

Ten Quebec
Doctors
talk about
God

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*Heart to
Heart*

Les Éditions Jaspe
Magog (Quebec) Canada

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Les Éditions Jaspe, Box 801, Magog, Quebec J1X 5C6

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Document layout: Carmelle Côté, Christine Lapointe.

Computer graphics: Infographie au bord du ruisseau

Registration of copyright: Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec 2000
Registration of copyright: National Library of Canada 2000

ISBN 2-9805638-7-0

Printed in Canada

*Dedicated to all the doctors
who serve humanity
with love and devotion*



A big thank you to all
who participated in this project and especially to you,
dear doctors,
who kindly took the time
to share with us the richness
of your experiences with God.
This book would not exist without your contribution.



...a Prayer

O God,
Thou hast endowed man with the wisdom to relieve the
suffering of his brother,
to recognize his disorders, to extract the healing substances, to
discover their powers and to prepare and to apply them to
suit every ill.
In Thine Eternal Providence Thou hast chosen me to watch over
the life and health of Thy creatures.
I am now about to apply myself to the duties of my profession.
Support me, Almighty God,
in these great labours that they may benefit mankind, for
without Thy help not even the least thing
will succeed.
Inspire me with love for my art and for Thy creatures.
Do not allow thirst for profit, ambition for renown and
admiration, to interfere with my profession,
for these are the enemies of truth and of love for mankind and
they can lead astray in the great task of attending to
the welfare of Thy creatures.
Preserve the strength of my body and of my soul that they ever
be ready to cheerfully help and support rich and poor, good
and bad, enemy as well as friend.
In the sufferer let me see only the human being. Illumine my
mind that it recognize what presents itself and that it may
comprehend what is absent or hidden.
Let it not fail to see what is visible, but do not permit it to
arrogate to itself the power to see what cannot be seen, for delicate
and indefinite are the bounds of the great art of caring
for the lives and health of Thy creatures.

Let me never be absent-minded.

May no strange thoughts divert my attention at the bedside of the sick, or disturb my mind in its silent labours, for great and sacred are the thoughtful deliberations required to preserve the lives and health of Thy creatures.

Let me be contented in everything except in the great science of my profession.

Never allow the thought to arise in me that I have attained to sufficient knowledge, but vouchsafe to me the strength, the leisure and the ambition ever to extend my knowledge. For art is great, but the mind of man is ever expanding.

Almighty God! Thou hast chosen me in Thy mercy to watch over the life and death of Thy creatures.

I now apply myself to my profession.

Support me in this great task so that it may benefit mankind, for without Thy help not even the least thing will succeed.

Amen.

MAIMONIDES

JEWISH DOCTOR OF THE 12TH CENTURY

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Introduction

The medical profession plays an important role in society. Whether it be dental medicine, pediatrics, or specialized organ transplant surgery, health professionals are in the business of taking care of their fellow human beings.

The doctor is the one who hears our first heartbeat. He or she also announces the end of our stay on earth. The doctor must constantly face life and death, calm the fears in patients' eyes, and deal with questions that science has not yet been able to answer.

The doctor is not a preacher; the doctor treats people. As Dr. Albert Schweitzer said, "My life will be my sermon." This man who loved God understood the importance of putting the Gospel into practice.

Many doctors believe it is essential to take into account the spiritual aspect of the human being. The eminent surgeon, Wilder Penfield, after devoting part of his life to studying the brain, commented: "I have concluded that it is easier to rationalize the human being on the basis of these two elements (body, spirit) than on a basis of one." Recently, Dr. Dale Matthews, professor at the School of Medicine at Georgetown University, spoke at a conference at Harvard University. He declared to more than one thousand health professionals, "I believe we are living in a historical time. The spiritual traditions of healing will be added to surgery and medication in the arsenal of treatments. We will enter the era of prayer."

It was with the greatest respect for the reader that this team of doctors agreed to participate in this literary project. Each chapter forms a window that looks into a doctor's soul. We can contemplate the sunny mountaintops as well as the dark valleys of their daily lives. They speak with candour about spiritual realities without pretending to know everything about God.

These doctors are neither writers nor theologians, but all who read with the eyes of the heart will catch a glimpse of the radiance one sometimes finds in the works of great artists such as in Michelangelo's fresco which portrays God extending his hand towards man's.

This book will shed new light on life and answer many of your questions. It will make you more aware of the people around you, be they rich or poor.

Furthermore, the beauty of this work will be revealed when the suffering or hardened soul, in a moment of clarity, humbly turns heavenward to murmur those long-awaited words, expected since the beginning of eternity: "o God, I want to learn how to know You and love You."

Deeper than appearances

You can see farther through a teardrop than through a telescope... beyond the difficulties and limitations of this ephemeral universe to the comfort and glory of the eternal heaven.

DR. S. I. McMILLEN

None of these diseases

A doctor is often perceived to be intelligent and socially successful. However, as the saying goes, "Clothes do not make the man." A person is always more than the social image they project. A doctor is more than a professional, and more than the father or mother image he or she represents to many. They bring comfort and precious help to the afflicted in their time of weakness, yet a doctor is also a person with emotions of his or her own. A doctor is, first of all, a person with a story and a history, someone who has had their share of successes and failures.



My story begins in the melody of the wind in an enchanted forest.

My father worked in the education system and our family was privileged to take long vacations, often spent in nature. During the 1960s, somewhere between Saint-Guillaume and Saint-Michel-des-Saints, Quebec, we lived in a cottage without electricity or running water, deep in the forest, two kilometres from the road. I became a trapper at an early age.

I am an only child. My parents married late. Without the benefit of brothers or sisters to play with, I spent many hours alone, listening to the wind whispering in the tamaracks. All my senses were alert, except for my tongue, which remained silent, even if I did answer the song of the blackbird. I loved this place. The moss and lichens fascinated me. The lake, the beavers, the trees scratched by bear claws — everything was delightful.

A place in the centre of this forest became my favorite spot. A strange forgotten place among the trees, 100 square metres covered in fine sand. In the middle was a mound of sand two metres high where the groundhogs dug their holes.

From my vantage point I watched the wars of the ants and wondered about human society. Sometimes I intervened and changed the course of events. My imagination was developing. I could feel myself pulsating at the same rhythm as the life around me. No fear, no empty silence.

There, in the heart of this immense space, I could also sense a presence, something indescribable. A friend, a double — I don't know what! But I knew it was both inside me and in all the things around me. I wasn't old enough to philosophize, and I still didn't know the name of this Being.

It was in Wyoming, 1976. I had just turned 18 and took a trip west after working at the Olympic Games in Montreal. I sat at the side of a road in the desert, where the wind and dust were blowing tumbleweeds along. I was hitchhiking on a small road that led to Yellowstone National Park, but the country was in the middle of an oil crisis and gasoline was rationed.

Twelve hours later I was still stuck there waiting! Since morning, only two cars had passed, headed in the direction of the land of Yogi the Bear. I was wearing a real cowboy hat I had bought in California and was heading home late; I was starting my first year of medical studies in less than a week. I had only a single slice of bread to eat and no more water.

The sun was setting behind the mountains which were silhouetted against the crystal blue sky. Huge sun! I had never seen it so enormous. I was exhausted, and suddenly a sensation came over me, an impression like the one I felt at Saint-Michel-des-Saints in the woods. It had been so long since I had sensed that same presence. He was in touch with me. Yes! He was there. He existed. It was God, and I was certain of it for the first time.

A car honked, then stopped 100 metres beyond me. Odd. I didn't see it or hear it pass. I was no longer hitchhiking-; I was sitting in a ditch. Is this what they call ecstasy? The driver motioned and called to me in English, "Hey! What are you doing? Aren't you coming?" My own efforts hadn't worked in getting me out of the desert. Yet, effortlessly, God responded to my need. Later, I learned that the generosity of God is called "grace".



I returned home from California at midnight the day before my entrance to the Faculty of Medicine. I needed a month to recuperate from the fatigue. Then later in my first year I was bored. The students were different from the ones I had known up to that point. I usually helped others and sometimes received help in return, but, in the Faculty of Medicine, over half the students had attended private schools and came from rich families. They were individualistic and had learned the importance of competition. I felt lost because I was used to reasoning, not just memorizing facts. Most medical training is based on the principle of memorization. Anatomy, biochemistry,

embryology — we had to learn everything by heart. It made me sick and I lost my motivation to study.

While waiting for the curriculum to become more interesting, I took an interest in politics. I became president of my class, then represented the students of the faculty of medicine at the Federation of Student Associations of the University of Montreal. There I met many Marxist students who tried to convert me to their opinions. I quickly realized that what I was looking for was something of a different nature. I spoke of living in a commune, but it wasn't because of communist ideas. Rather, I wanted to experience unity and create a self-sufficient survival unit, independent of the social system around me. In the 1970s, there was talk of a clash between the Soviets and the Americans. This proposed little group would have been able to survive an atomic war. People listened to me and said it made good sense, but nobody wanted to get involved in such a project.

I felt alone at the end of my first year of medicine. I lived in a student residence in a small room where I ate, slept, and studied. I had trouble pulling on a shirt without touching the walls! Sometimes I suffered from dizziness, up there on the seventeenth floor. I would look down and think of stories I had heard about students who committed suicide by jumping off high-rise buildings. It was a good thing that the year was coming to a close.

Vacation time finally arrived. I had to retake an exam however, as I had failed one subject, the anatomy of the limbs. No surprise! I had studied very little and often attended political meetings during periods usually devoted to dissecting cadavers. After rewriting my exam, I found it difficult to find a good summer job, so I became a counsellor at a summer camp. Then, I left again on a hitchhiking trip where I met the one who today is my wife and the mother of my two children.



My second year in medicine was more interesting but I still felt an inner thirst to know the ultimate reason for things. One evening as I was studying in my room, a bearded man in his thirties knocked on my door. He presented himself well, and he asked me four questions about the Bible and Jesus Christ. I found this interesting because in the past, I had tried in vain to read

the Bible on my own. This man offered me the possibility of joining a group of students who read the Bible and shared their impressions concerning the text. It sounded like a good idea.

I went to the group meetings once a week. I also read a Gospel of John in modern French at the rate of one chapter per day. I was always eager to come back from my courses and relax on my bed with my daily reading. It was fascinating. The words of the Holy Scriptures had a flavour unequalled by anything else. At last I understood what I was reading. It seemed to me the sacred texts were an inexhaustible treasure of truths, and it was going to take a long time to explore them.

The bearded man, who was Swiss, came to see me from time to time. The thing I found hard to understand was the idea of sin. Me a sinner? I was more attracted to the idea of sharing the power of God. I had no natural tendency to recognize my weakness before God and man, but Jesus' words had their effect on me. One month later, in October 1977, a football player was invited to our little reading group. He shared his testimony and explained how he became a Christian and how he lived his faith in the dressing rooms of the Montreal Alouettes. I was not sports-minded at all but the sincerity of his testimony touched me. But this time I was ripe for the picking.

Upon returning to my room, I read in a Bible I had managed to get my hands on, a passage in the Gospel of Luke expressing my feelings:

"I tell you that in the same way there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." (Luke 15:7).

I wanted to become a Christian. The parable of the lost sheep touched my heart. I knew that at that precise moment, heaven was rejoicing because in my heart I had accepted Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world.

All through my studies, I continued to read my Bible and meet with the group of students who were experiencing the same thing I was. My new girlfriend studied at Laval University in Sainte-Foy. She was very interested in the discoveries I enthusiastically shared with her. A similar group existed on the Laval University campus, and she was part of it. So we began to study and experience Bible truths together. We would share our discoveries in

letters and during the weekends we spent together. Over the course of these years, we understood the importance of the lordship of Jesus Christ. If he is Saviour, he is also Lord. This means he is the King and Master who will one day judge the world. He guides the lives of real Christians and disciples of Christ. Whoever becomes aware of this seeks to know God's will for his or her life. I had gone into medicine with the idea of founding a commune and becoming a psychiatrist, but now I distanced myself from these concepts and asked myself what I was called to do. Heavy hospital psychiatry interested me less than daily contact with people who would likely reflect on their troubles and misery. I hesitated for a year about the possibility of going to work in the Third World as a missionary, but I didn't feel a genuine call for this ministry. More and more I realized that Quebec was a mission field. Proportionally, there are fewer Christians here than in China. My vision became clear. I could be a general practitioner interested in the problems of the soul and share my faith in Jesus Christ here in Quebec, among my own people.



The route was mapped out, but it was not without its traps and pitfalls. Student life is very different from what we call "real life".

In 1985, I was married. We had just bought a house and had our second child. Because of Law 27 which reduced the salaries of doctors in private practice, I was forced to work in emergency rooms. Then one of the leaders of the young evangelical church I attended fell ill, and I was asked to help assume certain pastoral tasks. Therefore, I had to adapt to several roles and circumstances at the same time: husband, father, homeowner, job stress in a context of budget cuts, heavy and difficult schedules, as well as spiritual responsibilities. That is a lot for a twenty-seven-year-old to carry on his shoulders! Christians must not only learn to adapt to different situations in life, but also integrate their lifestyle and values. Also, a lay person who wants to get involved in the church should not expend the same amount of energy as a pastor does, who works there full-time. He or she is faced with all kinds of current life situations which give rise to all kinds of temptations.

I do not want you to think I am justifying my errors. I know I am responsible for my actions. However, when I look back, many things seem

clear when put into perspective. At the time, I did not succeed in integrating all of these things in my life. The simple act of managing goods was new to me, as I never had a cent until after I finished my studies. I visited other doctors who drove the sports car of the year, travelled south regularly, went on special outings, and bought expensive clothes. The temptation was strong for me to follow this pleasure-seeking way of life.

Warning bells went off. From then on, my little head contained more questions than answers. I experienced more and more difficulty in preparing the sermons entrusted to me. I showed less enthusiasm in taking care of the people in the small Bible study in my home and the Wednesday prayer group. Our marriage was suffering, and my wife was struggling after the birth of our two children.

One evening, as I was coming back from a seminar on masculinity, I stood there, both hands on the fence in front of my house, and I asked myself if life was meant to be so structured: a house, a wife, a job and a little food on the table! I felt nostalgia for the open spaces. I was suffocating! I had to throw some gear overboard if I wanted to stay afloat. I had to let go of something and save some energy somewhere. Our spirituality took a blow. In June 1986, we left the church and I stopped reading the Bible. After all, psychiatrist Suzanne Lamarre may have been right when she told me that my Christianity wouldn't last ten years! In 1980, she had been responsible for my training in psychiatry.



Some call it "crossing a spiritual desert". For three years I worked hard at the hospital and the office. I also did some counselling. In the evening, I worked at home. There was a lot to do. I moved soil and patio stones; I planted trees. Inside, I built cupboards and painted our ten rooms. While I was working, I wasn't thinking too much! But when these jobs were done, my life seemed very empty. I had to find another goal.

Also in 1988, I bought a computer. I considered changing my career plan because my work in the emergency room was tiring, and the Quebec health system was not going to improve. My artistic side from my adolescence resurfaced. I studied film making, then accounting, and finally

acquired an array of musical instruments and composed alone, thanks to MIDI. I also took up sports, dancing and oil painting.

Despite all these activities, I never felt satisfied. Nothing quenched my thirst for life and living, and my projects seemed so impractical. In 1990, I left hospital practice for good and joined a clinic in the suburbs of Montreal. I love the little town where I now practice. The contact with people is more personal than in a big city. In 1992, we moved here and sold our first house at a loss.

What wasted efforts!

During this period, I read a lot of psychoanalytical literature and analyzed my dreams. One recurring theme was an attempt to fly. In these dreams, I was hindered by wires and electricity towers. I believe these symbols represented my desire to revive my spiritual life, which was nevertheless blocked by some unknown obstacle. Later, in a dream, I climbed to the power station, the source of these wires, and I could better understand the depth of the desire for possessions that lived in me and haunts each person. The interpretation of my dreams brought me back to that intense discussion with Dr. Lamarre. Did she cast a spell on me? After our conversation, was I conditioned to fail in my ninth year as a Christian? I also dreamed about other fairly serious traumas from my childhood and teenage years. Therefore, this period helped me to develop a deep awareness of myself.

In 1994, on a stormy day, a battered wife came to my office and I referred her to a women's shelter. I left my office, and as I was cleaning the snow off my car, I saw the woman in a telephone booth. She had been trying for quite a while to find transportation to get to the address I had provided. I offered to drive her and she was very grateful. What she didn't know was that I was grateful as well, very grateful because of what happened afterwards.

