that he had sensed that there was some turmoil in my life and had called just to make sure I was okay. I found out later that he was a Stephen Minister and it was his duty and vow to provide healing to his fellow man. No want, no need, no ball game, no picnic. Just, “Hello my friend, how are you? Can I serve you today? I woke up this morning with many of my own problems, but for some reason I am going to focus on your problems.”

My jaw dropped. There I was, consumed in self-pity and, as made popular by the game show “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?”, here was my very own lifeline. I immediately began to reflect on all my friends who are from different religious backgrounds. Some have a lot of faith, some have little faith, and some have no faith, but none had ever called me to ask if there was anything I needed. This all-white suburban community in the land of Lincoln where I was a stranger was befriending me—my very own emancipation in the form of a community that looked different, lived

differently, dressed differently, sounded different but loved like Christ loved the Church.

LOOKING AT FRIENDSHIP

Two weeks had passed and the cloud bank that had hung over New York as a visceral reminder of the carnage inflicted on a people because of religious hostility had now dissipated. I was at another airport, dreading the routine security check that would be part profiling for protocol and part finger-pointing for justice. I look different and many of those who did commit the dastardly deed could pass for brethren by matching me physically in description. My outside appearance was a threat and my internal image was a mess. How does one justify hostility in the name of religion? Did not the Christians commit huge atrocities in the name of religion during the Crusades? Has not society evolved from the barbarism of suicide bombs being strapped to little girls who are in the prime of their lives so that retribution of hate can be made for a cowardly cave-dweller? And then my own personal moment of confrontation and accusations: "You are a foreigner, just like the rest of them. I wish people like you did not exist."

Not just in America, this person wanted me to have *never* existed. Such hate and anguish with distrust wrapped in a uniform threatening my own liberties and creating a new hell on earth.

A confession to my pastor and an admission to my bride that I did not want to travel anymore because I was afraid and humiliated led me to share my thoughts on fear to my home church. Shaking like a leaf with the tears of despair streaming down my cheeks, I stuttered that I loved America. I was angry at what had happened and did not know how to look different so that I would be spared the humiliation of being lumped into something that was perceived as vile and loathsome. “I will always be brown,” I screamed to an all-white congregation. “My son will always look different. We cannot hide anywhere, for this is our home,” I wailed. As a public speaker and communicator, this was my most guttural moment, clouded with the raw emotions of an Indian who is proud of his heritage, wrapped in a new faith, and afraid of his geographical position of choice.

On the flip side was the community that looked at a broken man in the church and decided to pick him up. The good

Samaritans got together and wrote letters of encouragement, thanking me for coming here and being a strong cultural and religious influence in their lives. They wept with me and for me. They told me that they had never looked at me differently and apologized for the actions of a few. They even put all their thoughts into a binder that had the title of gratitude and the content of generosity. I write this at thirty-three thousand feet in the air, with tears flowing as freely as the key strokes on my laptop, remembering the Christian love given to one family in the aftermath of total chaos and absolute mayhem.

This is not to say that only Christians can love and people of other faiths cannot. In reality, I have seen many acts of great friendship and love in societies that are not Judeo-Christian in nature. But you have to go back to my original premise for writing this book. I was raised a Hindu and wanted to follow the doctrinal philosophy of one man who kept insisting that everyone wants the same things. Ask yourself right now if you could have the following eight things how radically richer would your life be:

Happiness

Health

Prosperity

Friends

Family

Security

Peace of Mind

Hope

Now ask yourself if you knew that these eight things covered the entire gamut of living, and that they are all proudly declared in one text, would you not want to read it, research it and embrace it? That's what I did, and the journey has been fascinating and amazing.

To the contrarian who says that other religions offer the same promise, I would welcome a dialog with you where you can actually prove to me through book, chapter and verse where these exact concepts are offered in a single text. Remember, the theology behind our psychology can be interpreted to satisfy man's craving, but you have to believe that it is the inspired Word of God. And any religion that claims that all religions are the same is not

being true to itself.

FRIENDS IN FAITH

Imagine that you have received information that you have been diagnosed with a catastrophic illness or that a loved one has been informed about a devastating financial loss that is going to affect all of the family. Which one of the two options would you want? A hopeful response that all situations have meaning and an understanding that allows us to cope with the present, or doomsday approaches that blame everything on cosmic happenstance? When I became a Christian it seemed like all my friends in the faith belonged to the former category, and their suggestions and advice that were hopeful during some of the darkest days of doubt and despair were a welcome difference to what I had learned and understood.

I do not want the reader to infer for a minute that my friends who are not Christian have not contributed to my journey. But somehow all of their suggestions and advice have a finality that lacks the joy of a possible heaven on earth. Rabbi Harold S. Kushner wrote a book, *When Bad*

Things Happen to Good People, and chronicled the agony of living with the knowledge that his son was going to die from a rare and incurable disease called progeria. He states that knowing about the love of God as was stated in the Torah helped his family during some very difficult times. While the Rabbi is Jewish and I am a Protestant, we probably will disagree on the faith that comes after the arrival of the Messiah. We do agree that God the Father, who created the universe, wants a loving relationship with us and created us to have that love.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Christianity is unique in that the unity we have in the Trinity allows us to live with diversity and form a community that is guaranteed eternity. No other religion allows you to be brothers and sisters in a body of a Savior and proclaim that even though we are separated by age, gender, ethnicity and

cultural origins we can claim to be brothers and sisters in Christ as prophesied. In my Hindu roots the caste system and the economic class system separated the togetherness of the people. A servant from a lower class is allowed to go to the market and purchase the items required for consecration, but not allowed into the inner sanctum of many homes (pooja room), for they are from a lower caste. Most of the friends in the faith then are people of equal means.

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS

Very few religions will ever allow you to sing or claim that the Savior whom you credit with the creation, redemption, and salvation of humanity can indeed be your friend. Little short of blasphemy, the connotation that you can befriend God as you walk with Him and towards Him will get you chastised and maybe stoned in most communities. Christianity allows you to make this claim, and encourages you to think of God as a friend who wants to have a relationship with you.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven" (Luke 5:20).

Viktor Frankl, who survived the horrors of the holocaust and became a staunch advocate of man's desire to have purpose, said that our desire to be connected and belong to a cause gives us a unique strength that allows us to overcome the trials and tribulations we face. This belonging can come in many ways, but one that stands alone is the bond that God allowed you to have with Him through the friendship of His son. Many of you reading this book will agree that in a nominal journey we have all been in situations where we are nicer to our friends than to our family. There is a reason for this and it stems from the fact that we think that our friends accept us just as we are and don't try to change us. God can be your friend because He asks you to come just as you are and will take you with your worries and your warts, your scars and your scrapes, your hurts and your halos.

Early in my faith walk this concept of God as a buddy troubled me. I had a hard time separating the sovereignty of an all-important God from One who wanted to listen to me and comfort me. The absolution of this belief system lies in God's Word, given to us in the Bible where we are asked to seek Him and wait for His answer—much like a

friend you can call when all you know seems to desert you.

And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend (James 2:23).

The above Scripture was written thousands of years after the act. Abraham, who was given the privilege of being a father well into his life, was also asked by God to give that child, Isaac, as a sacrifice. When Abraham obeyed, God stopped the sacrifice and befriended him. That's the beauty of the promise of the Bible. It is real and easy to believe. A God who tests your faith and loves you for your obedience is exactly what a friend would do to test and see if your allegiance is real. If you are lonely and despondent and searching for someone you can talk to and converse with, ask Jesus Christ to become your friend. Tell Him that you need a confidante as you have exhausted all your earthly options. The transformation will be radical and your spirit will soar higher as you now know that the external image can be polished to meet man's expectation, but only God can be the friend that will fill the hole in your soul.

CHAPTER 6



EVERYONE WANTS TO HAVE GOOD FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND SECURITY

I remember vividly the joy I felt when my father-in-law wrote me a note validating my choices and thanking me for taking care of his daughter and grandson. As a man, there is nothing more fulfilling than someone else being the “I told you so chorus” for your life. When we began down this path I was of a different religion and, for all practical purposes, an unbeliever in the God of my wife’s family and the religion of her forefathers. My own family has been the most accommodating and cooperative group that seemed to accept, even if they did not support, all of my choices. The hurt and hate in this world is a by-product of the fragmented family. Even those that choose to terrorize the world by using their families as the pawns of indoctrination in a sick fantasy of detonating themselves now for an assurance of

paradise do so because it is their family that gets rewarded. This vile and deplorable behavior is also being taught to families in the name of religion. From self-mutilation, to enduring hardships of fast and penance, to the ultimate sacrifice of a life for God, the family requires much of us as we require much of it.

In the years since I became a Christian, I have felt the pressure from my own family to keep my choices silent and my joy bottled up. Discussions about God and His plan of salvation and redemption are actually considered taboo. Not from the societal manifest of what can and cannot be said in a certain geographical area, but out of respect for a father and mother who are so steeped in their orthodoxy that any conversation is just trivial. But, like anyone, I want harmony and choose that my parents are in the life of their grandchild. With it comes the doubt that many reading this book feel: If I choose this Jesus who seems to answer all questions, what will my family feel about my choice? What will my friends say if I suddenly turn my back on the history of my own identity? Will the gods I have been worshipping up until this time ignite their unified wrath against me? Having made all of these choices, I can tell you

without any error that all consternation is replaced with peace, and all doubt with a game plan for your life, and a Helper to help you in the Holy Spirit that He provides for you as His confidante.

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:26).

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding—indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:1-6).

CAN GOD HEAL FAMILY WOUNDS?

One constant in any family environment is the angst of

relationships and the breakdown of promises over a period of time. Early in my youth, I saw such turmoil amidst those that had some material possessions and their reluctance to share with those that did not. Even when there was sharing it was done in an almost altruistic method of martyrdom. Those that gave thought that they were amassing riches of good deeds in a future life, and those that did not receive enough seemed to curse the ones that had through verbiage that was at times downright demeaning. This led to some deep divides on issues pertaining to property and inheritance. Add to this the unimaginable scenarios of who could marry whom, and the events manifested into soap operas that would make the so-called divine blush if their words and actions were made public even for a moment. In parts of my immediate family there was also expectation as to which one of the relatives could be suitors to us in the bind of matrimony. My mother's own defiance as to not dilute bloodlines notwithstanding, we made some decisions on whom we would marry and whom we would not. This led to more argument among those that thought their progeny would have a ticket out of less than adequate surroundings if they just got their daughter

hitched to someone who had a chance.

I have learned that the soul-mate that God put in my life all those years ago was by His ordinance for my journey and not anything that man can claim conquest over. The grace that supposedly needs to exist as mature, educated adults ponder the choices of their children disappeared in my extended family when I announced what I was planning to do. The fact that I would marry a non-Brahmin was enough for some to talk, but the choice of marrying a Christian was harder than I bargained for. For almost fifteen years after I married, I prayed that God would bring closure to the results of my choices and the people it affected economically, spiritually, and geographically.

Today, two and a half decades later, my marriage has stood the test of time and as a welcoming example of the love of Christ, my bride, who is from a different religion than most of my family, is seen in a light different than all the others. Many praise her for her unique sense of giving, and her desire to love those she does not know seems to win more of them to her every day.