My work as a doctor usually ended at the doorway of my office. What was I doing? A free act of charity! I was falling from my high pinnacle of prestige and knowledge to give, help, and assist someone. This is the way of Christ, not the way of man!

From that day on, I tried to read my Bible, but I was stymied by its contents. I would have to fight. The words, the sentences, the ideas — everything had become so incomprehensible and strange to my mind.

However, I knew very well that I had already experienced real communion with God through this book. Jesus said,

"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children." (Matthew 11:25).

How can one live like a child again? How can one re-establish communication? In my own strength, it seemed impossible. More than a year went by and I was still trying to read my Bible every day. I would succeed for two weeks, then slip for three. Clearly, this force that had formerly linked me to God was not working anymore to keep me regularly in his presence. Realizing that the fight produced by my own efforts was in vain, I prayed. Every night before going to sleep, I prayed to God to bring me back into his presence. Only his grace could help me. I remembered his forgiveness in times past and the Bible's teachings about assurance of salvation. Was I not redeemed? I recalled these words:

"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:28).

And God answered my prayer. On January 1, 1995, the Bible became familiar to me once again. I could feel it with some unidentifiable organ of perception. I knew the battle was over. As a precaution, I set aside a period of six months before taking new steps, to reassure myself that I really would persevere. It required a certain amount of effort, but in June I discussed spiritual things with my wife. I was relieved to find out she had also been thinking about these things for a while. In October, we returned to the church we had left nine years earlier. The story of the prodigal son is ageless: We were welcomed with open arms.

Nine years of wandering in the desert! One would expect to learn a lesson from that. The time away helped me to understand many things: the worldly desires, the conversion process, the difficulty which some Christians experience in persevering in the faith, the lack of depth in others, and the invasion of materialism in the lives of those who do not put God first.

Shortly afterwards, I read the parable of the sower and recognized what had happened to me over the years.

"What was sown among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful." (Matthew 13:22).



An intense light shone from the top of a hill. Jesus Christ was approaching on my left. He took me by the hand. We walked towards this light, which was actually an angel. Jesus explained to me that there was a promise for me on the other side of the angel. I knew the promise was written in the book of Ezekiel, somewhere between chapters 30 and 40, and that it was verse 11. I reached the angel but he didn't want to let me pass. I sensed some sort of very powerful electric field. I faced him alone and wondered how to get past this obstacle. At that moment, the angel disappeared and I could see the verse. All I had to do was grasp it. I hurried, full of joy. I had barely moved when I felt a sharp pain in my lower back. An electric current shot through my legs. I heard my bones crack. I understood then that the angel had attacked me in the back.

It was just a dream! Upon awakening, I felt the pain again for a few seconds. Then, when I became alert, I felt no more pain. March 28, 1996, 3 A.M. I was supposed to get up in an hour to fly to Boston, where I was to attend a conference at Harvard University on psychological traumas. I tried to go back to sleep, but I was preoccupied with the dream. What did it mean? I searched and searched; it was incomprehensible! This dream was different from my usual dreams, and bore no relation to my thoughts from the day before.

The airplane barely took off before I started to pray. I quickly opened my Bible and read every verse 11, starting with Ezekiel 30. From my window seat, I admired the sunrise over the Appalachians. In Ezekiel 36, there was no doubt, the verse matched my situation perfectly:

"I will increase the number of men and animals (creatures) upon you, and

they will be fruitful and become numerous. I will settle people on you as in the past and will make you prosper more than before. Then you will know that I am the LORD." (Ezekiel 36:11).

The original context was describing the return of Israel. The word "creatures" refers to animals, which were indispensable to their economy. It is worth noting, however, that at the beginning of the book of Ezekiel, angels were referred to as "creatures" as well. Here is how this passage spoke to me. The Lord promised me a period of my life that would be as fruitful as the period at the start of my Christian life. I could once again testify of my faith and have success. He even mentioned that the people I would witness to would one day be witnesses themselves. That explains the multiplication effect. The Lord would grant me help from his angels to accomplish this task.

I do not make a habit of taking personal interpretations from the Holy Scripture. I look with suspicion on those who are constantly seeking specific promises for their lives. It seemed to me, however, that time God wanted to speak to me in a special way. I was truly happy to read such a promise although I still wondered what some parts meant, namely the pain in my back and the angel who blocked me from seizing the promise.

One year later, at the end of July 1997, everything became clear.

On July 30, we were ready to leave on vacation. While I was putting the last suitcase in the car, an extremely strong pain gripped my back. The pain produced exactly the same sensation as in the dream! I yelled and hung onto the car, incapable of walking or moving.

During the next four months, I was forced to take tranquilizers to be able to sleep. About ten muscles in my left leg atrophied following a paralysis caused by the compression of the S1 root in my spinal cord. Tests showed two nasty slipped discs. I also lost all sensitivity in this area for six months. I lost weight and experienced pain in my left knee because I had to sleep with my legs elevated on pillows. For months I suffered from insomnia due to the pain. My concentration and memory were affected as well. I felt pain in my neck, shoulders, and sternum, pain that was associated with a general deterioration of my condition. A long convalescence lay ahead. I had to visit various specialists, undergo tests on uncomfortable tables, wait in

hospitals, and participate in many physiotherapy sessions. For several months, I was totally incapable of working, and my return to work was very gradual.

Today I understand more clearly the meaning of the dream. First, God promised he would bless my efforts to proclaim his good news and help others to know him better. This aspect of pastoral ministry was clear to me at first, but it would only be in this subsequent period of my life that I would be fully fit to serve him. Secondly, the dream foretold a handicap in my back. It seems this handicap was a necessary step for the promise to be fulfilled. Already, some people with whom I shared the Gospel in 1996 were interested in reading the Bible, and I believe the best is yet to come. This injury allowed me to grasp the promise in many ways. It helps me to better understand and talk about human suffering. It gives me time to read and write. In fact, I am currently writing a book about the sexual revolution, and this book may serve as a stepping stone to involvement of a broader scope. Who knows what God has in store? The important thing is for me to follow the guide!

I now offer you some of the reflections I had during my illness.



On my back, my legs elevated on pillows several hours per day, I had nothing to do but read. At the start of my disability, I read a book recommended to me in my first year of medicine: *The Doctor, his Patient and the Illness* by Michael Balint. Like most students, I never had time to read it while in school. Facing my first serious illness and reading this book gave me an opportunity to reflect on my role as a doctor and on current medical practice in Quebec. My Christianity and interest in the psychological aspect of illness had made me sensitive to the experiences of patients well before I experienced suffering myself. For example, I was shocked to observe the aggressiveness some emergency room nurses felt towards people who had attempted to commit suicide. Of course, it isn't pleasant to watch people vomiting their medication and yelling about their misfortunes, but it seems to me that, as health professionals, we should be able to imagine the family and social tragedies that led a person to this situation. We should be capable of showing compassion. If not, why did we choose this profession?

Personally, I tried to avoid this attitude and, instead, made a point of helping my patients understand the social and psychological dimensions of their physical problems. For example, one woman's endless examinations regarding abdominal pains stopped when she admitted her marital difficulties. A man's hypertension was controlled when he spoke of his aggressiveness concerning his workplace. A young secretary's asthma, which had resulted in an investigation into the air quality in her workplace, cleared up after she cried and said she was not given the promotion she deserved. There are a lot more besides! I listened as well to a dying man without any family tell me about life in his native country, a woman affected all her life by incest, and a young girl deeply hurt by her brother's suicide. I encouraged a psychotic who is now delivering newspapers, a mother who decided to take care of her child, a person with a mental deficiency, and a man on the brink of bankruptcy. Medicine is all of this. One thing was not very clear to me before I became ill, and that is the idea that society requires a doctor to be a judge and to take sides. When we take the Hippocratic oath, we are stating our desire to devote our energy to caring for the sick. In the last half-century, society has demanded that doctors accomplish more and more medico-administrative tasks for the benefit of social institutions. Employer, employment insurance, automobile insurance, worker's compensation, private insurance — all hope the doctor is in a position to determine if the patient is really sick or hurt! What is there to say? As a doctor, I am placed in a situation where I must judge my patient. That is role conflict. The way I should behave in this system was not always clear to me. The other problem I experienced and still experience is the impoverishment of the health system. Budget cuts in the hospitals make practising medicine more and more difficult. My salary is reduced from year to year. It is therefore harder to achieve my objectives of listening and showing compassion to my patients.

Being ill and reading Balint gave me the chance to reflect on the social aspect of illness. Balint is an English psychiatrist. He brought together a number of family doctors to discuss doctor-patient relationships. Together they discovered and described many problems that hinder their clients' healing. I find the problems listed in this book are still relevant, even though the book was published in 1957. Balint's group was especially interested in

psychosomatic illnesses, which account for around 25% of visits to general practitioners' offices. They were also interested in the psychic and social repercussions of physical illnesses. The participants observed that many physical illnesses are a manifestation of the patient's deeper suffering.

Balint suggests that illness allows certain individuals to avoid having to face difficult problems in their lives. He describes an example where the client offers his or her symptoms to the doctor with a view to being placed in the position of patient. However, the illness is set up as a function of supply and demand. One can bring the patient to search for solutions and fight moral conflicts if the real cause of the incapacity to function is flushed out at the beginning of the illness. If the deep causes of suffering remain hidden, the symptoms can crystallize and become chronic. I knew the concept of psychosomatic illnesses before reading the book, but the idea that the illness could be a position of more or less conscious retreat seemed interesting to me. I have often seen patients who were told after an extensive evaluation, "You are not sick. We cannot find anything that would explain your symptoms." Rather than feeling reassured, these patients go away disappointed. Why? It seems so illogical. Balint's theory has the advantage of providing an explanation.

For all that, one must not think that dealing with a patient is an easy thing. First, the doctor must eliminate an organic cause. Then, the relationship between doctor and patient must become deeper, and a climate of trust and acceptance must be established. Only then can one bring up and deal with delicate or personal issues. After that, the doctor must move along with the patient to discover the cause and origin of the suffering. If doctors and patients do not manage to cover the whole distance, it is unlikely that any real healing will take place. The illness will show up in a different manner: other symptoms requiring more research, a relapse of the same illness, a resistance to changing the factors that could bring healing, etc.

Balint was also interested in the limits created by the internal structure of the health system. Specialists look after the training of general practitioners, yet hospital life is far from the reality of the general practitioner, who faces a whole person and not a specific, malfunctioning organ. Therefore, the family doctor starts his or her career with a prejudice in favour of what is tangible, explainable, and rational. He or she likes to be able to put a

label on things, and is proud when making a diagnosis, even if there is no treatment to offer the patient! The lack of healing in the patient is not attributable to incompetence in this case, but to science, which has not advanced far enough. A doctor believes this work is done when he or she makes the right diagnosis and offers the recognized treatment. However, the patient's suffering is not finished, and the need to make another diagnosis can lead to abuse. I think of one woman who saw four different psychiatrists over four days in a psychiatric observation unit. The specialists admitted the difficulty they had in making a diagnosis: all four diagnoses were different! In this regard, Balint said no diagnosis is possible in psychiatry without a certain amount of therapy. But a doctor is eager to be able to define the illness in order to better control it. Furthermore, in a context of budget cutbacks, one wishes to move the client along, especially if resources are limited, as they are in psychiatry.

A specialist sometimes recommends obtaining the opinion of another specialist. This phenomenon is very widespread in hospitals where there are no general practitioners. Balint gave the term "collusion of the anonymous" to the phenomenon of a patient being sent from specialist to specialist without anyone actually taking responsibility for him or her. The psychological advantage doctors derive from this is a chance at glory in the case of success while avoiding responsibility in the case of failure. As for the patient, he or she can, in the midst of such confusion or uncertainty, more easily modify symptoms, play the doctors against each other, and guarantee dependence. As students, interns, and resident doctors, we have all known patients who told contradictory stories. The difficulty in gathering the facts is attributed either to the inexperience of the doctor-in-training or the inability of the patient to formulate his thoughts. This poor recollection justifies more expensive tests, yet no one seems to have considered that the patient's imprecision could be a more or less conscious trick and a manifestation of his ambivalence towards healing.

Balint's group described 1,001 ways to push this type of patient into the background. The request for routine tests occurs most often because it suits both the doctor and the patient, and the doctor may more quickly see the other patients who are waiting.

The patient sees X-rays and blood samples as magical, as if they alone can heal. Certainly, they have the power to reassure, which is without

doubt the desired effect for most troubled souls, but these tests do not have the power to check or arrest the source of the pain or illness. Moreover, negative tests do not explain anything, and the long delay in obtaining results sometimes creates more anxiety than it relieves! Balint described the process of natural selection that goes on between doctors and patients. They choose each other according to their own style, in the goal of mutual acceptance. In this way, each is better able to bend the other to suit his own needs. A patient wanting to deal with symptoms will choose a doctor who does not ask questions but, rather, asks for tests. A patient who wishes to verbalize will choose a doctor who listens. Likewise, doctors can subtly eliminate their undesirable clientele.

Reading Balint's book allowed me to reflect on things. How do I behave as a doctor and now as a patient? As a new patient, I could also ask myself about my reactions to my own doctor. How did my family and friends react to my illness? How were my relationships with colleagues affected? How was the communication with my insurers handled? All these questions led to a certain number of additional observations. I observed three periods in an illness: the initial crisis, the organization phase, and the chronic phase. I noticed that my entourage understood the illness poorly during the acute crisis and the chronic phase. The middle period was the best accepted. During the acute crisis, the loss of autonomy is so fast that others don't have time to understand what is happening. They expect the patient to continue to accomplish a certain number of tasks that he or she is no longer in a position to carry out. Also, others cannot sympathize with the patient in his or her suffering since they have never experienced the intensity of the pain or its physical and psychological consequences. The patient therefore feels alone, misunderstood, and poorly supported. He or she is too affected by the situation to manage alone, though. This is a very distressing moment. The following period is easier. Care is organized. The diagnosis brings reassurance in that it offers a mental image of the suffering. It also allows one to consider paths to solutions and to grasp a concept of the future, even though it may not always be rosy. At this stage, the patient enjoys a privileged status. Others give the patient the right to retreat from activities, and offer their help and comfort. One lone shadow looms: the insurance company. Facts concerning the illness must be recorded and sent in. However, the simple act of holding a pencil

turns out to be exhausting. How can one think, write intelligibly, and recall conversations while pumped full of narcotics and muscle relaxants? Any delay in returning the forms triggers an automatic reaction on the part of the bureaucracy. The indemnities are just beginning to be paid when the notices arrive: "If we do not receive your documents in the next seven days, we will be forced to close your file." Difficult not to panic — and difficult to keep a sunny smile!

Over the long term, the physical suffering diminishes gradually but the illness leaves its mark. From then on, the patient must find a new balance based on residual capacities. The patient has less energy, and certain parts of the body or spirit do not respond as they did in the past. The patient may have also modified his or her perception of life. At the same time, the social support is drying up. Others expect the patient to become productive once again, and neither the patient nor his or her entourage foresee that the return to work will require certain adjustments. Both parties hope for a total healing without aftereffects. This phase is difficult for the patient. Each simple task demands a lot of calculating, and rare are those who understand this. Rare also are the workplaces that permit the worker to start again at his or her own rhythm. Rehabilitation is demanding and exhausting. Partners are impatient, conflicts common. The sick employee has been replaced at the office, and his or her job is threatened. Colleagues' broad smiles and health questions leave nothing to the imagination about what is going on behind the patient's back! And questions from friends become irritating. After the twentieth time someone asks if you are feeling better, you want to say "yes" just to get some peace.