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The God of the Bible takes care of His own. When you come on bent knee to Him in unconditional surrender and make Him the Master of your life, He begins the corrections in all of your life. He will let you make friends with your past and through His Helper in you will allow you to deal with the forgiveness of the present so that the portrait of tomorrow can be painted on a clean canvas of hope. When I contrast that kind of complete forgiveness and healing of wounds it is liberating as a thought. However, when I look back on the predestined ways of my youth, there was never any real forgiveness, just forgetfulness. If your belief in God as an omniscient being is not paramount, then you will trade the trials of the moment for new trials tomorrow, and dredge up the old routines at any time when you have to reflect on your fate. Besides, one of the attributes of the Bible that absolutely makes you fall in love with the ways of Jesus is the glory of heaven and a place where we will all be that has no troubles or strife.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going (John 14:1-4).

In a recent encounter with my father about my embracing of the Gospel and my desire to share it with those that want to know, I was asked by him why I found it necessary to return to my birthplace and seek forgiveness. He was visibly touched when I told him that seeking his forgiveness as my earthly father was important, since I want to be his legacy on earth. But reminding him that I have been forgiven by my Heavenly Father touched a chord that showed him that I came to him forgiven by a God that I believe and that this has freed me up to seek mortal recompense with no strings attached.

LOVING YOUR FAMILY THROUGH CHRIST

The risk of estrangement plagues everyone when they

choose to make a momentous decision. Raised in the joint family environments of India, almost everything you did had a familial and social stigma to it. The truancy of the teenage years, coupled with the desire to experiment in the nefarious and the egregious, meant always walking the fine line of alienation from the family. Religion was no exception, and the forced nature of ritual and worship seem to drive many a seeker into the arms of something more tolerant and logical. The lore of my ancestry and the desire to rebel drove me away from God and my family almost instantly. The seemingly wayward actions of a teenager trying to make a point, and the constant dance between presuming to know what was right for me and parental wisdom, caused great consternation to my parents. Add to this that the matrimonial choices were of the inter-caste and interfaith variety, and there was no love lost.

Years after I had become a Christian and felt the fullness of God in my life, my belief brought me to the threshold of making amends with those that the Creator had put in my path. My God had instructed me through His text to love all those who had a different belief. I learned harshly that this meant making friends with your past. Zig Ziglar,

who has been my mentor for two decades, says that you can let your past beat you or you can let it teach you. Dr. Ravi Zacharias coined love as the supreme ethic. It was time to love my parents back into my life using Christ as an example of atonement and sacrifice.

For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other (Galatians 5:14-15).

Many religions talk about love and many faiths express the desire to love. In modern times more atrocities have been committed by those that claim to be universal in this ethic of love. Granted, anytime a Christian makes a case for loving their neighbor they will be told about the Crusades. Since we are talking about the here and now, all I can vouch for is that you cannot judge any philosophy by its abuse, as dastardly deeds have been done by all who hijacked a few verses of their ordained texts to make a mess. David Koresh did it in Waco, Texas, and Jim Jones in Guyana. Christianity becomes unique in the sense that the Bible, which is God-breathed and divinely inspired,

allows everyone to have two ways to look at it. One as an inspirational text that actually gives advice on living every day, and the other as an intricate code that was woven over thousands of years to fit like a roadmap that takes you from origins to modernity and from creation to design. Following the grace of the document and its application to my life has allowed me to love my way back into a family that had shunned me for the supposedly alien choices I had made that ostracized me from them.

CAN YOU LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOU DO YOURSELF?

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:43-48).

However, when you realize that God Himself said that you are to love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you, life takes on a different moniker of civility. My newfound grace in the Lord Jesus absolutely changed my image, and the love I had for my life and the relationships in that life seemed to bubble up to overflowing. I remember deciding that the only way to erase almost two decades of angst in a family that claimed betrayal and abandonment was to love them into acceptance. Today my relationship with my parents is as secure as it has ever been, and the vocal affirmation of love comes from them to me before I can voice those feelings. We hug more and share more than at any other time. The karmic destiny that was our life in an out-of-control roller-coaster ride has been replaced with sanity and equality. By loving them as Christ loved the Church universal, I was able to deflect any and all pain that seemed to be leveled against me. This does not make me anymore divine than understanding childbirth would make me an authority on pregnancy. But this philosophy of *turn the other cheek* that had been modeled by Christ and perfected by the likes of Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., seems to work when it comes to loving our families.

The grace that abounds amidst the peace of forgiveness and the restoration of familial love is talked about in the Bible more clearly than any other book on life. The very prayer we pray is to ask God to forgive our transgressions as we forgive those who transgress against us. While in reality I never want to be forgiven as I have forgiven, I am blessed by the assurance that to forgive is a divine quality.

FIGHTING AGAINST REASON

The art of the love paradox is the fight against reason. It seems that the material wants and societal greed that creep upon us cause us to want to rebel against everything. In moving from the dependence on what is good to the independence of what looks appealing to the inter-dependence on what will make us stable, we lose the comprehension of rationality. The desire to defy creation as an order and God as Supreme Designer leaves us in shambles. We make our own morality and craft our own reason and choose our own paths. The private hell we create for ourselves overwhelms us, and the arguments we fashion to sustain this ridiculous notion that we have figured it out for ourselves leaves us confused. Add to this the nauseating doctrine of Frederick

Nietzsche and we have managed to slip into a cauldron of despair from which there is no exit, as existential plays would have you believe.

The mastery of this is best explained by G. K. Chesterton from his book *Orthodoxy*.

But the new rebel is a skeptic, and will not entirely trust anything. He has no loyalty; therefore he can never be really a revolutionist. And the fact that he doubts everything really gets in his way when he wants to denounce anything. For all denunciation implies a moral doctrine of some kind; and the modern revolutionist doubts not only the institution he denounces, but the doctrine by which he denounces it. Thus he writes one book complaining that imperial oppression insults the purity of women, and then he writes another book (about the sex problem) in which he insults it himself. He curses the Sultan because Christian girls lose their virginity, and then curses Mrs. Grundy because they keep it. As a politician, he will cry out that war is a waste of life, and then, as a philosopher, that all life is waste of time. A Russian pessimist will denounce a

policeman for killing a peasant, and then prove by the highest philosophical principles that the peasant ought to have killed himself. A man denounces marriage as a lie, and then denounces aristocratic profligates for treating it as a lie. He calls a flag a bauble, and then blames the oppressors of Poland or Ireland because they take away that bauble. The man of this school goes first to a political meeting, where he complains that savages are treated as if they were beasts; then he takes his hat and umbrella and goes on to a scientific meeting, where he proves that they practically are beasts. In short, the modern revolutionist, being an infinite skeptic, is always engaged in undermining his own mines. In his book on politics he attacks men for trampling on morality; in his book on ethics he attacks morality for trampling on men. Therefore the modern man in revolt has become practically useless for all purposes of revolt. By rebelling against everything he has lost his right to rebel against anything.

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UNRESOLVED CONFLICT

The pattern of most familial conflict in a majority of households is as predictable as a sunrise. The origin of disagreement and the propagation of rumor and innuendo are done sometimes out of envy and most times out of boredom. This docudrama of emotions that finds its way into every joint-family household is the foundation upon which a lot of unresolved conflict is built. Fathers who had nothing in terms of love from their fathers insist on reciprocating such nothingness. *It is important to note that at a superficial level this set of actions happens in all religions and faiths.* Mine was no different. We blamed society for not giving enough and then blamed others for taking too much from us.

Amidst the penance that came with worship we surrounded ourselves with piety that would absolve us of our emotions and transport us into the next realm, where conflict would not be resolved and pent up hostility would be handled with ignorance. Not ignorance in the desire to solve the problem, but ignorance that supposedly offered bliss in the desire to not know whether a solution existed. Thus,

generations of baggage was passed down through myriad relationships that offered no solutions, only more guilt. The gods of each home tolerated this madness and the people prayed around each other and for forgiveness and resolution, but almost never for each other. As I reflect back on those days of my youth, there was much pain in some of the unresolved conflict. A father's anger against decisions made when I was in my early twenties, coupled with a brother's displeasure regarding my opinions of his choices, seemed to gather steam with each passing year of neglect. The Bible again became my light saber as the God of my deliverance through His Word documented the importance of resolving conflict while reminding me that the time that had passed since the transgression had no bearing on the ability to be forgiven for it.

When you allow God to come into your life and agree to have the Holy Spirit as your Counselor, there will be no more unresolved conflict in your heart. The desire for absolution and forgiveness becomes so paramount that you will apologize for things about which you may not have been in error. This is not a docile tactic of giving in, but one that allows you to take the higher road and the

upper hand by being the bigger person.

To have an assurance that God wants us to be in the position of resolution of conflict is very comforting. Grace in your life will force you to seek out even the minutest discrepancies and seek a solution. If the Lord of the heavens carried the heavier end of the cross that would be the support for His own crucifixion so that mankind would forever be absolved, then why do we hold onto petty differences that deal with mundane issues? Surely there will be decisions made in your families that deal with matrimonial strife, property disbursement, estate planning, and religious direction. These strifes may lead to unresolved conflict and misplaced anger, but when left unrecognized for generations because you believe you deserve it as a lot in life, it can cause irreparable harm. Restore yourself in oneness with the Creator and watch Him heal your families and bring about a transcendent yet indescribable peace.

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:14-15).

*Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and **great assurance** in their faith in Christ Jesus. Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory (1 Timothy 3:13-16) [emphasis added].*

SECURITY THROUGH HIM

One of the things that God's salesman Zig Ziglar shared with me early in my faith walk was the need for security in all we do. The loss of any sense of apprehension begins to free the mind to conjure up possibilities and imagine potential. The mindset that God is in control and that all things are possible through Him is a confident mindset that allows you to weather the storms of life with determination that you do not walk alone. Security in an all-knowing and all-

powerful God gives you a feeling of invincibility. Nothing in my childhood offered me that assurance and nothing in any of the religious ceremonies and temple rituals came close to the comforting thought that a loving and living God wanted my security. In fact, to the contrary, I was encouraged to do good deeds so that I could atone for my transgressions and God became someone whose power was to control me rather than use me for His glory. So each person seeking security in our town would try to outdo others and jockey for position to become the trustees of a temple so that their piety would be amplified in the eyes of all. The rickshaw puller on the streets and the housewife in the slums could have no security, since they had nothing tangible to offer God except parched skin that lay taut over protruding ribs. Could someone exist that could reach into the depths of such despair and throw a lifeline?

May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you." For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity (Psalm 122 7-9).

If you are reading this and do not know the assurance that this provides, I encourage you to take comfort from the following example. Security means many things to many people. For some it is financial security and for others it is emotional and physical security. Recently I was invited to participate in an evangelical outreach mission in a country where the political beliefs and religious worldview were not exactly considered an oasis for Christian missionaries. I had prayed long and hard for the peace of mind that I wanted my family to have as I committed to the trip. The financial requisites were slightly outside what we had budgeted, so we prayed for the security that God had assured us through our faith in Him. Please note that God is not a “genie” that you can call on to grant wishes, and He is not in the business of miracles on demand so that man in his frailty can grasp the enormity of God. So when the check arrived in the mail for almost the entire amount except for about six dollars, we were overjoyed. Needless to say, we fell to our knees in adoration and thanksgiving when the letter inside said that the money was from an unknown benefactor who simply said “go serve Him.” When you seek security through Him, He becomes your personal confidante and that reassurance through grace is

beyond mortal reasoning.