I was astonished at the inability of my brothers and sisters in the faith to live with the idea that my convalescence could be long. "We are praying for you," they said. Very good. But the more I repeated I was not going to get better quickly, the more their faces fell. Why? Does it seem impossible that God would allow this illness to last for some time? To tell the truth, I do not believe this is the main problem. The real risk involves going further in this conversation. When the answer is, "No, I'm not feeling better," the person addressing the patient must face the idea of suffering. The suffering soul issues an invitation to a deeper conversation and to sharing wounds. Many people we meet, even in churches, do not share with us a

degree of intimacy that would allow them to confide in us. Not anymore! The patient mirrors suffering; he or she reflects an image that frightens, the image of our own vulnerability. To engage in dialogue with the patient opens the door to a world nobody wishes to enter. Yet the patient is also the bearer of healing. By this stage, he or she often exhibits a certain degree of resignation and wisdom, which in turn gives pause to others who, while claiming good health, are plunging into multiple pursuits at a frenetic pace. What vain frenzy, centred on doing and having! The attitude of our patient, on the other hand, revolves around the idea of being. His same eye contemplates life and death, like a still monument in the middle of two infinities. That is why it is so difficult to bear the gaze of a dying man, to listen or keep silent at his side. The patient sends a message to our conscience. People in good health have a tendency to repress the idea that one day they could be ill. Death is a taboo subject. The supreme fear is fear of death. The patient is in the heart of the abyss, in the cave of the beast. The patient demonstrates that the health of well people is but temporary. Why not face it and come to terms with the reality of suffering? Is this not also the best way to approach the reality of the kingdom of God?

Over the course of my illness, I had the opportunity to observe doctor-patient relationships from the inside. They follow the larger reality described above: lack of understanding about the acute phase and chronic phase. When my illness started and I went to an emergency room, the staff told me to go home and inject myself with narcotics, without giving me any diagnostic test or future appointment. However, that emergency room was not at all busy. I was the only patient there in the middle of the night. They kept me only after I insisted. There was no relief two hours after the first injection. To get help, I had to escape from the stretcher which imprisoned me at the opposite end of a long, empty corridor. I could hear the faraway laughing of a doctor and some nurses as they chatted while waiting for more patients. I slowly entered their area. The doctor, visibly annoyed that I had interrupted him, indicated to me, without getting up from his chair, that my problem was without doubt psychological in origin.

I never saw this doctor again. One week later, I was paralyzed. And even if this time I was taken seriously, my pain was certainly not over. They asked me to lie still on an X-ray table which was as hard as a rock so

I could undergo an axial tomography. The radiologist did not prescribe any narcotics! Fortunately, I had a bottle. Then, I was able to establish a deeper relationship with the doctor who took my case. A long game of supply and demand followed. How can I express in twenty minutes the experiences of a month? How can I give the true picture, being honest with myself and describing reality? What am I capable of doing and not doing? A certain relativity is involved, inasmuch as one cannot know whether one can do something before trying; for example, returning to work. There comes a moment when the doctor has exhausted all available resources. This important moment represents a transition in the relationship. A game of guilt. When the healing is not total, who is to blame? The patient or the doctor? Why search for a culprit? Because it is a natural tendency, it's as simple as that. In reality, it is neither useful nor necessary to find a guilty party, on condition that all concerned accept the failure. And here is the stumbling block! For the doctor to recognize that he or she has reached the limit of his or her knowledge and skill is a humbling experience. For the patient, it is a gesture of resignation. It is rare for this game to produce harmony in relationships. A lack of ability to synchronize can explain the failure of this transition period. The injured party communicates a sense of dissatisfaction. The other feels the guilt and hits the ball back. I consider myself fortunate to have passed through this transition fairly well, although not without fear. I still see a number of my patients who had to deal with these fears at a time when I did not yet know about the existence of this step.

I reflected on the problem of the doctor being caught between the contradictory roles of judge and healer. Here I am speaking of the game played between the patient and society. Sometimes this double role does not cause problems since the doctor's goal is to help the patient become fully functional again. Society also recognizes this function and provides for 'employees' mechanisms of withdrawal from the production system. However, the tolerance limits of these mechanisms vary according to the employer and the economic conditions. The poorer a society becomes, the sooner it exerts pressure on the patient to be replaced at work in order to maintain the production line. In this case, the doctor is called upon to issue a verdict and play the role of arbitrator in the conflict. Until I was sick, I knew society's arguments, i.e. the importance of surveillance to avoid fraud, abuses,

and wasting taxpayers' money. The doctor, being a highly taxed citizen of the state (for example, we are the only self-employed workers who cannot claim the Goods and Services Tax or the Quebec Sales Tax rebates), he or she is inclined to take society's defense when the patient does not have a lot of arguments to prove his or her trustworthiness. Moreover, budget cuts in the health system have given rise to talk of rationalization, which has led to a decrease in requests for tests. As result, the doctor who has a strong social conscience looks for objective signs of the illness — an absent reflex, an abnormal curvature, etc. In the absence of any objective sign, the patient's symptom is pure subjectivism. Here one asks a moral question: "Should I give the benefit of the doubt to a patient who claims to have pain?" The experts' reports required by insurance companies and employers quickly settle the question. No! It is true some patients heal magically following such a verdict. But most find themselves on the street. Why? Because they really are sick! I would like to say parenthetically that fifty years ago many diseases were unknown. Even today, we continue to define syndromes where the aetiology remains a mystery. We regularly discover causal agents that have been unknown or ignored but relate to known diseases. The lack of understanding about an illness or the inability to diagnose it is not synonymous with the absence of illness. How can we so easily disqualify the subjective information about an illness and refuse to take it into account? It seems to me we should give the patient the benefit of the doubt and continue on with them in the healing process. Actually, this is exactly what the doctor in charge of the patient has the opportunity to do in many cases, after the experts have rejected the patient. Unfortunately, the situation often ends up much more complicated. To illness is added financial problems, depression, and sometimes divorce.

The doctor is in a better position than anyone else to realize that society often refuses to look at its own problems. It sends to doctors the people who are "damaged and in the garage", and it certainly doesn't want to know why they are in that condition. If repairs are possible, society will take the material back. If not, the whole thing is ready for the scrap heap! This is often the impression one has. The system is tougher and tougher on people. No dialogue is entered into between the working world and the health system with the goal of foreseeing structural flaws that lead directly to illness. And

these are numerous: overwork, poor supervision of employees, demanding schedules, etc. Society no longer seems moved by the links established between the types of stress a family undergoes and the overall health of an individual: transfers, unsynchronized schedules and vacations, children spending long hours in childcare centers, guilt put on mothers, repercussions of an illness on a whole family, etc. We content ourselves with compiling statistics that show an increase in suicide rates, depression, asthma, drug addiction, and learning disabilities — and we ask doctors to manage it all!

I am not too optimistic. But just the same, I made a choice, that of Hippocrates. I will defend the patient and I will give the patient the benefit of the doubt. I will avoid ordering tests just to get rid of a client. I will not fall into the trap of stopping the healing process at the moment the diagnosis is made. I will try to cooperate in a work team with specialists and other health workers. I will accompany the suffering soul on the road to healing.

This is where I am in my life. I practise medicine part-time. Writing the book I spoke about also occupies my time. Lastly, I am contributing my efforts to some Christian groups: the Quebec Association of Christian Counsellors, the Francophone Alliance of Evangelical Protestants of Quebec, and the church I attend. The first group is looking for concrete ways to apply Christian ethics in daily counselling. I have met some fantastic people while working with the Committee on the Family in the second group. As a team, we reflect on the various problems of Quebec families and search for ways to positively influence society. The act of going to places where we study social problems helps me to formulate my thoughts and to write a book that deals with the family and the principle of chastity.

I believe I have found meaning in my life. I recently realized that there is a positive side to having crossed a spiritual desert. The experience allows me to understand many things and can help me come to the aid of others. I think I am where God wants me to serve him. I like that. I am pleased to serve the church and society. Besides, I believe this is the way God works in our lives. He produces a motivation in us for our work so we can both serve him and at the same time enjoy our activity. It may happen that he closes the door when we would like to go in a direction he has not chosen for us. A number of years ago, I convinced myself I needed a more specialized diploma to gain credibility in the eyes of the church and society. I asked

myself whether I should become a psychoanalyst. Through prayer, God said no. Then, I asked myself whether I should study theology and, again, the Lord confirmed he had something else for me. He wants us to accept his will, but he will not force us to do activities which we would not appreciate in the long term. He loves his children.

I am grateful to God for a wife I love and two beautiful children. I would have a hard time to describe in a few lines all the ties, emotions, mutual help, and memories a family brings. Diane and I came from the last wave of baby boomers. We are the generation that received, full force, the wave of changes caused by the feminist revolution. The lack of a clear model in this society in transition has forced us to reflect, to look for new avenues, to be creative. I continue to reflect on ways to apply Biblical principles in the present social context, and I am not contented with overly simple recipes. With the passing of time, we will discover the role of mothers and fathers in the family. Our personal experiences have made both of us less at ease with exercising certain aspects of parental authority, and we have had to make adjustments. Consequently, we have, in our own way, shared tasks and the care of our children. I am satisfied with this way of doing things. We have succeeded, I think, in instilling in our children the idea of taking care of one another. We like to have fun together. Our two teenagers express their ideas clearly. We make sure that each individual's space is respected and that all take into account the interests of the group. It's a mini-society all right! The parents play the role of leader, and it appears to me we have done well. God has blessed and will continue to bless. The important thing, I think, is for us to search for the path he traces out for us in each situation, and to be sensitive to one another. For this to happen, Jesus must reign in our hearts.

DR. MICHEL ROBILLARD

...a Prayer

If one day
 I lose sight of You
 and walk away
 clothed in shadows of blurry dreams
 If in the storm
 my boat gets wrecked
 If I forget Your voice
 If I make the wrong choice...
 drunk with poison rage
 If I profane our romance
 If I curse our dance
 If I become Judas and Peter
 all the better to deny You
 And if one day...
 If my joy fades away
 drowned in my silent tears
 If I hide my suffering
 between the wrinkles of my broken heart
 Like the shadow of the past
 Like the friend one calls in the middle of the night, shaken
 Like the handful of dust one throws on a coffin...
 God...
 ...will You hear me?

ANONYMOUS

Blessed are the Poor

The cross is both forgiveness for our guilty acts and true relief from the acts done against us.

DR. PAUL TOURNIER (1898-1986)

Bible and Medicine

Some people come here to our little community group after being so terribly hurt by life that we cannot seem to find within ourselves the adequate resources to help them.

I sometimes see patients with cardiac or intestinal problems and the specialist's report says there is nothing else which can be done for them. I, as a general practitioner, cannot bring myself to tell my patients this. After all, I am their doctor! There has to be something else that can be done. It may mean accompanying them towards death, but even that is something one can do. I cannot tell them, "There is nothing else we can do for you. Good bye. So long!" The same thing goes for psychiatry. I absolutely cannot tell a patient there is nothing that can be done for him.

We can always find some way to help. If not physically or psychologically, we can always help spiritually by being with people in their last moments. It means a great deal, and at least we are not abandoning them.



I live in a community group which takes in people for whom there is supposedly nothing more which can be done. Drug addicts with no work, no spouse, and no social life come to us. They are facing enormous problems and we often find ourselves at a loss for answers. Nonetheless, the fact that we welcome them without judging them, and the fact that they see us praying for them, does them good.

In our group, prayer is voluntary; no one is forced to pray. When people ask us why we pray, we answer it is because of our faith in God. "We believe God is able to act and we want to witness what he does." We tell them they are important in the eyes of God. "You are my brother. I know I cannot solve all of your problems but I can, however, give you something to eat and put a roof over your head. I can try to help you sort out your situation, but you must seek strength where it can be found. That is why we pray." Little by little, some ask, "May I pray, too?" They start asking questions about God and begin walking with him. Many people have been converted here. They find new strength to solve their problems or at least to surmount them. The objective is not to solve every problem; that would not be the miracle. Christ

did not come to resolve all problems for us, but rather to bring us a new perception of life which will help us to overcome the problems.

I have met some suicidal people who were otherwise lucid and rational, and they would say to me, "Listen, I have nothing left in life. I have lost everything and I want to die. It's all settled; my time is up..." These are not necessarily very depressed people, however, they are disillusioned. They already have the rope and they are going to hang themselves with it.

Here is one of the answers I usually give: "That is quite a luxurious idea, you know. Thinking about dying is really a luxurious idea. If you consider the Second and Third Worlds, the wars, cataclysms, and famine (what happened in Nicaragua, for example), those people cannot even afford the luxury of suicide. They are so preoccupied, not only with their lives, but with their survival, with knowing whether or not they or their children will have something to eat when they wake up the next morning, and with walking four miles to fetch some clean water to drink. By simply selling the empty eggshells we throw away in our country, we could spare them all those kilometres."

Anything is possible! That is why I say that your idea is a luxurious one. If you want to die, it might be because your focus on life is so very narrow that you refuse to search for other solutions. But what do you really know about life? You live in Sherbrooke in 1999; what are you doing in Sherbrooke? What are you doing with your life? Why don't you go on a trip to Africa or Nicaragua? Stay there for a month, two months, or even three; work on a humanitarian project. They could use you over there. If you think your life is a failure here, surely you would be able to achieve something over there. Now let me tell you something; those people will be the ones who will end up doing something for you. They have a great appreciation for life; it is of utmost importance to them, and they help each other out a lot."

Some people knock at my office door and tell me right away, "You won't make me change my mind. I want to die." I answer, "You are right! I cannot make you change your mind, but before killing yourself just go and work for a humanitarian organization for two months. After that, if you still want to die, go ahead. Just two months! After all, there is no rush since you want to die anyway." Some of them do leave for Nicaragua. One man was attacked by the contras on his arrival. Since he wanted to die anyway, he did

not turn back. He is still there today, helping these people in their miserable condition. He is, in fact, quite active raising funds. The survival instinct of that population touched him. He found a role to play in society. He discovered his place on this planet and his life has new-found meaning. He is now very happy and no longer wants to die.

The problem lies in the fact that we have our eyes fixed on one tree and, ignore the whole forest surrounding us! Thinking about suicide really is a luxurious idea, and living in a poor country for awhile is often quite beneficial. It opens one's eyes to a different reality.

It is the same with spirituality. When people are too centred on their own lives, their own misery, and their own daily routine, they become limited. I am not only talking about people who live in poverty. For some, it is their "little pleasure" which serves as a barrier. They have their little home and their little lot of land and that becomes their limit. I know of other people who are materially rich and who open up all of a sudden and enlarge their field of vision. They start growing wings, and energy seems to be coming out of every pore. They stop focusing on their personal and family welfare, and now see about improving the condition of others. They get on the move. The greatest message of Christ is summed up in looking beyond ourselves, our own comfort; our own welfare and our own survival; his message is that we consider others and, whatever good we do to others can become contagious!

Here is an example: when I was a student, and going through a period when I lacked money to take care of my needs, one of my friends, a Marxist, spoke to his father who gave me \$1,000. In 1968-69, that was a fortune to me since I could not even earn that much in a full summer. He saved my life! I told him I would pay him back every cent one day. He said, "No, not to me. You will pay it back some day, but it will be to someone in need. I lent it to you and you will lend it to another person going through a difficult situation. I hope that person will pay it back to someone else in need. At the end of the line, many thousands of dollars will have been offered as gifts." What an extraordinary statement! A real vision of faith. In my mind, that is the most generous attitude one can have. It does not stop at my navel, it extends to others. Others become a part of my life and I become a part of theirs. And that is the real notion of

the Body of Christ. If my foot is hurt and I neglect to take care of it, my whole body will suffer. However, if I take care of it, that same foot will enable me to walk.

Because we are believers and are open to all, and because we do not judge anyone, many in our organization are referred to us by social services. Many organizations such as ours were founded by believers, including l'Accueil Bonneau in Montreal which welcomes the homeless. Society in general does not know how to cope with people who live in misery, so they send them to us. We certainly do not have a solution to every situation, but we work hand in hand with social services and community organizations who can sometimes supply more appropriate help in meeting certain needs. We do not pretend to be their sole resource; we are simply trying to help.



I completed a Bachelor's degree in biochemistry and physiology, and a Master's degree in pharmacology as well as my studies in family medicine. Only later did I develop a particular interest in psychiatry and drug addiction. I will soon be working at the Sherbrooke prison, and I would not work in such an institution if I were not a believer. I consider the prison to be a significant place.

Christ came for the destitute and the ones who have been rejected by society and they are the ones we must reach. We must go to these people who have nothing and help them discover that there is always a solution. Honestly and humanly speaking, I could not do what I am presently doing if I were alone in this venture. It would be impossible for me. That is where the community makes sense in my mind. I have the privilege of living side by side with people who share the same vision and the same values as I have and who believe in God as I do. We often pray together.

The priorities of our community are prayer, worship, and hospitality. If it were not for prayer, I am sure that I would have left one morning and found another place to practise medicine. I would not have been able to keep up with my work. It is so terrible to see people imprisoned and lacking a place or a standing in society. They are drowning in their problems. Their

families do not want to see them anymore. They do not even have one friend left. I tell myself that if I must be a witness for Christ somewhere, there is no better place for me than with them. I realize that our Christian witness has its place in other environments but, as far as I am concerned, my place is truly there. Our community is like a door opening onto the street. The destitute are the ones we want to reach. It is quite clear to me that prayer gives us the strength to do what we do.