GOD CHOSE YOU

The pastors conference that we hosted had come to an end and the ones who stand in the gap of Christendom as the real martyrs of today all seemed excited. These men and women of God had traveled great distances to be educated and equipped for three days by a team that had come from the U.S. The backdrop of persecution in a couple of states in close proximity had already sent a few thousand Christians into hiding in the forests. Columnists wrote denouncing the deeds, and politicians vowed protection for this minority. The miscommunications of a couple of groups led to untold violence and unfathomable carnage as man turned on man and sought blood for what was called coercion by one group to adopts another's beliefs. These pastors wanted to know how to go back to their congregations and talk about what had happened without opening a wound of hurt and a scar of subtle deceit. All I could think of is what is promised in Scripture and requested of disciples. Love has been proclaimed throughout the gospel as the supreme ethic.

Gandhi said that there are many things he disagreed with regarding Christianity, but the love of humanity and the equality within the human race needed to be the supreme morality that allowed one to look at one's own faith and another's belief as well. He derided the fact that man can claim that he has morality while treating another as a lower caste or as an untouchable.

“As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man, for instance, cannot be untruthful, cruel or incontinent and claim to have God on his side.” *Mahatma Gandhi*

As you read this and look at the landscape of carnage and the heat of what persecution on both sides does to people, remember that long before you were even a thought, God chose you.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).

Whenever I meditate on this Scripture, the abstract being what

I used to be is replaced with the certainty and absolution of someone who God chose before time. There is a confidence that goes into being able to love and allowing you to be loved. Granted, everyone has their own faith and finds it personal to them, but as has been stated often, the purpose of this narrative is to establish why I went from one end of the belief system to the other. Knowing that God would want to choose me is an amazing feeling and a distinct sense of comfort.

So let's go back to the pastors conference. The question on everyone's mind amidst such hostility and derision was "why" would a western team decide to bring its resources into a country that was likely to give them consternation and angst? The answer was one that we were able to give them at the start of the conference. "God has crafted this moment in time and space long before we each were formed. We are here to fulfill our call, but this union in time and space was crafted in the mind of a Creator while He was designing His creation. Thus our meeting is not an accident or a choice that is human, but a supernatural choice and a divine intersection that was shaped long before each of us were on this earth." The solace and comfort

that the response gave the pastors in attendance seemed to be reflected in their new joy for the remainder of our time together.

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5).

WASHING AWAY YOUR INSECURITY

There then is the security that humanity creates; the class system upon which we judge each other but God had no intention of doing it that way. Actually, the caste and class systems are designed to have an abstract control over something that cannot be defined. Jesus washed the disciples' feet as a symbolic gesture of servant leadership while transforming the role of teacher and student into something a lot less complicated. Where I was raised the ritual of touching feet was only one-sided. A student always touched the feet of the master and never the other way around. The young touched the feet of the elderly while soliciting a blessing, a ritual I still practice when I meet my parents and in-laws.

The security that comes from actually having an opportunity to wash away your insecurity was something new, refreshing and challenging to me. The search for such absolute security with God, who would want to wash the feet of His disciples so that they in turn may have no objection to bending at the waist in servitude for others, was radical and refreshing.

... so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet

but my hands and my head as well!”

Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean (John 13:4-11).

The moment of complete transformation and eternal security came on the last day of the pastors conference. We had embarked on a foot-washing ceremony to culminate the events of the week. There was a great humbling of the spirit and crumbling of the ego as my senior pastor gently washed my feet and slowly massaged the burdens they carried, while delicately wiping them so that they were prepared to walk again in humility. A bishop of repute then got involved in this very boundary-breaking gesture and soon there was no title or position—just an eager dash to the front of the line to serve and be served.

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS TRY TEARS

My turn at washing the callused feet of a servant of God

came with some amount of uncertainty, as the very man whose turn it was had been vocal about his displeasure for doctrine and order. He was agitated about the rules of the church that seemed to lack the relationship of Christ, and made it known publicly on more than one occasion during the just-concluded sessions. When we were done experiencing one of the more tender acts of human kindness in all of the Gospels, he beckoned me to the side to give his revelation of what had just happened. He reminded me of the high caste I had been born into and from where I had begun my own journey. He then recounted how he was a Dalit, or one from the class of “untouchables.” He had to embrace me tightly as the emotions of the moment were so powerful, and as I realized that in the search for absolutes when all else fails, God will let you learn with tears.

If there is a need for happiness and security in this world, I now know where to go to get them, and you can, too.

CHAPTER 7



EVERYONE WANTS PEACE OF MIND AND HOPE

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Brutality in the form of terrorism reared its ugly head and came in the disruption of civility at the Munich Olympic Games in 1972. The voice of the late Jim McKay, as he somberly reminded the viewers that all had ended tragically, was a grim reminder of the horrible spectacle that had unfolded in front of us. Celebrating the spirit of sportsmanship, the nations that had come together to compete for athletic superiority had already pledged that

fairness would be the code of conduct. How, then, did the world come to the cusp of such madness when people needing to make a statement usually raid the hopes and dreams of the innocent? Who then can give us universal peace and unblemished hope? I have read many of the works of other religions and the concepts of hope and peace are usually included in some format. However, the Bible warns about the atrocities of the moment while prophesying about the hope in the second coming of Christ.