When I started my work in psychiatry, as a family doctor, I was asked to remove the cross I was wearing around my neck since there were patients who experienced religious delirium. The staff could wear anything around their necks, any other sign or symbol, but not the cross. I did not start a war on the subject and I very simply removed it. It was not a gesture of resignation; I just decided it was not necessary to fight a battle about it. James says in his epistle, "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do." What bears witness is not the cross I wear around my neck but rather who I am. People know I am a believer and they respect me, even though I am subjected to jokes and sarcasm about religion. If I make the smallest misstep or any error whatsoever, some say, "How can you act that way when you say you are a believer? Aren't you a Christian?"

One is not a Christian because he is perfect, and one is not perfect because he is a Christian. Christ was surrounded by some very good people but Judas still betrayed him. Judas was also surrounded by very good people and he nevertheless betrayed Jesus. With time, people became aware of my faithfulness and the respect I have towards my patients. When they started to notice the benefits of prayer, they slowly started to open up. Soon many doctors and psychiatrists were sending us their patients. These people could only be helped by a group and needed a life environment conducive to their healing.

Without even taking faith into account, for the many patients who suffer from depression and related problems, it is preferable to place them in an environment filled with acceptance and love while at the same time providing stimulating activities. These things are therapeutic. People could try to create such a life environment but they would quickly tire of being the organizers. One could not last very long. Our environment, when combined with prayer and faith, is what has allowed us to continue welco-

ming people for the past twenty-three years. It is this factor which has allowed us to avoid exhaustion, and not whether or not we are good organizers. Prayer and faith which come from our relationship with the Father and Christ are the main factors which make this environment encouraging and stimulating.

I do not claim that we will constantly experience unbelievable miracles. Jesus never appeared to me in person but I feel and know that he is present nevertheless and he gives us the grace we need to continue our work. That is something we witness on a regular basis. I have met people for whom it seemed that there was nothing else which could be done, and some cases where I could only pray. God answered! Prayer is a genuine resource for the sick person. It feeds his or her communion with God, and that communion engenders confidence, and that confidence establishes hope.

When I cannot see any other solution, I pray, "Please, Lord, help me to listen to these people. Give me the ability to listen in order for these people to feel understood." In reality, what can we say or do when confronted with such intense moments of suffering? For example, when I see a man who has just lost his wife and two children in an accident, there is nothing to say! Or when another has found his daughter hanging, what can I say? As a doctor or a psychiatrist, it is possible to stay aloof and listen to this person while thinking that he will soon go away. It is different when you are a believer however. I then ask the Lord, "How would you listen to him? Please come and touch him." In such painful circumstances, no one but the Lord can do anything worthwhile.

Life in jail is not easy and not necessarily pleasant. Many convicts know also that when they leave, problems will abound. Therefore, the time served in jail is a period of waiting. It is the right time for us to intervene. They need to meet people, they need to talk and be listened to. It is a time when they are open. Although they are physically and psychologically limited, they have all the latitude necessary.

Bedridden patients find themselves in a similar situation. They often discover spirituality at such a time. When physical activity comes to a stop, one meets God. Why should we meet God when we are suffering and not while we are happy? The question is not related to suffering or happiness but rather to the fact that we come to a full stop when we are suffering. When

we are inactive, our ears are open to hear and our eyes are open to see. We then step into another dimension and ask ourselves about existential issues. We do not have to work or do this or do that: we do not have to take care of our spouse and children. We normally never have time to stop; then comes an accident, a death, or some other event, and depression hits. Everything falls apart! At a time like this, God sends his angels to support us. If I am convinced that God is always present, I am also persuaded that I am more inclined to see and hear him when life's circumstances make me come to a halt, when I am down. And, unfortunately, it seems that we have to have travelled down a dead-end street before we step into that other dimension. Many people have had to go through sickness to discover these things. To convert means to turn around. God has always been there but we did not have any time for him. We have been too busy!

In his Word, Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Although he knows everything in advance, it is important that we talk to him. The plan of salvation has already been accomplished. God is the master of the universe, and his plans surpass all circumstances. He knows what is best for us. I do not believe that it is natural for man to speak to God; it rather becomes an attitude of the heart. In difficult moments, if I complain and focus on myself, I will go deeper into misery and everything will become more painful. If I start praising God, which is hard to do, and say to him, "Thank you, Lord, for what you are doing in my life and for what you have given me," I rise above my difficulties, knowing that he has a much greater plan for me. I am therefore focusing on him. I am not thanking him because I am suffering these ordeals, but rather for the good he can do in my life through these trials, and for the life he has given me. I want to be God-centred; he has a salvation plan for the world, and I am working for his kingdom. First, I am not burying myself or indulging in self-pity, and, secondly, I am leaving the door open so he can work in my life. I look up to him and tell him he is the one who can do everything while on my own I can do nothing. "Lord, you are my life and my salvation and I give you my all. Be pleased to accept it." When I open the door to him, it allows him to act in my life.



Praising in difficult times is not necessarily spontaneous. Again, I am saying that community prayer helps a lot. When I am unable to pray alone, there are people around me who can pray for me. I could say that I am hitchhiking on the faith of others.

Sometimes I run out of fuel. Everyone runs out of fuel at one time or another. If I am alone to pray and I don't feel motivated, I won't pray. However, if I know that a group is meeting to pray, my commitment will bring me there.

I sometimes go to prayer meetings simply to honour my commitment, as though I were crossing a desert and incapable of going on. I persevere because I am following the caravan. If I become unable to walk, there will be someone who will lend me their camel so I can go on for another stretch. Group prayer is a stimulant which helps us to keep praying. All religions talk about community. There are parish communities, regional communities, etc. People have built cities in order to live together. Humans are basically social beings although they do not always knew how to live in their social environment. In my opinion, the key is in taking care of each other's needs. It is extremely important, and includes the spiritual dimension. We must stick together. I consider this truth to be unshakeable.

I am sometimes quite tired when I get to Tuesday night meetings. "Lord, I don't know how to pray or what to pray for but I am here. I am simply here. The least I can do is to be present. I feel down. I had an awful day. There are people I don't know how to help. I was swamped with calls. I am sleepy, but I am here, and that's about it." That is the kind of dialogue I have with God. In my opinion, the important thing is to keep in contact. God only asks me to be myself. He knows me inside out. "Tonight this is where I am at. I don't feel well. I come to worship you because you are my God, you are a part of my life, and you are the one who gave me life. It is the most beautiful thing I have ever received."

We sing songs from the Psalms and the Gospels. It sometimes takes a while before I get into the right attitude but, at one moment or another, either a word or a phrase reaches my heart. It nourishes me, it comforts me, and supplies the needed answers. I may safely keep that word in my heart for many years. I am not sure what it does but it keeps coming back to my mind. It repeats itself over and over, making its own way. God is the one who has

transmitted it to me during worship or prayer: one word, one sentence which strikes me and stays in my heart.

The Word of God is always powerful. Whether it be the Psalms or the Gospels, it can all be summarized in just a few sentences. God repeats himself in more than one way because he knows it is necessary. The main message to me is that: I AM LOVED BY GOD!

I stopped suffering from anguish the moment I became convinced of the reality of God and his love. It is not works nor accumulated indulgences for my sins that make a difference to him. God saved me and I am loved by him: all I have to do is to respond to him since I am a free human being. And as such I am free to do whatever I want to do. If I do not open the door to him, it will be my own decision. If I am stuck in a black pit and God extends his hand to help me — no matter why I fell in that hole in the first place — if I do not give him my hand, I will stay in that condition. It's my move. God wants me to love him.

When I hear people say that God is responsible for evil, I tell them that is false. God does not cause any harm, but he allows us the freedom of choice. I am thinking about my daughter. I want her to love me truly for who I am and not because I have given her some food or money. Of course, I do all kinds of things to demonstrate to her that I love her and when she tells me, "I love you, Daddy!", I want it to come from her heart. That is true wealth. If I had to pay \$10,000 to hear those affectionate words however, they would never be a balm to my heart.

God truly wants us to know him but still allows us to be free. His salvation is free. By saying yes to him from my heart, his plan will be accomplished in my life. He demands nothing in return but simply says to me, "Here is my kingdom, a kingdom of peace and love." And by accepting it, I cease my struggling.



I have a neighbour with whom I had some difficulties. No one is exempt from that sort of thing. We succeeded in liberating ourselves from that situation but not without pain.

My wife and I needed a quiet place where we could rest away from the community life, which is sometimes quite demanding. So we bought a cabin which just happened to be next door to an irascible, paranoid man. A right of way to our cabin crossed that neighbour's lot and one day he refused to let us go by.

You would not believe all the things he came up with to cause trouble and to prevent us from using this right-of-way. He erected fences and even asked for money. And if that were not enough, he messed up my land while building a new road. Although it was a very painful experience for me, I refused to get angry; the man was sick and very aggressive. Every Saturday morning, he would curse when he saw my wife and me coming. We tried everything we could to make peace with him. We kept on praying, but in vain. Each encounter with him would end in anger and insults. Through some miracle, however, I never raised my voice and didn't react.

Later, when I had to sell the cabin, I had to guarantee the right of way to the next buyer. I was terribly hurt to see how much that neighbour hated me. I must admit that it was not easy at all. Even now I believe he is the person for whom I have prayed the most in my life. Each time I said, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us," I would think about him. I cannot say that I was exempt from bitterness, but slowly, with the help of my daily prayer time, these circumstances stopped affecting me.

What I ask of the Lord now is that this man will someday be able to forgive others also. I realize that the hatred he carries in his heart is destroying him. I used to pray, "Lord, I know there is bitterness and hatred against that man in my heart, but I don't want any part of it. I know it can destroy me, too, and I know you don't want that to happen to me. And neither do I." God helps me in the measure I allow him to work in me.

And God delivered me. Even if I was not the one who instigated the trouble, I believe the fact that I was liberated will contribute to the liberation of that man. God brings healing through prayer. Prayer helps us to surpass our human limits. Whenever man is limited by circumstances, God will cause him to overcome through prayer. I refused to submit to that state of mind for the rest of my life. Whatever wrong others do to us not only transforms itself into bitterness in our heart but is also then transmitted to

others. The hatred we keep alive within us will also be passed on to others. A good example is the one bad apple in a basket of good apples. The bad apple will eventually and surely get the good apples to rot. "Please, Lord, come and help me to learn how to forgive and to overcome."

I must admit however that it still hurts. Did not Christ himself, when he was resurrected, still bear his wounds? Healing is greatest where the wounds are deepest. The path to faith is tremendous but also very human, although everything that happens to us comes from God. For that reason, the fact that God became a real man is so precious to us. He has completely endorsed the human condition in order to reach down to our level and bring us to him. Our access to God depends only upon our openness towards him.

The more I open myself to him, the more God will supply the light I need to go to him. He helps me to overcome my old limitations. One has to be sincere, though. If I say I believe in God and that he is my Provider, but I stop working, under the pretext that he will provide for me, I doubt very much that I will succeed. I believe that man has the freedom of choice. I also believe that God will respond if I pray, "Lord, I am doing my best with the means you have given me, fully aware of my limitations. I will do my best. Please give me the grace I need, and most of all help me to do it out of love."

The Bible says that if I do not have love, even though I move mountains, I am a "clanging cymbal." I do not want what I do to be in vain, and since I do not know how to love, I ask him to bless me with the grace to live with at least a little bit of love. One of my friends said, "On judgment day God will sift your life through a strainer and only love will be retained." I can accomplish many things; so can philanthropists. But if what I do is only through philanthropy, I am not sure it will be of much value. And that is why I pray, "Please, Lord, come into my heart and help me to do whatever I do with love. Please come and love others through me."

It will then not be me who acts but God who works within me. As far as I am concerned, I do not succeed in doing all the good I would like to do, and I often do wrong things which I do not want to do. God works in me, not because I have lost my freedom, but rather because I am his child. Is that not the greatest thing that could happen to me? The more I let God work in me and the more I surrender my freedom to him, the more I become

myself. I am the winner. This principle will have an impact on others, and the snowball effect is what makes the kingdom of God greater and greater.



I am 46 years old. I am married and the father of a daughter and a son, aged 22 and 19, respectively. I was raised in a Christian, Roman Catholic family. My parents were strong believers and I served mass regularly as many young boys my age did. Although I attended church often, I did not know exactly what faith was, since I was being taught through catechism and not the Bible.

During my teenage years I dropped it all, without putting a stop to my search for spirituality however. I led a good boy's life. Then I started to search in different types of religion without knowing what I was really looking for. I knew I possessed a physical body and a soul, but I was also persuaded that there was a spiritual aspect to my being. There was one book I believed in and I had promised myself I would read it first: the Bible. I thought if that book was the world's best seller, I owed it to myself to read it.

I soon discovered things I had not been taught and did not know. The Bible had values which I readily accepted, being a hippie at the time. The peace and love which was preached to us in those days could be found everywhere in the Bible. To me, Christ was a hippie who disturbed not only the society he lived in but the religion he had been brought up in as well. I could identify with this somewhat but not enough to adopt it. In that period I also met Angèle. We lived together for two years, and although my parents, who were believers, did not fancy the idea that we were living commonlaw, as far as we were concerned, we were completely comfortable with our situation.

Previously, I had worked five summers at a camp for the "poor"; in other words, for people who could not afford a vacation. From the age of 13, I had been a counsellor at this camp, which was organized by a priest of the Order of St. Vincent de Paul. He and I had a good relationship.

One day I said to Angèle, "I think we should get married." She responded very negatively to that request since she was not a believer. I told her that Father Jacob, the priest I knew, could arrange a very simple wedding for us. "It will be very intimate — your parents and mine. Everyone will be

relieved and it would not require any more involvement on our part than what we have right now."

We went to see Father Jacob and he asked us about our spiritual life. I told him I was reading the Bible and that was about all. His reply shocked me. "Because of our friendship and the duty you are asking me to perform as witness, I cannot marry you, as that would make me a false witness." I was extremely disappointed and even angry. He added, "Listen, you hold a lot of parties, you drink and you have fun. We'll have another kind of party which we call 'prayer meetings'. If you promise to attend at least three of these meetings, whether you go on or not afterwards, I will marry you."

What a deal! When I think about it, I still admire that man's faith. So, we went to these prayer meetings; I, the student in pure sciences and fundamental research in pharmacology, and Angèle, the student in psychoeducation. We were surprised to find ourselves sitting there in a prayer meeting, with approximately 150 other people. We considered ourselves observers only, and sat at the back of the hall.

In spite the criticisms we had, some things did move us. First, the disparity of these people. There were people of all ages, of all levels of education, and from all walks of society. It was really fascinating to us. Angèle, who knew about group therapy, found the dynamics quite exceptional. Prayers were spontaneous. Everything was going so smoothly that we thought the person in charge of the meeting was very talented, but we soon realized nobody was really in charge of leading the group. We then thought that there had to be only one spirit in that assembly to produce such group unity. Far from us was the idea that the Holy Spirit could be present. We could feel the solidarity, the continuity, and the harmony, and to us, it was extraordinary.

At our second meeting, the same factors touched us. But there was something new. People started to wish each other peace, and although we were sitting well apart from the group, many took the trouble to come to us. One came, then another, and another... When it got to about ten people, I decided to sit down. I could not believe that they all could be so weird. They looked so normal and surely not all of them could be putting on an act!

We went to the third meeting merely to keep our promise. We were still not completely convinced. We wanted to get it over with and get married. However, something quite special happened that evening. As a child, I had been the victim of an accident which left me with pain in my back. During the evening, the pain was particularly strong. It was difficult for me to remain seated on the hard little chair for two hours. At times, the pain became so intense I could not stay seated.

At this point people were voicing prayers and requests for healing. Angèle asked me in a low voice if I wanted to join in. I remember thinking that the idea was absolutely crazy, but suddenly I started to talk to the Lord. The faith I saw in these people impressed me and I said, "Lord, if all this is really true and if you really exist, then whatever it is you have for me, I want it." While I was praying, Angèle was praying silently too. I felt warmth in my back, and when she opened her eyes and looked at me, I told her, "My back is not sore anymore." She could not believe me! I could not feel the slightest pain anymore.