We have already dealt with the answer about the abuse of religion and how Christ's words never acknowledged it, applauded it, or encouraged it. However, those under the guise of atheism or pantheism can naturally lend themselves to confused ideals or warped dispositions because doctrinally there are no absolutes that prevent them from doing so. The barbarism committed in Munich has no excuse, and the progression of such brands of terror in the name of God is not only despicable, it also leaves no solutions possible. So where does one look for hope and peace in the other worldviews that seem to peddle the message of abstract beauty while shunning, and in some cases defiling, the absolutes offered through Biblical Christianity?

MUST CERTAINTY EXIST FOR HOPE TO BE OFFERED?

In my search for the true identity of God, this was the one area in which I resisted God's salesman more than any other. I remember how desperately I wanted to role model all of the behavior he was offering, for I was sure that it would lead me to the success I desired and a life I wanted. However, at the crux of this offering was the absolute in the personhood of Christ. Like many who question this one attribute of Christianity, I, too, shuddered to think that in order to find peace and hope in God I would have to change my belief at such a foundational level. This was the one thing that was non-negotiable that would take away an earthly identity that had connected me to my family, my caste, and everything that I knew. I wanted to be certain that God was going to be real but was not ready to accept that He was the only One who could be real in the person of Christ. Maybe as you read this you have your own questions as to why God would want to be narrow in His access if His promise for a better life was so broad. Many theologians have wrestled with this, and many scholars have debated this issue from across the

spectrum of religion and practice. Most have preferred to win a popularity contest and be wide in their margin of offering, except Jesus Christ, who made the way to Him and through Him very narrow and very specific.

While I was in a country that we shall leave unnamed, I was told by a person who was raised with a different worldview that he was upset with the radical teachings and misinterpretations of his religion and hence decided to become an atheist. I remember the look on his face as we sat in his car and I told him that I did not believe in atheists. He was shocked and asked me how I could make such a nonsensical claim. I replied that just as he chose not to believe in God, I had chosen not to believe in him. He was not amused until I explained my position. I told him that I was not big enough to prove my God anymore than he was big enough to disprove my God. All he was trying to do in the midst of mortal conversation was tell me that he did not believe in something that I believed in. For me the difference in theism and atheism lies not in doctrinal musings, though there are plenty to choose from. The difference lies in the peace of mind of knowing that God can make claims and prove them, and promise

hope and reveal it as well.

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23).

THE BLESSING OF REVEALED HOPE

The musings of entire nations and the speeches of politicians seem to offer a lot of hope, and people readily abandon principle and belief to respond to such diatribes and platitudes. Across demographic barriers the word *hope* and its cousin *change* have altered the course of human history and, more recently, provided the incredible backdrop for an unprecedented witness to breaking of barriers. Most religions and worldviews offer a glimpse into this revealed

hope, whether through a requirement of deeds to have the hope or as an image of paradise where one would be reunited with God if one followed certain edicts. Christianity would stand alone in God promising hope for your life through an eternal rescue that would cleanse your past, being spiritually present as a navigator for the rest of your life, while guaranteeing you a union with Him after you die. How much more hope could a person want, if all else were equal? How many more signs would a person need to understand that God could be and should be capable of telling me exactly how to live for tomorrow, while erasing the weighted anchors of distressed yesterdays that seem to hold me back?

The mindset I had, as I was ready to take the final step in my conversion experience, was one of doubt. Is this promise of eternity real? Must I relinquish every thought I had about what piety and prayer were all about to embark on and enjoy the sanctification that this hope in Christ offered? You may have the same questions as you ponder the true identity of God. I do not know if my answer is true because I say so. I believe in what was said about the answer I now have by the many who have proclaimed the Word before

me, and the blessings of the life I have led since that day in October of 1993 is the proof others see. How can you explain the lives of Adoniram Judson, Henry Martyn, C. T. Studd, E. Stanley Jones, and the others who followed the blessing of that hope into great hostility and persecution? It was through the study of the lives of the pioneers of The China Inland Mission led by Hudson Taylor, and the story of Jim Elliott's tragic end at the hands of headhunters, that I got a glimpse of that hope. Why would these people, who lived within the confines of luxury in the midst of excess as it related to the rest of the world, give life and limb to spread the so-called good news? Why was their vision of a blessing so different that they were willing to give their own lives to share this love? Contrast this to some of the prevailing worldviews today and you can see the subtle difference in how the commandments are carried out.

CAN SUCH HOPE COME FROM THOSE THAT MAKE US HOPELESS?

Practitioners of other faiths always complain about the fact that Christians try to convert others while offering no apology for their own history. Noted among these expositions

was the one given by Swami Vivekananda at the World Council of Religions in the late 1800s, where he rightly accused the British of having their foot on the throat of an entire nation. That one single statement created another dent in the minds of many, as most of the European West that had colonized the known world were also believers in this religion that had enslaved entire populations. This stigma would be the same argument used for the next hundred years about how Christianity is bad because those who believed it were perpetrating evil. Nowhere is any mention made of the hospitals and the schools, and the other infrastructure through clean water and sanitation that are funded by Christian groups. What about the medical missions undertaken in places like Darfur and Rwanda, where genocide is transpiring in the twenty-first century using religion as a backdrop? How about the pirates off the coast of Somalia and the militia groups that inhabit the jungles of Central America, the Philippines and Northern Sri Lanka? All with religion and identity at their core while scoffing at those that once colonized them. Hope in Jesus Christ allowed me to run away from understanding the craziness of the world, while embracing the sovereignty of God's promises so I can look at my son and my bride and

believe that if God is right, then I will forever be united with them in this life and the next. It was the kind of hope I was searching for and the one worth finding if you are in the same place.