We then went to see the nun who was responsible for the group and told her, "If this is faith, we want it. What do we have to do go on a retreat... anything else? We are ready for anything at all." She asked us about our occupations and after a short discussion, suggested that we attend a seminar on Life in the Spirit to be held one night a week for seven weeks.

We attended these meetings with a very critical attitude however. I still feel sorry for that poor nun who guided us. She has since died. She really loved us despite all the trick questions we put to her. We were extremely hesitant and ferociously critical. In spite of it all, the Lord reached us in such a way that our wedding was a real marriage in the faith. We invited many people. All my friends who attended the wedding and these who had been saying that I was on a "trip", were converted themselves, and even today they are still very involved in that movement. One of my friends used to say, "When you give your life to the Lord, it is as if he puts his hand into your mouth and right down to your feet, and then he turns you inside out. Your whole perception of life, of yourself, and others, takes a 180-degree turn."



I often say to people, "Try to imagine for just a moment how your life would change if you simply realized that God exists and that he loves you. Your perception of life, suffering, good and evil, love, and everything else would become totally different." With God, everything takes on another dimension. Nothing is the same.

We are no longer trapped in our finite little world, no longer limited by death. God fills all things without crowding us out. He becomes an integral part of our existence and this spiritual dimension becomes the centre and balance of our whole life. We have now acquired of a new consciousness, an awareness of the presence of the Spirit. We have a body but we also have a spirit, which is the breath of our being, the life within us. When God impregnates our spirit, we no longer see life the same way. And, this is what made me adjust my life to the values of the Gospel.

I now read the Bible in a much more serious way. What spoke to me the most is the letter St. Paul wrote to the Romans, where he speaks of the life of Adam and explains how sin came into the world through man. This epistle enlightened me as it answered so many of my existential questions. It was really what I was searching for. I wanted to be at peace with the world and with God. From that point on I could feel a vigour which did not come from me. God was there for me! And this is what he desires for all peoples.

After our marriage, I left the pure sciences and began to study medicine. I was a "lab rat" and described myself as antisocial. I did not like crowds and abhorred speaking in public. Never would I have believed that one day I would be giving lectures. Still, I chose medicine. My lab supervisor, who had noted the changes produced in me by my conversion, came to see me one day. He said, "You know, Alain, I think that you would make a poor researcher. I believe, though, that you would make a very good doctor." I had never thought of becoming a doctor. Furthermore, with a Master's degree, I could not be accepted in medicine at the Université de Sherbrooke, but that year there were exceptions, and I was one of them.

Then my eyes were opened. I used to view my life in the light of; my own aspirations, my talents, and my tastes. I desired to earn a good salary and was interested in science. All this was but my own view however; my conversion opened and enlarged that vision. From then on, it was impossible for me to think of my life as finite. I adopted a global view. I asked myself

what role I had to play in life and what was the meaning of it. Did I have a small role to play, or a greater one? I was completely free to choose.

God showed me that he would supply his grace. He had a plan for my life, but it involved my will; and to participate in that plan, I had to be willing to see things from his perspective. I could continue in my own way, looking at the ground and only seeing the road I was travelling on. In contrast, however, I could look down from above, as one does from a helicopter — and see the entire forest, and discover other roads and highways! I would then have more to offer as a person, and could reach my full potential.

God wants me to grow. He wants me to bloom. My eyes have been opened and it seems as if I can hear God telling me, "Stop looking only at your little pathway and look at the boundless horizon in front of you." I have a desire to ease the suffering of others and make a difference in the world. Medicine seemed to be a very good way to do just that.

Around that time, my wife and I met a couple who had completed five years of mission work in Africa and wanted to do something for the church in Quebec. We bought a house and shared with them as much as we could. Our expenses were thus reduced and with the accumulated savings we were able to help people. It started slowly. After only a short while, however, people were coming from all over to knock at our door. These people really needed help. Social workers also started to send us people in need, and we found ourselves in a house filled with people.

We desired to live according to the Bible in a more profound way, and the values we saw in society were not the values in the Gospel. Consumerism, materialism, everyone concerned only with themselves — this did not seem to agree with what was written in the Good Book. So we opened our doors and shared with others: the poor, alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes, guys coming out of jail, and many others. We were overwhelmed by the size of the problem facing us, and admitted that God was the only one who could bring any solution to those problems.

We prayed, "Lord, please help us to offer something to these people." When we saw the pressing and evident needs all around us, for which we had no solution, we began to pray more frequently and with more insistence. The needs were huge. I switched to a form of medicine which was more suitable to community life. Not only did I work with the alcoholics and

the drug addicts but, increasingly, I felt the need of more study in psychiatry in order to get the tools to better help them. The needs are great and I still did not know how to remedy them. I have learned that the priority should first be given to prayer, then psychiatry, psychology, or the therapeutic approach.

I believe that prayer and medicine are complementary. Unfortunately, spirituality has been removed from medicine and particularly from psychiatry. One of my favorite illustrations goes like this: I cannot deny having a left hand even if I keep it hidden behind my back. Spirituality has only been removed from science and medicine because it cannot be explained. Although it cannot be described in a scientific way, it is a serious mistake to pretend it does not exist.

Psychiatry supplies interesting tools to help us understand the emotions and the human psyche. As for emotional wounds, practically all are related to love. Psychotherapy may help discover the origin of these wounds and why they affect our lives, but it does not change anything. No therapy can heal a wound. At best, it may teach me how to live with my wound and help me diminish the impact it has on my life; but the wound it will always be there and there is the possibility that the same pattern will repeat itself over and over.

If anything can heal an emotional wound, it has to be love itself. As we have already seen in a purely human context, people who have access to a group where they are loved, accepted, and not judged will experience healing. God is love, and he is therefore an even greater source of healing. It is not that we should pressure each and every person who is in psychiatry into converting, but with that understanding, I can, without even speaking about it, comfort the people facing me with the same respect God has for us. Indeed, if I am in psychiatry, it is precisely due to my faith. People can sense it and they ask me what it is about me that is different. I answer that Christ is the reason. If they start to open up, they discover, little by little, the hand of God in their life. Many are not cured and will remain schizophrenic or have other mental disorders, but their behaviour will change and so will their perception of life. They no longer want to die and instead are quite eager to live.

In our community group, people come and discover themselves, discover God, experience change in their lives, learn how to help one other, and then move on. We then know that they will be able to carry on.

We are officially recognized by the Roman Catholic Church. We are involved in the traditional church but are sometimes marginalized because our door is open to the street people. We receive all kinds of people, divorced or otherwise, drug addicts, and people of all nationalities and religions. These folks see us living our spirituality and it is a good, wholesome experience for them.

I am a doctor and I earn a good salary but the house we occupy does not belong to me. If I should leave one day, I would be going without a cent; the house was bought to meet the needs of the community. Material possessions are not a consideration. What has been given has indeed been given, and we will not do anything to jeopardize the community monetarily. Should we decide to leave, the community would owe us nothing.

Wealthy people are allowed to participate by paying the rent for the poor so that they can continue participating in community life. Some cannot afford the whole cost of their rent, and it therefore makes sense that if I have a little more, I will contribute more. It is one way to share the wealth. Our way of life is a testimony to society since we do not live according to the values of our time (capitalist values), but according to the values of the Gospel.

We do not advertise, but once a year we hold an enormous bazaar like a store. All donated objects are sorted, then carefully cleaned. We sell everything at low prices hoping that the poor may buy the merchandise. Our intent is to provide for the needs of the home, and also to serve as a link to the people who use our services. Most of the people who come here are excluded from society, with no home and no work. Many of them are isolated, wounded, or sick. Participating in this bazaar helps them to discover their own abilities. One may be responsible for electrical appliances, another will take care of the clothes, and so on. They all work together, no longer relying only on us since such activities help create good relationships between them. If somebody has to move for example, he can end up with 6 or as many as 12 pals to help him. Now that is co-operation!

Others have left the community and have not been seen since. That is fine with us. We do not intend to encroach on anyone's freedom. Many have spent time here and have continued on their way; what counts is the multiplication factor. They have been helped and it is now their turn to help others. One day, as we were reviewing our community life, we began to grasp the meaning of our community's name, "Étoile de Bethléhem" which means "Star of Bethlehem". That star brought people to the stable to see Jesus, and they then went on their own way. We sometimes have fun saying we represent the donkey and the ox, keeping an eye open to see the people come and go. Some people, after spending time at our place, have developed a desire to get involved in society. They come here, convert, change their way of life, discover a kinship of spirit, and find a family. They then continue on their way better equipped to do whatever they wanted to do. We are but a road sign or a stop sign along their way.



A human being is defined on three levels but medicine cares only for two of them, namely the physical and the psychological. Psychiatry, a form of medicine which is becoming more and more tangible, often offers antidepressants as a solution, thus seeking to heal the soul by treating the body.

We know that people need more than antidepressants. They often need to be listened to, accepted, surrounded, and comforted either by a spouse, a family, or a psychiatrist. Although this type of intervention contributes to their healing, it never or rarely provides a complete cure for the illness.

But, why stop there? Another dimension to life is the spiritual dimension. And this dimension is the one which gives real meaning to life.

Many of my patients go through a crisis in their lives. They question their very existence on this earth. They know very well that all is not material and that the spiritual side exists. Why then should we not take this spiritual dimension into account in the process of helping them?

People are often observed doing good deeds for others, after they themselves have come through a period of illness. They have discovered new meaning in their existence; they had a very worldly outlook on life

before that. Prayer is therefore a prime element in the help we can bring to these people. The Lord tells us to present our needs to him and he will answer. If we exchange our restricted views of life for the broader truth of his infinite abundant life, things will never be the same again.

Since my conversion I do not see things the same way as before. There are things for which I justified myself then but do not need to justify myself today. It is the same at the psychological level. My relationships with my wife and my children have entered into another dimension. I view my role in society and my work as part of a global plan called the kingdom of God. I know that I am but a tiny drop of water, only a seed in a field where God's plants are growing.

My spiritual life has enabled me to see the infinite dimension of things. As I was saying earlier, if I am walking in the forest and my vision is centred on my feet or on the pathway before me, I will not be able to see anything else. But, if I am in a helicopter, the view will be completely different. One can compare it with someone who has never seen the sun and suddenly discovers it for the first time. Their whole life changes in a radical way: their daily routine, the things they used to do in the dark—everything changes in the presence of the sun and its light. Their whole perception of humanity and life changes.

When I was young, I would say to myself, "I have to believe! I must believe!" But it did not make any sense to me then. To be converted is to realize, in an instant, that God exists, and this was to me the greatest revelation. Today, I can say that I believe because I know that God exists. I know it with certainty. Faith is an assurance and it has changed my whole life. If someone were to ask me if I would be willing to give my life for my children, I would say yes without hesitating. That certitude lies within me and it is very strong. I just know it, that's all! The feeling is similar to the one we experience when we really believe that God has given his life for us. I know that I am saved. I also know that whether or not I perform a multitude of good deeds or works I will not become "more saved". Jesus gave his life for me and that undeniable truth lives in me. It explains why my perspectives are becoming broader. This new way of thinking is thoroughly changing my life. Now I know I can contribute to the kingdom of God.

A good friend of ours was a Marxist to the core. When he saw my wife and me become Christians, he thought our friendship would come to an end. However, he listened to what we had to say out of respect for the friend-

ship we shared. He also experienced a conversion. He burned all his books and changed his life completely. He is now married and the father of three children. Besides teaching theology, he is active in counselling at the University of Ottawa. His life has been entirely renewed.

I also remember some of the people who arrived at our community center in a very bad emotional state. I am thinking in particular of someone who had gone through many broken love relationships and had some children. He tried many times to take his life. He was a wreck and he came to us as a last resort. Gradually, he started to pray with us and to improve. My resources as a doctor were not useful at all in his case. I could understand why he wanted to die. Through prayer, he was given some words that brought him to focus on God. Although he is still going through tough times, his vision is no longer focused on his problems. He now goes to God for help.

God is not the one who causes suffering and hardship. These are inherent in human beings and their freedom to make choices. When a man goes through difficult circumstances, he cries out to God and asks or even begs for help. Therein lies the solution. It is not, however, a magic solution. The believer does not suffer any less than the non-believer. The difference between the two is the absence of desperation. Hope is always there for the believer. He perceives the infinite dimension stretching way beyond life on this earth.

The believer has a global view and I could even say an aerial (or celestial) view of life and its circumstances. I may suffer but I am still alive and I am loved by God. Even if I do not love myself, God loves me and my healing is found in him. If it is true that love brings healing, and if God is love, then he will heal me. There is a sort of healing which occurs deeply in the soul and in the psychological being but does not necessarily relieve a person from misery. However, that misery ceases to be the final state or a handicap which stops me from going forward.

Another important thing to understand is the fact that it is not up to us to give ourselves a mission. Even with the best of intentions and highest ideals, some of us miss the goal. God doesn't demand anything from us, but he desires what is best for us.

For me, working with prisoners, psychiatric patients, or drug addicts is a source of healing. It does me much good. You see, it is really my calling. Your calling may be different. For example, if your calling is to make

bread in a bakery and serve your customers the fruit of your labours, then do it with all your heart. Be attentive to God's will.

The essential thing in life is to discover we came from somewhere, from Someone and, most of all, to realize this someone is waiting for us. What God desires most is that we become his children. He wants us to be free. That is also what I want for my own children, but before they can be free, I must give them some rules and instructions. I must provide well-defined boundaries. And, as they grew up, my children discovered that these limits were to serve as guides towards freedom. Discipline makes us free. I myself am freer since I do not waste my time anymore.

God teaches me how to be free. If I want to be free, I must disengage myself from what controls me. Among other things, certain social values divert me from the real essence of my nature, which is to love and be loved, the true essence of man. I need to be loved and I also need to love. Anything which keeps me from that is an obstacle to my freedom. The freer I become, the more I disentangle myself from hindrances. If I challenge myself to accomplish that with my own strength, I will never be able to achieve it. The only person who can help me do it is the God of love.

From the moment I recognize that God is love, that he exists, that he wants me to be free, and that he wants the best for me provided that I keep on believing, my calling (my mission) will define itself from within, based on who I am. There are as many callings as there are human beings. It becomes the testimony of what God does in one's life. That is how the kingdom of God is established. The first thing to do is to enter into contact with God and pray, thus opening the channel. That channel is as simple as the one I used for my conversion when I said to him, "Lord, if you truly exist, if all of this comes from you, please give it to me. I want it." He says that if someone asks for faith, he will not refuse. To the one who asks for the Holy Spirit, he gives it.

From this point on, you will begin to discover your identity. You will also discover the mission that God has entrusted to you. The goal of any therapy is for one to become oneself. It is a long, hard road, but one we must not avoid. I do not know of anyone who has achieved this goal through therapy alone. But through faith it becomes possible because God is your guide on the road which stretches over a whole lifetime.

...a Prayer

Lord, open my eyes
That I may contemplate Your splendour
And see the distress of men.
Lord, open my ears
That I may receive Your Word
And hear the cry of the needy.
Lord, open my lips
That my mouth may declare Your praises
And pronounce just words.
Lord, open my heart
That I may have room for You
And be open to all.

ANCIENT PRAYER

C hina: A Love Story

The greatness of human deeds is measured by the inspiration that gives them birth.

LOUIS PASTEUR (1822-1895)

I had the opportunity to live in China for a year. At the time I was not yet a medical doctor; I was studying at CEGEP. My father, who was a university professor, had taken a sabbatical year and our whole family set off for China, that magnificent country with its millions packed into large cities, and its countryside where you may find one person in ten kilometres.

The geography of this immense country is diverse, ranging from boreal forests to jungles to coastal regions. There are rice plantations everywhere, especially in the south and east, and fields of wheat and barley in other parts. In contrast, one is not at all surprised by the absence of vegetation in the Himalayan Mountains. You may cross the Taklamakan Desert at 150 feet below sea level or climb the Tibetan plateau with its lofty peaks, over which Mount Everest presides. I remember one particular spot below sea level in the north-west where the temperature reaches 40° Celsius. Very close to there, you can admire the icy mountains. Simply enchanting!

That first trip went well. Many memories are still fresh in my mind. When the Chinese learned we were Canadians, they kept repeating the words, "Bai Qui En". It was puzzling! We soon understood they were referring to Dr. Norman Bethune, who for them is the Canadian hero of the revolution. They know Bethune's story.