It seems that even in my small town where my whole story began I was sent to a Christian school not because they thought I would be converted but because it was the place to be. If we had to pay homage to the practices of a few and what that does to the belief of many, we need look no further than how some of the great martyrs of enslaved nations were killed by their own who believed that too much was given away at the bargaining table. Hope in God transcends humanity, and having that assurance allows you to reject the crazed, despotic ideas of sycophants who parade around behind any religion while misinterpreting the truth. Imagine having a hope that no matter what happens on earth there is an assurance of perpetual unity. Would you not want a God who said that He conquered death?

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe

that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him (1 Thessalonians. 4:13-14).

CAN HOPE HAVE PROOF?

In my youth we would hear stories of young children in the foothills of the great mountains of the North who were an incarnation of a deity and how the entire region would make pilgrimages to catch a glimpse of this child god and be blessed by him or her. At the same time, the Biblical narrative of the Child Jesus, and how Jesus actually talked philosophy with the elders, was discounted as a fable. As I grew in my understanding of the Bible I began to look at what was prophesied and whether the prophecy had come to pass. The next bit of scrutiny involved looking at whether anyone of credibility had successfully discredited these prophecies. I started getting excited when reading Josh McDowell's book *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. Using exhaustive resources that incorporated theology, history, archeology and science, McDowell laid forth some incredible claims that gave me a glimpse into the fact that the proof I was searching for might actually exist. There is

no denying by any scholar that Jesus was actually a human being and not a figment of imagination. Even those that do not want to grant Him the status of the incarnate Son of God accord Him the title of Holy Man, Good Man, and some even say He might have been a prophet. But none discount Him as never having existed.

Ravi Zacharias states that the two most compelling arguments in all of Christendom are the cross and the empty tomb. When God's salesman suggested to me that everyone wants hope that tomorrow will be better, I wanted more than hope. I wanted an assurance from God if I was going to believe Him through absolute assurance of His Word, spoken by Him to those that chose to serve Him. No abstract set of actions and deeds were going to work for me anymore as I was in need of absolute proof. The Bible started giving me proof in one book. Testaments separated by hundreds of years, and proven by carbon dating to have actually been written all those years apart, were pointing to simple facts that had been proven.

Old Testament Prophecy on Crucifixion

Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they

pierce my hands and my feet (Psalm 22:16).

New Testament Fulfillment on Crucifixion

When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots (Matt 27:35).

Old Testament Prophecy on the Resurrection

... because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay (Psalm 16:10).

New Testament Fulfillment of the Resurrection

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him" (Mark 16:5-6).

THE HOPE THAT BRINGS PEACE

I had been around Christians all my life and many of them shared with me the hope they had in Jesus and the assurance they had by believing in Him. However, none

of them converted me. Even God's salesman was used as an instrument of revealing what a blessed life would look like so that when I was ready (free will) the Holy Spirit would be used by God to deliver me. Having been an ardent student of religion in general and history in particular, I have had many a debate with individuals who ask me to share my expertise as a motivational speaker. These requests are usually couched by asking me in a "politically correct" way to refrain from sharing my convictions. Early on in my career I would oblige, as I felt it would hurt my chances of being accepted. Now I find that more people comment on my faith and solicit prayer for their loved ones, and do so clandestinely for fear of repercussion. I respect their views in doing so.

In London, England, on the heels of a three-day secular seminar, a lady from a former Eastern Bloc nation asked me to share more of this Jesus. She said that as I talked she felt warmth that she had never experienced before. The concept of God's goodness and grace had been suppressed for years under a totalitarian despot whose people were eager to love and be loved. In Poland I had an encounter with a person who wept openly when I shared the Good

News with him, and in another country where we conducted some youth programs, a young girl said she would never be able to publicly acknowledge her change in faith for it was against the law for her to convert. Can you believe that man would make a law preventing another man from freely finding a hope that binds and a peace that liberates?

Amy Carmichael, a missionary from Ireland who labored in India for fifty one years without a furlough, wrote this about hope:

*Thou art the Lord who slept upon the pillow
 Thou art the Lord who soothed the furious sea
 What matter beating wind and tossing billow
 If only we are in the boat with thee.*

*Hold us quiet through the age long minute
 While thou art silent and the world is shrill
 Can the boat sink while thou dear Lord is in it
 Can the heart fain that waiteth on thy will.*

How easy it is to have hope in a Creator and live life with that hope. The one thing I have learned in this journey is

proof is really not what people want. It is the security to believe in that proof.

It often happens, that those who hear the gospel doubt whether it is really the word of God. Having been taught from infancy to regard it as a Divine revelation, and knowing no sufficient reason for rejecting it, they yield a general assent to its claims. There are times, however, when they would gladly be more fully assured that the Bible is not a cunningly devised fable. They think if that point was absolutely certain, they would at once submit to all the gospel requires.

Such doubts do not arise from any deficiency in the evidence of the Divine authority of the Scriptures; nor would they be removed by any increase of that evidence. They have their origin in the state of the heart. The most important of all the evidences of Christianity can never be properly appreciated, unless the heart is right in the sight of God. The same exhibition of truth which produces unwavering conviction in one mind leaves another in a state of doubt or unbelief. And the same mind often passes rapidly, though rationally, from a

state of skepticism to that of faith, without any change in the mere external evidence presented to it.