In certain places the villagers had never seen a Westerner. I remember stopping with a friend in a village of about 3,000 people. As we got off the bus, we found ourselves in the middle of a market. All activity stopped instantly. Everyone stared. We felt so tiny. It was impossible to pass unnoticed!

On several occasions people invited us home to have a cup of tea and talk with them. We had to communicate as best we could since most Chinese don't know a single word of French or English. That didn't stop us from spending many hours with them, speaking with the help of gestures, facial expressions, and sometimes drawings to make ourselves understood.

Most of the dwellings I saw were very modest. The things we take for granted here in our Canadian homes would be luxurious there. In the large cities, economic growth has produced considerable development, but in the villages and outlying regions, life has remained unchanged. There are dirt streets, and the main means of transport is the bicycle. You may see one or two taxis, but the bicycles are everywhere. At rush hour in the city there are thousands of them no matter where you look. I witnessed bicycle traffic jams!

Motorized vehicles or buses in the big cities have to push their way through dozens of rows of bicycles. Once when I was travelling on bicycle, I suddenly heard a horn behind me, and when I turned to look, it was a huge bus a metre from my back wheel! Other times I went over the handlebars. Also, the police stopped me and tried to give me tickets.

A typical house in a northern village where it is colder is comprised of two or three rooms. The outside walls are often covered with dried corncobs. In the yard there is a little well, beside which lies a mound of wheat or barley ready to be winnowed. Chinese characters are written on the sides of the door of almost every house. For those who practise the so-called "traditional religions" — the Buddhists and Taoists — these writings invoke a blessing on the house or act as a good luck charm.

A great variety of religions exist in China. It seems Christianity is currently growing the fastest. Unfortunately, Chinese Christians often suffer ill-treatment from the civil authorities. They are arrested under the pretext of illegal assembly or other concocted reasons. It is difficult to know exactly how many Christians live in this vast country since the majority keep themselves from being known by the authorities. Nevertheless, it is estimated that there are at least 50 million Chinese Christians.

There are two types of churches in China: the officially recognized churches and the underground churches. True Christians belong to both groups, but the officially recognized churches are far more limited in their activities. For example, the state decides the subject matter for the sermon each Sunday. Preaching is not allowed at any other time of the week. Nobody may speak of Jesus Christ to anyone under 18, and certainly not outside the church building. Many restrictions of this type are imposed. For this reason, the majority of Christians choose to meet outside government-controlled structures and thus risk being arrested. The situation has worsened over the past two or three years. In the late '70s and early '80s, occidentals wondered if there were still any Christians in China; we believed very few had survived the revolution. However, we discovered many more than when the missionaries left the country in 1950. At that time there were one million Christians. Twenty years later, statistics show that there are between 10 and 30 million Christians. Occidentals are not indispensable for promoting the

Gospel! Christianity is not a western religion; it is a relationship with God, available to everyone.

I mentioned the Chinese houses. Lucky charms are not found on Christians' houses but on those whose owners practise other religions. Inside a house there is a large, elevated, terra cotta bed. Below the bed is a door where coal or wood is placed to make a fire. The bed is warm and helps to heat the house. The whole family sleeps on the same bed, on a small, straw mattress and a pillow stuffed with grain or sand. A section of the bed becomes the stove, where the fire comes up through an opening at one end. I stayed in one such house in the north of Peking; it happened to be the village chief's home. The walls were made of mud. From the ceiling hung a light bulb of about 20 watts. Posters of Communist leaders (Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Tse-tung) decorated his walls. A small room served as a dining room, and I can still smell the aroma of the small bowls of noodles we were served.

Chinese law requires that families practise strict birth control. In the cities each family is limited to one child, while in the country the limit is two. In certain regions, people sometimes decide to pay a fee permitting them to have up to five children. The authorities use every means to try and prevent this. The reason people in the country desire more children is because they hope at least one will take care of them in their old age. On the other hand, space is so limited in the cities that a newly married couple can wait up to five years before having a place of their own. Many small families must live together under the same roof for years. They are obligated to pre-register their children in kindergarten and sometimes must wait two to five years before receiving confirmation of a place. It resembles a lottery. One cannot have a child before a place is reserved for him or her in the school. The parents must continue to work. In a workplace, there are a certain number of registrations and lots are drawn. If your name is drawn, you know you may bring a child into the world. In four or five years he or she will have a place at school. If the child is not enrolled, it's a risk you take. With a bit of luck, and especially if the grandparents live in the city, the child will be taken care of.

Cities are built upwards; skyscrapers are everywhere. In Shanghai, it is said that there are actually 10,000 construction sites. This metropolitan area includes a minimum of 15 million inhabitants. Imagine two or three times the population of Quebec in a single city. Enormous! I lived mostly in

Peking. In contrast to the clay constructions in other areas, almost everything there is concrete. The limited space means everything is utilitarian. Though single-family houses are rare, apartments are numerous. External beauty is not a preoccupation, except for the "nouveaux riches", who can afford a little more. The city dwellings are comparable to our North American housing, with electricity and many other benefits the country folk do not have. Everything belongs to the government and landlords are very rare. Fairly recently, however, some people have been granted permission to buy the property where they reside.

I kept company with a number of Chinese students. They love to learn foreign languages such as English or French. I also love to learn languages and studied Mandarin and Tibetan a bit. Students are the same everywhere: they hunger for knowledge. Many invited me to their residences, modest one-room places with a bathroom and a common kitchen. Pictures of their home, family, and friends lined the walls. One of their favorite pastimes was getting together at a restaurant around a bowl of rice to discuss one thing or another. They would also meet in parks, which usually featured greenery, a pond, and games for children.

Workers often live and work together since their housing is supplied along with the job. Essentially, the work unit determines their social life. Everything is included: kindergarten, health services and accommodation. And everything is organized in relation to the workplace. It is to be hoped that employee relations remain harmonious because employees live side by side and their children attend the same school. Most people keep the same job all their lives. There are now quite a few entrepreneurs trying to get established, but they have trouble finding housing, education, and health services.

There is a population of 800 million country dwellers. Since agriculture requires about 500 million in manpower, this leaves 200 to 300 million without work. It is estimated that around 80 to 100 million has moved to the city. One can easily imagine the social problems arising from this exodus! These people are likely to find work on the construction sites, but at a very low wage. They have no house, just a few boards and a canvas roof to make an on-site shelter. Work takes up all of their time. They work sometimes 18 hours a day. When they can, they visit and sometimes even try to give financial support to their families back in the rural areas. Tens of millions of people live like this

at the time of this writing. It is very difficult for me to explain the density of the traffic to Westerners. What words can convey what it is like to be in the midst of 100 million people, all on the move at the same time?



I took my first trip to China in 1988. I returned for the following five summers between university sessions. I worked there as a tourist guide and as an English teacher, and studied botany. I returned two years ago; this time, as a medical doctor in a rural setting.

Generally, there is no shortage of doctors in the cities. They have everything they need, or almost. However, their medical system is along the lines of what we had here fifty or sixty years ago. There are a lot of specialists but few general practitioners. Everything is accessible for the elite. For those who have a residence permit and live in the cities, things are not too bad. In the country it is a different story. Take for example Yunnan, a province in the south-west where 38 million people live. There are about 30,000 villages and more than 50 ethnic groups. About 15,000 villages in this province are without a doctor. Where doctors are available, only a third have education beyond primary school. Some had the privilege of receiving 3 to 6 weeks of medical training. Their equipment list consists of a stethoscope, a syringe, maybe a bit of penicillin and aspirin, and some herbs. These villagers touch my heart the most. I decided to take a year of training in international health before spending six months in this province which borders Burma and Laos. Details of what I will be doing are sketchy, but I know I will be involved with doctors, even if it is just to give them a few weeks of additional training. It is better than nothing! For example, when it comes to perinatal mortality, their rate is 20 times the Canadian rate, and close to half of these deaths are related to tetanus. In some areas, the custom is to apply mud to the umbilical cord. Also, the babies are laid on the floor. In both cases, tetanus can be contracted. Since these customs are important to them, I can't arrive in these villages with my modern techniques and expect them to change at once. That's not at all the way things happen. Rather, I will direct my efforts towards recognized doctors or health workers who are chosen by their villages to take courses. They will be more open to certain changes. Medical teams have already been

set up to provide appropriate training, and also I want to learn from them. I am not going there just to teach, but to learn as well.



When I was very young, I dreamed of becoming a doctor. I had heard that in a certain country, most likely Indonesia, there was only one doctor for 17,000 people. This thought stayed with me and motivated me to study medicine. I also wanted to travel. Before being admitted to the faculty, I already desired in my heart to become involved in a developing country. During my childhood I believed I would one day work in the Canadian Far North. I had the chance to stay there during my medical training.

The friends and acquaintances I met during my travels had an appreciable influence on my choices. Some who came from underprivileged regions would ask me repeatedly, "When you become a doctor, will you come to take care of the people in my village?" Others encouraged me to head in the direction of community medicine. I had a hard time letting go of the idea of following the same patients or families for their entire lives, but this is not possible considering the type of medicine I will be practising. The other side of the coin is I now have the challenge to help promote change and improve the health of a village, a province, or even an entire region. All families will benefit from it. This choice does not result in instant gratification as is the case when treating an individual, but we know our work will make an impact in the long term.

I finished my medical studies in 1997 and have been working at Saint Mary's Hospital in Montreal for the past two years. I completed my term as a resident doctor and will be writing my exams next week. I have still not practised medicine on my own. This fall I will work in several clinics, especially in pediatrics. I want to acquire experience in this area since people under 18 make up 50 per cent of the population in developing countries.

Good health is a precious thing — physical, emotional, and spiritual health. I had the privilege of growing up in a family where this balance existed. For me, it was a normal thing to believe in God. I never expected to understand everything before making a move: I always acted according to the portion of his will I knew. This heritage of faith and trusting obedience was

instilled in me at a young age. I realized that it wasn't necessary for me to understand everything before I acted; otherwise, I would have run the risk of never doing anything my entire life. It would be like going to school all your life to learn and then dying without ever having worked at your trade.

It is the same in the spiritual realm. Regardless of your starting point, it is always possible to advance. You can try to understand a bit more while moving forward at the same time. The key is to be honest with God and yourself.

I had my periods of doubt. I got through my teen years fairly easily and can honestly say I was never tempted by drugs or the like. The most difficult testing of my faith came when I was about 20, during my third trip to China. I had been travelling alone in an isolated region for about a month and wanted to go back to the city. The problem was I couldn't find any means of transportation. I made friends with the only other stranger in the area, who happened to be a young man who had come to the Orient to buy opium. I was a bit angry with God because he wasn't helping me to get out of my predicament. After all, why should I care about him? I might as well follow the example of my new friend and live as I please.

I spent several days thinking about it. There was no electricity, no television, and no telephone. I was with an individual whose values were very different from mine, and there was no one else with whom I could share my inner conflict. Thankfully, I made the right choice.

Looking back, I see how simply I resolved my dilemma. If God did exist, I was free to choose to follow him or not to follow him. This led me to consider the possibility of living a life without principles or morals. On the other hand, I reasoned, if God really did exist, it would be absurd to live without him. The question took another turn. It was no longer a matter of whether I wanted to follow Jesus, since I had already concluded that the Bible was true and God really existed. The question now surfacing related to the quality of my commitment to God. Until that point, he had been a part of my life, but in a secondary role. God wanted me to be totally committed to him. These few days of reflection became the turning point of my existence. Though I didn't see flashes in the heavens, God obviously enlightened me. I had no good reason to believe he didn't exist, as a host of small happenings ran through my mind, reminding me of his actions on my behalf and all

around me. In this lost province in China, I made up my mind to live entirely for God.

And I have never regretted it.



Although the medical profession offers an interesting financial potential, I hope to be able to maintain a fairly modest way of life. Many tell me that in a few years this noble resolution will change: I will have my own clientele, my own practice, and a lot of money. I know that this is a real possibility and don't deny the importance of money.

I would rather say that I am privileged to have these possibilities in my life. Now we have a small house we are quite satisfied with. We don't want to become overly attached to anything. We also want to be free from excessive financial obligations so we can be ready to respond to any needs that arise, be they humanitarian or the need for doctors to help with training in underprivileged areas. In the meantime, I am working in walk-in clinics and emergency rooms.

Whenever the occasion arises, I speak to my patients and colleagues about my faith. I want to be available to answer their questions, whether biomedical or spiritual in nature. In my opinion, the spiritual aspect has a direct bearing on health. We cannot, at will, separate the body from the soul and the emotions. The medical profession is beginning to recognize this fact. It is erroneous to believe we can treat parts of an individual separately as we did in the past, where everything was superspecialized and we were only interested in the part of the body in need of treatment. We have the opportunity to treat the whole person, and even more, the whole family. That's what makes family medicine special.

Relationships are important and can affect one's health. I treated a woman in the emergency room who had severe pain everywhere in her body. After examining her and asking questions, I concluded that everything was fine physically; but in speaking with her, I discovered the problem was relational and emotional. Although she actually felt physical pain, her problems came from elsewhere. Her emotional state was affecting her perception of pain. Of course, if someone came to me with a broken bone, I wouldn't begin

by asking about the condition of his or her soul! However, I do not separate spirituality from medicine. When someone comes to see me and the diagnosis is not very clear, it is possible that by respectfully asking some questions, I can provide help beyond the biomedical.

The other day, I met another patient who, along with all his family, was going through a period of conflict. I am not a therapist, but since they had to wait about three months before being able to meet with a specialist, I agreed to see them. There was strong tension between them. I was nervous. That particular morning I had asked God to give me the clear-headedness necessary to help them. They managed to agree on some points which would at least give them the means to get through the week.

I still have a lot to learn concerning human beings and God. Since the birth of my daughter eighteen months ago, I have been experiencing moments of rich beauty. I marvel to see life blossoming, with all the emotions it evokes. I am learning to take on my responsibilities regarding my child. Recently I understood how God must feel towards us, his children. For example, when my daughter has mood swings, I love her anyway. I must teach her self-control, certainly, but I still love her very much. It reassures me to know that even when I am temperamental and stumble spiritually, God doesn't reject me. His love is constant. And if, as a father, I know I would not abandon my little daughter for anything in the world, how much more must God, who is perfect in love and goodness, feel the same way towards me.

Being a parent has also helped me to better understand the necessity of divine correction. God is not the source of all human ills. There are situations he permits us to experience to help us grow and go further. Although I don't always immediately realize the potential good a trial may bring, I know that God was with me in my trials through the years to support me and to help me grow. In this way, my role as a parent has enriched my human experience and my understanding of spiritual truths.

God speaks through the Bible. Reading the Bible daily is a good habit to cultivate. I am not always as regular as I would like to be in this regard. I love talking with God. Sometimes I rise early in the morning to talk to him and sometimes we talk at other times in the day. I talk to him while driving. I have to travel thirty to forty minutes to get to work, and I often take advantage of this time to ask him to be with me throughout the day and

to give me ability and wisdom in my practice so I will know how to react in difficult circumstances.

I also talk with God about things that worry me. Sometimes a Bible verse comes to mind, and sometimes a word of advice someone gave me in the past. I see this as the intervention of the Holy Spirit, who reminds me at appropriate moments of things that help me.

Each individual is unique. The Bible tells us God communicates in various ways. I have never seen any writing in the sky revealing the decisions I should make. Maybe I am not close enough to God! However, when I reflect on all the little events in my life, the roads I could have taken, and the doors that closed before me, their path points to a sovereign hand intervening to guide me. Certain directions I wanted to take that seemed sensible at the time could have led to very harmful results. I have a strong feeling God has directed my steps. I cannot convince myself that it all happened randomly. I would need a lot more faith to be an atheist! I am ignorant of the exact functioning of the universe and the precise way God created this planet and the human race, but I do know he is the Author and Creator who is present and interested in each one of us.



My wife and I met six years ago. I had learned that a group of Chinese Christians was meeting in Montreal and, since I had made several trips to China, I was interested in contacting them.

It was Thanksgiving Day. Some friends from the group decided to go to Morgan Park on the West Island of Montreal. Four or five of us spent the entire day together. Eva was part of the group. These Chinese people were Quebecers like I was, born in Montreal and students at McGill University. Their parents had lived in China.

We had a picnic lunch. Everyone brought sandwiches but I brought rice! We laughed.