Excerpted from *The Way of Life* by Charles Hodge

THE HOPE IN GRIEF

One of the most pervasive of all human emotions is the process of grieving. As a Stephen Minister I have been in one-on-one situations where the case I was assigned to ended with the death of the person I was caring for. The devastation that follows is huge, and coping with it is hard. In my upbringing, death had an air of finality to it and the mourning for ten days was then replaced by an annual ceremony to remember the dead. The ceremony and ritual conducted by the living seemed more important than the memory of the one that had departed.

My first Christian funeral of any memory was before I had become a believer. It was the funeral of Mildred Michael, my bride's aunt who had succumbed to cancer after a few remissions. A painful, slow and sometimes excruciating experience preoccupied the last ten years of her life. What

caught me by surprise upon her passing was the constant mention of the fact that she was not in pain anymore and that she was now healed and with Jesus. They talked about her life in the present tense and only reflected on the contribution she had made. The long motorcade that escorted her casket from the church to the cemetery was a vision of completion for a life lived in glory and now received by a Savior who had conquered her pain forever. The children grieved the loss of their mother, as did a husband who now had to take care of the children, but all was amidst hope and there was no obligation to grieve or a set time to do so.

Since then I have preached the funeral of my best friend Richard Oates and still weep for the loss into eternity of my mother-in-law, Maya Michael. At a time when I thought my life was getting meaning, two tragedies in a span of four days brought me full circle in my journey. Yet the messages given at their end were not only a celebration of their life with us but a reminder of the union that waits when we see them again. Assurance at a funeral may be a strange way to comfort the grieving, but ask anyone who goes through this process and see how joyous they seem

behind the veil of human loss.

In 1995 I was with Mr. Ziglar in Chicago when the call came that he had to return to Dallas as his oldest daughter, Suzan Ziglar Witmeyer, was extremely ill. The next two weeks saw me witness a man who had given hope to so many come to grips with the impending tragedy of watching his daughter living her last days. The family seemed to console each other and they prayed and petitioned God to intervene and heal their loved one. I was but an outsider watching the toll it was taking on the man who had shown me so many things, including this Christ to whom he now appealed. The wisdom Suzan shared when she reminded the family that they were never to blame God for what was about to happen was surreal to me. I had met Christ through His writings and had a personal encounter with change, but Suzan was about to meet the Author face to face, and she seemed to know it. As a pall bearer at her funeral, I saw the hunched-over body of a father who had aged through the episode, while secretly hoping for the motivator that I needed to return.

And he did return. The most moving of all speeches I have

ever heard Mr. Ziglar give was in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, at a Bill and Gloria Gaither event. Amidst free-flowing tears and restrained sobs were the words of assurance that everyone wanted to hear. He comforted the crowd with how the population of heaven now had one more person he could not wait to see. He talked about how when he got there he would run to see his mother and then search for his daughter. Forever preserved in his mind was a future reunion that would guarantee another chance with his loved one, free from illness and any strife. This was the beginning of my own change in my faith walk. Imagine waking each day with an assurance that no matter what I will always get a second chance in heaven to see my bride and my son. I will see my buddy and my spiritual mother again. Glory! All things being equal, that is one abstract that I am glad was replaced with an absolute.

I AM ABSOLUTELY SURE

Thank you for taking this journey with me. I am convinced that if you explore all that we have shared with each other and revisit those points in your own life that cry out for meaning, you will find the answers in Scripture. God's

salesman changed my life and as he continues to inspire me with a life that has been lived with certainty, I hope I have had a chance to give you a glimpse into my own journey. I pray that you will contact me and let me know if some part of this narrative has touched your life. If our paths never cross on the mortal side of reason, I hope you have chosen the hope that comes with salvation through Jesus Christ. If you have, then heaven will rejoice for you now have a reservation and when we check in at our appointed time, we can meet and greet each other face to face in all glory with our Father.

I would like you to have as a sweet melody my favorite hymn. As you sing the words new tears will appear as you know that the One who got on that cross willingly did so with the intention that you would get to know Him. He has waited for you to come to this moment and has used me through these pages to bring you to the foot of that “Old Rugged Cross.”

*On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
the emblem of suffering and shame;
and I love that old cross where the dearest and best*

for a world of lost sinners was slain.

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
and exchange it some day for a crown.*

*O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,
has a wondrous attraction for me;
for the dear Lamb of God left his glory above
to bear it to dark Calvary.*

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
and exchange it some day for a crown.*

George Bennard, 1873-1958



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KRISH DHANAM was born in India. In 1984 he finished his MBA and migrated to the US with his bride Anila. Winning a sales contest in 1990 earned him a ticket to a seminar conducted by the legendary motivator Zig Ziglar. This chance encounter would be the catalyst that shaped the next two decades as Krish joined the Ziglar Corporation in 1991 as a telemarketer and eventually became the Vice President of Ziglar Worldwide. Currently he serves the Ziglar group as their Global Ambassador.

Through training, teaching and facilitating seminars all over the world, Krish launched his professional speaking career. As one of only two executive coaches personally trained by Zig Ziglar, Krish has successfully delivered his message of hope, humor and balance in over fifty countries

and throughout the continental United States. His client list is the who's who of global enterprise and he has received accolades from some of the most distinguished organizations including The United States Army, Christian Dior, Cadbury Schweppes, EDS, Texas Instruments, PepsiCo, Enterprise Rent-A-Car and Energizer Batteries.

Today he is the co-founder of a training company, author of *The American Dream from an Indian Heart*, and a contributing author to the book *Top Performance*, written by Zig Ziglar. In the year 2008, following a calling on their heart to do something for their motherland, Krish and Anila formed Mala Ministries. This led to an affiliation with Ravi Zacharias Ministries in India where Krish serves on the board of their Life Focus Society. The Dhanams are the proud parents of Nicolas and the family makes their home in Flower Mound, Texas, with their canine buddy, Jasmin.

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