I saw Eva once or twice afterwards. We bumped into each other at a conference in the United States where thousands of students seeking to go overseas had gathered. It seemed obvious we were both interested in working in developing countries. It was a good point in common. We saw each

other more often after this, and then Eva spent six months in Niger. If this separation was difficult, it was no less constructive. She worked as a nurse in a hospital with a shortage of personnel. A year after her return we were married and two years later our little daughter was born.

Both of us desire to travel. We hope our little darling will adapt well to different environments. Among other places, we plan to go to China. We would like to meet other young families from Canada and the United States there. We will certainly have Chinese friends, but our contact with other Canadians while in a foreign country will be a source of support. We are trying to be realistic and to recognize we are not Chinese, but bona fide Quebecers. We want to learn what other cultures have to offer. I do not know whether my wife will be directly involved with this project or not. She has training in community health, but her role as mother is very important in our eyes. If we find a reliable person to take care of Hannah during our working hours, it is possible my wife will become involved. We will see.



There are a lot of Chinese people in Montreal. Eva's parents have lived there for 30 or 40 years. They came from Hong Kong in the south of China. The present generation of young people is living between the two cultures. For example, in Eva's parents' home, everything is very Chinese, but the majority of Eva's friends were born in Quebec. Traditional Chinese parents are intensively involved in decisions concerning their children's future. However, the latter, who have grown up here, see things very differently. In their country of origin, the parents usually saw their children leave home only when they got married. As well, they hoped to choose their profession for them, preferably doctor, lawyer, or engineer. The children, for their part, have a tendency to react like their Quebec friends and make their own choices. This creates conflicts because the family interprets this attitude as a lack of respect.

The Chinese community has been in Quebec for more than one hundred years now. The Chinese Presbyterian church just celebrated its 100th anniversary. The Chinese hospital, which will soon move to the Chinese district, was established in Montreal fifty years ago. Many waves of immigration

have followed one after another, and some families have been here for several generations. We must not presume that just because a person is Chinese, he or she has just arrived in this country.

Just before we were married, my wife and I went to Old Montreal to join some childhood friends I knew when I lived with my parents years ago. They were living in Beloeil. It was their first time meeting Eva, and, upon noticing her Asian appearance, they said in their most cordial tones, "Welcome to Quebec!" We didn't know exactly what to say.

Young people from other ethnic groups often find themselves in similar situations. Without being political, I would suggest we must realize that a good number of Quebecers are not white. Although their parents came from various of places in the world and speak a language other than French or English, they consider themselves as from here. Such is the case with Eva. Like myself, she grew up in Montreal and speaks English and French, even though with her parents she speaks Cantonese. At work she communicates in both French and English.

Eva went to China a few times, including once to study the language. She was not granted the same benefits as other Westerners. The Chinese do not understand that she is used to living a Western lifestyle and that she speaks more fluently in English or French than in their language. If I speak in Chinese, even if I make mistakes, they think it's fantastic. They compliment me, encourage me, and forgive my mistakes. In contrast, if Eva, who was also born in Montreal, speaks in Mandarin or Cantonese and doesn't express herself perfectly, the people do not react the same way. They ask her why she can't speak better. She often senses a lack of tolerance.

Other young people who were born in Montreal from immigrant parents face this same dilemma. Sooner or later they go through an identity crisis. They don't feel welcome in their parents' country of origin and don't always feel accepted in their homeland of Quebec. They find common ground and associate with other youth whose situation is the same.

In one way or another, all of us are in search of our roots. Whether it is a question of language, ethnicity, family, or spirituality, we

are all looking for our identity. Should not this legitimate quest related to the blossoming of our beings lead us, above all, to seek God?

Think about it.

DR. TIM FOGGIN

...a Prayer

Great is our God, great is his power
And his wisdom is infinite.
Praise him, heavens!
Praise him, sun, moon and planets,
In the language given you
To praise your Creator:
And praise him also, O my soul,
Sing while you can of the honour of the Lord.
From him, by him are all things,
Those yet unknown to us
And those we do know.
To him, Praise, Honour and Glory
From eternity to eternity.
I give you thanks, Creator and Lord,
For giving me this joy at the sight of Your creation,
This pleasure in contemplating the works of Your hands.
I have tried to tell men
Of the splendour of Your works,
In the measure that my finite spirit
can capture Your infinity.

JOHANNES KEPLER (1571-1630)

O n the shores of the Amazon

*I see God in every human being.
When I wash the wounds of lepers,
I feel as if I was taking care of the Lord himself.
Is that not a beautiful experience?*

MOTHER TERESA

Extracted from an interview, 1974

We arrive in Peru at 6:30 A.M. after a twelve-hour delay. Sporting dark circles around our eyes, we approach customs. They decide to search us and refuse to let our medical instruments go through.

As I turn around, I see the members of my group gather and move back to pray. How can they get our instruments to the other side of the border by praying? During this time, I talk with the customs officers. They decide to place me in a little room — by myself. The team keeps praying.

I find these doctors quite bizarre. "What a way to start a trip!" I think. Too bad. The week may be long.

As I am sitting and waiting, I cannot understand what is happening, but suddenly the customs officers let us go through with all our instruments, without argument. My brother, Luc, who was praying with the others, comes and tells me he is persuaded that God has acted. I say to myself, "They have the right to believe what they want to. That doesn't bother me. I am open-minded, after all." At the hotel we rest for half an hour then meet to plan the schedule for the week to come.

This medical team is made up of people from many countries. My brother and I are the only two from Quebec. There is a dermatologist from Rome, a surgeon from Georgia, and other doctors from different parts of the world. They are all specialists who have chosen to participate in a humanitarian aid project in Peru. The trip is sponsored by an organization in San Diego, which Luc knows of through a pediatrician he has worked with. The relations among the group are very cordial.

So, here I am in Peru. The team starts the day with a prayer meeting. I do not go.

After planning our schedules, we take a brief tour of the site where we will be working. As a matter of fact, the clinic is a square building without partitions, and a cement floor. Curtains have been installed. One has to make do with whatever he can find! The dentist chair: a desk. People sit on top of the desk and place their feet on a chair. Later we fashion a dentist chair out of an armchair we remodel with boards, adding a cushion as a head-rest for the patients. Quite elementary, Doctor! I do not know of many dentists who would enjoy working under such conditions. For the first day, I have seen quite enough.

I must say I love the exotic side of this country, its palm trees and warm climate. I also appreciate the fact that I find myself among people who speak another language, a language I can speak fairly well myself. I am very happy to be here and moreover, I am on holiday.

I have come here of my own accord to help these people. I am greatly motivated to do so, especially since the services we offer are absolutely free. Another reason I looked forward to this trip was that it represents a terrific opportunity to work at a unique undertaking, side by side with my brother, Luc. We played together so much during our childhood, but about fifteen years ago we lost sight of each other. Working together was just like a dream and I was deeply moved in my soul.

And now, what about the poor, the people who do not have a cent to their name? Even the most destitute among our poor would be considered rich over here. These Peruvians live in such extreme poverty that it is difficult to stand the sight of such misery.

The site where we set up the clinic makes me think of an abandoned quarry. Suppose that one day our government said to all the people benefiting from social assistance in Montreal, "We cannot give you any more money. We are offering you the Miron Quarry. Each of you may choose a lot and lodge your family on it." That is exactly what is happening in this region. The Peruvian government has given these people a small piece of land at Iquitos, on the shores of the Amazon. This region floods for six months of the year. It is simply dreadful. All the houses are built on piles around thirty feet (9 metres) high. These people live thirty feet above the ground! All houses are built either on piles or in the form of rafts. That means the houses rise when the rains come and go down during the dry season. There is no sewage system nor any other waste removal system. Sufficient space is left between the houses so that the rubbish can be thrown down between them. The monsoon is responsible for cleaning once a year. When the water rises, it brings everything out to sea. During the dry season, the refuse accumulates.

A nauseating stench emanating from the piles of waste pollutes the air.

Another team from California is also in place. They came to build a school. It is in this building under construction that we set up our clinic.

Most of the poor are receiving medical care for the first time. Imagine their reaction! Thirty-year-olds are going to a dentist or a doctor for the first time ever. The average life expectancy is only thirty-five years. Young girls are often pregnant at thirteen. Many suffer from AIDS, hepatitis, and worms. They all suffer from nutritional deficiency, and the state of their mouths is deplorable. Many are very ill. When they learned that there was a medical team coming, they spent months preparing for our arrival.

People line up, even at night. Others sleep on the road or on the bare ground, to be in line early in the morning. They have no clothes except an old pair of pants with holes and a torn sweater — the extent of their possessions. Between 600 and 1,000 people line up every day. The most we can attend to in one day is 700, more or less. This is an enormous workload. No break to go to the beach, although the heat is enough to wilt you. When I go to work at 7 a.m., the temperature is already 40 degrees. The heat is extreme. There is even a team which accompanies us whose only duty is to remind us to drink water, because we often do forget to drink. I wear a headband to stop sweat from running down into my eyes and preventing me from seeing what I am doing. I look more like a hippie from the seventies than a dentist. I feel a little bit like a farmer who works in his field all day.

We take half an hour for lunch. I am tired and wiped out but I have no desire whatsoever to complain. It helps me, at least, to appreciate how easy Canadians have it. We often complain that life is tough, but we cash our big pay cheques and we own two cars and four television sets.

I cannot keep myself from constantly making comparisons. I tell myself, "If I just bring some of these people back with me to my country, even for one day, so that the atrocity of their suffering could be understood..."

Looking outside, I see a little boy playing on his balcony, thirty feet above the ground. He is dancing naked. I use my binoculars to see better. "You are having fun and laughing! How can you laugh in such a dump?!" How is it possible for a young boy to laugh and dance in that quarry full of human excrement with the terrible smell that makes you feel like vomiting? I cannot believe my eyes. I promise myself never to complain again back home. I will stop complaining about anything and everything, including the weather.

These people live in another world, we say. When I think about it, I believe we are the ones who live in another world: a world of selfishness and insensitivity.



We do not often experience this kind of suffering. We also suffer, but in different ways; for them there is no way out. They suffer in all senses of the word. We see very young mothers coming to the clinic with their five children. At the age of 22, they already have five children, which means they will be grandmothers at 30. Keep in mind their life expectancy is around 35 years.

Like us, they suffer heartache. If a woman's husband is unfaithful, it hurts her as much as it does a woman of our world. The problem of suffering is real and nobody can escape from it. All human beings are subject to suffering and pain.

I, like many others, have had my periods of suffering. Although I cannot compare myself to the Peruvians, some life events have hurt me as well.

I must tell you right away that I have been quite pampered. I belong to a good family. I have good parents who have loved me and taught me good values. My family environment and principles helped to keep me from making too many blunders which would have resulted in severe consequences for my future. I was protected and even coddled in cotton-wool, but not too much. My errors were never too serious. And despite my errors, my parents never abandoned me or deprived me of their love.

My private life has been very tumultuous. I lived through two separations and the latter caused me great sorrow. I thought everything would be fine. I had a wife, three children and we were a family. One day my wife and I would be grandparents. It was my dream, but my dream ended in failure one more time. Everything was over for me. I stopped working and was totally defeated. I received psychotherapy for eight months. On the brink of suicide, I had no idea how to pull myself out of my misery. During that time, my brother, Luc, did not cease talking to me about God, and I found him very annoying. So I cut all ties with him. He was not bringing me the help I was looking for; he was just getting on my nerves. Nothing could comfort me. I

needed others to encourage me, and when I found myself alone, I fell back into the same pain.

I was a bit like everyone else. I would pray when things were going wrong, but quickly forget God when things were fine. That's the relationship I had with him. I was acting like the good Roman Catholics of our village. The church was filled to bursting but a lot of people would have conversations among themselves while the priest was preaching. All through my adolescence, I went to church for appearances only, except when my life was upside down, when I had no solution, and when I could not confide in my father because I was in conflict with him. All I could do was to revert to what I had learned from my parents: to pray. And, that is exactly what I would do. However, I don't remember my prayers being answered a single time. I prayed because it made me feel better. I prayed and I cried.

I found myself isolated in a cabin, and this time I was really in the dumps. For a week I could not get to sleep without antidepressants and sleeping pills. I was in the woods three weeks and I had dark ideas. There was a cliff not too far from the camp. I also had a gun with me. Suicidal ideas obsessed me; I was living through horrible moments.

Fighting with myself, I thought I was too much of a coward to kill myself. I wanted to die but I was too weak to act. There I was, feeling guilty even about the fact that I was too cowardly to commit suicide. I really was reaching the bottom of the barrel.

One evening, I let the valve open and I started to cry, to scream, and to shout — at God. I said to him, "I can't stand it anymore, so I'll give you two possibilities. Either you help me understand what is wrong and do something for me, or I will throw myself over the cliff. I am not giving you any more chances. I am really fed up and disgusted with life, and I am very serious. Either you answer me tomorrow or I die. If you care about me, you will answer. If you don't, I'll be coming up to see you." I was defying God. I was angry and I was telling him off.

Next day my sister-in-law came to the cabin. She came by boat as there was no other access. I could have died there and people would have searched for my body for a long time. She came to give me an answer to what I needed to know and to give me the strength to continue moving forward.

Shortly after, I surfaced and started the up-hill climb. I also stopped taking all my pills.

I still did not realize that it was God who had provided my way out. I thought that it was thanks to my sister-in-law's visit and thanks to me.



The telephone rang. It was Luc. "Serge, I'm going to Peru."

"You're going to Peru?"

"Yes, I'm going to Peru for several days."

"Lucky! I would just love to go to that country!"

"On top of that, it will not cost me a cent."

"Hey! As far as I'm concerned, I would be willing to pay my fare."

That was the end of our conversation. When Luc sent his confirmation by fax, he mentioned that he had a brother who is a dentist and willing to pay for his own ticket to join the team. The organizers of the trip received his message while they were in the office praying that God would send a dentist to complete the team.

Can you imagine? That's exactly what they were praying for.

When Luc related to me what had happened, I asked him not to start up with his religious rhetoric. He was seeing God everywhere and that irritated me. I loved my brother, but I had burned all bridges with him after he invited me to visit him while he worked in Mexico. I refused his offer and wrote him a letter explaining frankly why I did not want to go: I did not want to hear him talk about God. I wanted to see my brother, not a preacher. Of course, I was slightly aggressive. You could have talked to me about beer or women and everything would have been all right. But, if someone dared speak to me about God, I would become aggressive. I preferred to talk about sex and violence. If someone told me that he had cheated on his wife, I found it quite "cool".

The organizers received the fax and sent back a message saying that they would like me to be part of the group. When Luc told me, I was in my office, wearing gloves, and working in a client's mouth. I immediately told my secretary not to book any appointments for a certain week. I was going to

Peru. I made this decision without consulting my wife whereas today I would do the opposite. That time, however, she fully agreed that I should go.

Luc and I were supposed to share the same hotel room. But due to a question of logistics which some may understand and some may not, there was an error caused by a surplus of reservations, and the hotel personnel did not take our request into account. I ended up sharing a room with two evangelists. Some may smile at that, but God, who knows me well, was pursuing me earnestly. He probably said to himself, "Serge is a tough nut to crack. I will bring him to Peru and make him stay with two evangelists. He should sweat a little. If that doesn't make him understand, then he must be deaf."

These two guys came to Peru to distribute free Bibles to all who wanted one. The scarves they wear around their foreheads because of the heat give them the appearance of hippies. Although it is difficult to imagine, they were attacked in the street a few days earlier and robbed of their Bibles. They were frightened. One admitted to me that he thought his life was over. We surely do not often see that kind of felony at home. Attacked for Bibles!

Luc asked me if I wanted him to make arrangements for me to be transferred to his room. Not necessary. "I know it's going to be a bit wild for a while, but I'm a guy who loves adventure. It doesn't bother me that much." These two guys are not trying to convert me. They are much too busy. They never jump on me.

The second morning I decide to attend the daily prayer meeting, but only as an observer. I clearly perceive that this is not a sect. These doctors simply meet in the morning to pray together and read a passage from the Bible. Although it does not fit my usual routine, I go out of curiosity.

What really touches me, however, is my contact with the Peruvian poor. Every evening when I am alone in my room, I cry. I do not know why I cry, but I am sad thinking of all I own while these people are dying without help. This could be me if I had been born here. I came to help these people and offer some medical care, but it seems minute in comparison with their immense needs. I am incapable of really comforting them. I feel like a farmer trying to reap a huge field without equipment of any kind. It is impossible to work fast enough to avoid losing the crop.

I had already experienced this type of underprivileged milieu. For example, I had gone to the Dominican Republic. But, since I was rolling along at 100 km/hour on my motorcycle, I was going too fast to notice the little cabins made of corrugated iron. My pockets were full of money and I was drinking as much rum as I liked. I was acting like most who go over there on holiday. If I had seen some poor people, I never felt their suffering. What is happening here in Peru? There really is something going on inside of me. This feeling pushes me to examine my conscience.

Every night I find myself alone in my room, haggard from having worked all day with a passion, but still having the impression that I have not accomplished anything. This is definitely creating a conflict. I am a sensitive man but also I am very autonomous; I do not need anybody. I am a real get-ahead guy. I create my own jobs and I am quite able to get along in life. A real tank charging by.

Something else bothers me, an unresolved conflict between me and the woman living at my side. We are not married, but for a year Diane has wanted to have a child. I do not want one. The situation is tearing us apart and clouding our relationship. I am living a beautiful honeymoon with her and I already have shared custody of my own children. I do not feel any need whatsoever to have more. This situation is a heartbreaker for us and now Diane is thinking of leaving me.

These inner struggles combined with the Peruvian reality stand before me like a mirror, a mirror in which I see myself exactly as I am. I dislike what I see. Although I came here to bring something, to offer my services, in reality it is I who am poor and in need. I cannot explain it, but during this whole week, my life is projected in front of me. I watch all the crazy things I have done and all my failures. My small world is starting to crumble.

How can this be when, just a few days ago, I was thinking, "Olé!" I was an old Quebecer drinking his beer and having fun telling jokes, showing everybody that everything was just fine. Of course, everybody was great! When I was asked how I was doing, I said fine, even if I had just finished arguing with my wife. No matter. I was like everybody else and everybody was all right.

But this intimate contact with the poor of Peru and the members of the medical team bring me to reflect on another reality.

Luc is invited for a meal by a pastor who lives at the other end of the city. I am invited, too. The pastor shares with us his desire to see a small hospital built in his region. He takes advantage of the occasion to announce, "If one day you should want to come and build a small hospital here, just call me."

There is a service before the meal. For about fifteen years I have not set foot in a church, and here I am, in Peru, in a clay church.

There is singing for at least three quarters of an hour, after which comes the sermon. Accustomed in my youth to sermons which lasted ten minutes, I find it very long. Indeed, the sermon seems particularly long to me. The pastor, who does not know me at all, is preaching and looking me straight in the eye, just as if he is God speaking to me through his mouth.

It is hot but I have goose bumps. I look at Luc and say, "I don't understand what is happening to me. What is it exactly? I am unable to look at that man! I feel like I'm looking at God."

The same evening, while I am taking a shower, I am convinced that God is working on me from the inside and that he has taken a mirror and set it in front of me. "Look! Look at who you are. You are not God!" I always perceived myself as a person who could do anything. All I had achieved in my life I accomplished by myself. I had done everything. When I took one step forward, it was because I was taking the step. As a French-Canadian, I used to think, "There's no Jesus Christ who will decide for me. I'm the one who decides what I do. If I succeed, it is because I succeed. It is up to me!"

But there, in front of my mirror, everything comes crashing down. God wants to show me who I really am: a being existing only for self, a being devoid of true kindness and love.

There I am, showering and crying in distress. My whole self-centered life is revealed before my eyes. And there, alone, with the water falling on me, I meet God. No human being on earth could have produced that awakening in my conscience. Without a word, without saying a thing, in an exchange within my inner self, I feel God forgiving me. I dissolve into tears again, this is how it happened. It was as if God was piercing my shell and breaking the wall I had built around me to ignore the reality of good and evil. I came into contact with my Creator, who makes me see that my way of life is leading me straight to ruin and downfall. Something definitely happened

between God and me. I used to tell him, "Don't call me, I'll call you," but from this moment on, I see only him. I never used to take time to listen to him or have a personal relationship with him, but now I am falling in love with God. When you fall in love with a girl, you find it difficult to spend an hour without phoning her. You call her and you tell her how eager you are to see her. Well, it is a bit like that. I can feel God loves me and is with me. From now on, my whole life is open before him.

Upon my return to Canada, Diane is waiting for me at the airport. As soon as our eyes meet, she realizes that something has changed in me. I try to explain in a few words what I have experienced but it is impossible to keep back my tears. I have barely been gone a week, but I feel like a prisoner who has just been released after twenty years in jail. As I look at the people around me, I realize that most of them have never had the chance to see what I have seen. I feel different indeed.



I have many friends, and the majority of them are what you would call "good people". They don't care to go to church and are not Christians. They simply live as I used to live. As far as they are concerned, they are convinced they are not doing anything wrong. One can look at pornographic movies, go to erotic massage parlours, smoke a little joint once in a while — what's wrong with that? Their mentality is that everyone is entitled to act as he pleases, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else.

Yet, to hurt someone does not necessarily mean to hit or torture him. It is all relative. To cheat on your wife does not hurt her — until she finds out about it. Today, I find their philosophy quite strange. My friends find me strange, too. I used to find it "hot" if someone told me he had cheated on his wife. Now I answer, "Would you like her to do the same to you?" My friends ask me if someone hit me on the head during my trip to Peru.

What destroys humanity is corruption, not righteousness. We must not hide our head in the sand and pretend it is not that bad. I remember a passage in the Bible where a girl was brought to Jesus, a girl people wanted to stone. Everybody knows the story of the adulteress the people wanted to stone to death. Stoning was a part of Jewish mores. Jesus, however, suggested

that those who had nothing hidden in their heart — that those who had not sinned — throw the first stone. They all had sinned! Yet, as far as we are concerned, we are all walking around with haloes. We all seem to be good. I am not talking about criminals with big tattoos to show everybody how mean they are; I am talking about the majority of people. We all look like good people, despite not even having a relationship with God. Despite the clean exterior, we are dirty underneath.

My trip to Peru helped me discover this. God wants to free us and heal us.



As unbelievable as it may seem, Diane was praying as well, and God touched her sometime before I left. I was touched in Peru and she was touched in Canada.

She gave her life to Jesus before I did. Before the trip, she was praying without telling me. She would pray alone and ask God to allow her to have a child. She was supplicating and keeping all these things in her heart. After four years together without using any means of contraception, she thought she was sterile. Shortly after my return, she announces to me that she is pregnant.

She is crying and worried because of all we have been through and the fact I did not want to have another child. God changed my heart. Diane can hardly believe it.

Some months later, she gives birth to a wonderful boy who fills us with joy. God answered. Yes, it was definitely God who answered.

We get married. This marks a great change for me since I used to believe that marriage was merely a human invention. I used to see it as a contract signed before men in order to obtain permission to sleep with a woman. I completely rejected the idea. "I am the one who decides what I do with my life and others have nothing to say in the matter." I never wanted to depend on anyone. At work, I was not an employee; I was the boss. I had my own office and I was the one who made decisions.

We get married at Fort de l'Assomption. Our wedding is superb. All the invited guests wear costumes from the medieval era. We will never forget that beautiful day.

I find it interesting to realize that my relationship with God started to grow at the same time as my youngest child did. I was spiritually born around the same time my son was physically born. And, just like him, I have everything to learn. I want to teach my child how to lead a good life, but I also want him to understand that I will never abandon him. I do not want him to have to go through the same suffering I did in trying to live on my own strength for forty years. I am so eager to protect him, although I do know he will stumble and trip from time to time. He is a human being just like I am. However, God my Father is there. Today, I can walk with confidence since I know my Father is with me and wants to guide me.

I also have a beautiful older daughter whom I love dearly. The other day, I was saying to her, "Do you know what is natural with children? They usually only call their parents when they need them or need some money. They forget to say 'Hello' or 'How are you?'" That is mean and it hurts. Could it be that we treat God the same way? We probably hurt God regularly. In any case, as a father, I would like my child to call me simply to say hello or ask me how I am. Furthermore, since this is the kind of relationship I would like to have with my children, I imagine that God desires the same thing in my relationship with him. He wants me to talk to him, and not only to list my prayer requests, but also to tell him how much I love and appreciate him. I know that God does not do everything for me, but he has nonetheless given me life. He gave me parents and grandparents who prayed to him. God has answered their prayers.

God is my Father. I do not think that he will beat me up if I do something wrong. On the contrary, I believe he will cry. He will be sad over the fix I got myself into. He will not say, "I told you so. Tough luck. Next time, you'll just have to listen to me." Only our earthly fathers think that way. As far as I am concerned, God is different.

That encounter with God in Peru gave me a second chance. God simply told me that I could start anew and that he was accepting me at the place I was at. He had been grieved by my way of life but the past did not matter anymore. From that point on, I could consider my past as baggage —

positive or negative—and as something that could help me to understand life. I am not saying that everybody should find themselves at the bottom of a barrel. It would be much better never to go there at all. It is much too dark.

Today, with God as my partner in life, I can talk about the past and I can better grasp what God can do. What happened to me is something divine and not earthly. I now know that God can transform even the worst individual on earth, even the vilest one. One only has to slightly open the door to his heart. For me, it was a long process. God wanted to talk to me but I put my fingers in my ears and ran in the opposite direction. To hear someone speaking to us, we must at least listen. It is likely that at a certain moment in Peru, I said to God, "OK, what do You want? Hurry up and tell me because I'm in a rush!"

I deeply believe that anyone who wants to listen to God, and lets him speak, will experience his presence. It is not difficult and costs nothing. And it produces unbelievable benefits. I went to Peru hoping to offer something but I came back filled with new life. There is not one human on earth who can give us all that...

...only God.

DR. SERGE CHAUSSÉ

...a Prayer

And now, I know it is "Christ in me, the hope of glory".
Christ, my Intercessor, before the throne of God.

O Christ. Prophet and High Priest,

You my King, You my Master,

You the All in my life, my Way, my Goal, my Reward,

Inexhaustible Source of my love,

Freely, You searched for me to redeem my soul

By Your marvellous, divine love.

I, the wretched unbeliever wallowing in the quagmire...

My Lord, I worship You

With the delight of inexpressible love,

With the ineffable joy of knowing You live within me.

Yes, You loved me

With a love that defies all human knowledge,

And I love You in return with an overflowing heart

That beats only for You.

O joy that surpasses all the joys of earth,

The intense joy of loving, of being loved by You,

By You, who, by dying, revealed to me the source

Of eternal Love.

Oh! Take me, my Master and my Friend,

Take me, spirit, soul, and body.

Accept, I pray, the whole sacrifice offered on Your altar,

The joyful sacrifice of love.

Oh! Use me like You want to, Lord,

So that others

May discover the secret of eternal joy

In Your infinite tenderness.

FENTON HALL (1898-1925)

Hogar para niños

If we fully comprehended the brevity of life, our greatest desire would be to please God and to serve one another.

DR. JAMES DOBSON

Love for a Lifetime

I used to think the secret to happiness in life was to find a place for yourself under the sun, work hard, and seize every opportunity for happiness for yourself and for those you love: your spouse and children. That thought fed my mind all during my youth.

Unfortunately, I was unable to attain this goal, and in spite of all I did, I felt more and more miserable. I saw the light and found happiness however, when I realized I did not have to earn it, that it was freely offered to me by the one who loved us, the one who has loved us since the creation of the world.

I graduated from medicine in 1983. I am currently practising my profession in the Lanaudière region, in three different fields: home care and palliative care through the Montcalm CLSC (local community services centre); care of elderly people or people with loss of autonomy in a residence; and working in a private, walk-in clinic in l'Assomption. I have a wife and three children who fill my life with delight. I am crazy with love for these four people who are the most precious in the world to me. Although I am happy, I would not want to pretend that I live in perfect happiness however, as there are a few shadows and grey clouds. I feel sad when I see the people around me suffering, whether they be close relatives, patients, families of patients, friends, or neighbours. I desire to help them and solve their problems but I often find myself powerless in the face of their pain. Humanism and understanding are very little to offer when it comes to satisfying their deepest needs. What cheers my heart is knowing that the one who freely gave me happiness through his love can also bring happiness to those I love. He loves one and all without exception, whoever we are. No situation is too desperate for him.



I come from a good Quebec family. My father and mother are believers and practising Roman Catholics. I was brought up according to the moral principles of honesty, love, respect, and forgiveness. I practised my religion like most children did in those days. I believed in a God who was the author of creation, who made me, and who gave us a law and expected us to follow it without assistance. A distant God. I knew what I had to do and I felt I

must do it on my own, managing as best I could. I did not believe he could intervene in the lives of ordinary people. As well, I feared punishment if I should disobey.

During my teenage years, life's pleasures made my fears vanish. Life was so good. While attending high school at Collège de l'Assomption I met the girl who would later become my wife. As we both were passionately fond of adventure, we registered at the University of Ottawa. At 17, I found myself in the faculty of sciences. I was thriving on knowledge and exhilarating in all the new philosophical trends presented to me. I was also starting to question my religious beliefs. "Live your life to the fullest" was the most interesting concept someone could offer me at the time. I was conducting my life at the expense of other principles gained during my youth, such as respect for others. I was picking up momentum on the road to success. My friends had a good opinion of me and thought I was "cool". I had good marks, was self-confident, and I was accepted in medicine. There I was, in control of everything. My dreams of accomplishment and success were becoming possible. I never expected the shock I was going to experience shortly after I began in medicine however.

The courses in anatomy, pathology, and others helped me discover the functioning of the human body with all its subtleties. Dissecting corpses to learn anatomy made me view death closer than I ever had before. Suddenly, the escape from reality which I had been enjoying the last few years with all the exciting activities and interesting philosophies — stopped. There I was, with both feet on the ground, face to face with the concrete realities of life. Coming into contact with sickness and human suffering opened for me a new concept regarding the true condition of man. This new reality could no longer be camouflaged through any kind of escape or philosophy. It was too real. Then started a period of intense questioning in my life about the existence of man, the existence of God, the reason of our existence on earth, the purpose of suffering, and why there is so much injustice in the world between rich and poor, sick and healthy, and the high and low classes. All the previous beliefs and concepts which I had built up over time seemed to fall apart. They did not make any sense anymore. I found myself feeling insecure when I had never felt that way before. Anguish took hold of me and followed me everywhere. I started a long period of searching for truth related to life

and in particular relating to God. All of a sudden, my religion could not supply the answers to all my questions, and I needed to find out more.

I started to search in just about any religion and philosophy. For three years, I looked into Hinduism, the Koran (the Moslems' holy book), and Transcendental Meditation. I was very interested in metaphysics, the philosophy which tends to turn spirituality into something logical.

Unfortunately, these three years of reading and research did not bring me answers. I found nothing but beautiful, interesting and very philosophical writings, which fed my intellectual thirst without providing any food for my heart; nothing which could really give me hope.

One day, as I was shopping for used books, desperate to find the God who must surely exist, I looked up towards the sky and with the little faith I could muster, believing he was listening, I said, "God, if you really exist, if you are there, give me a tool I can use to get to know you." That day I bought a book called *The Sermon on the Mount*, which was yet another treatise on metaphysics, an erroneous philosophy like many others. Nevertheless, when one is seeking God with all his heart, God will often use anything, erroneous or not, to bring that person to truth and to himself. God needed to use that false philosophy in my case; he knew it attracted me. This book contained passages from the sermon on the mount in the Bible and the author's explanations of them.

In all the books I read, I noticed that although the explanations were interesting, the Biblical quotes affected me the most. That is, of all the texts I read, the Bible passages touched my heart. I also realized that all of these books, whether they were from the Orient or from here, talked in one way or another about Jesus or the Bible. It was presented in many ways and forms, but it was there. I thought there must be something special about the person of Jesus and the Bible.

I decided that rather than read other people's explanations and opinions, I would go directly to the Bible. I was a resident doctor in Quebec in 1983. I had been married for two years to that same beautiful girl I had met in high school. I remember one evening, while I was reading the Bible, my eyes lighted on the passage where Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." To me, that was a true revelation and for the first time in my life, I was convinced that

Jesus was the way, the only one who could truly bring me to God. That same evening I told God that I was giving my life to him and that I accepted to follow Jesus. I recognized he was the only one who could guide me in the truth and provide an answer to my multitude of questions.



Shortly afterwards, I finished my term as a resident doctor. My wife and I had accepted a position in Amqui in the beautiful Matapédia Valley of the Gaspé. Our move during the summer of 1983 was the starting point of seven wonderful years in that most welcoming region of our belle province.

We came to know the people of the Valley as warm, hospitable, and fantastic, to the point where one did not feel like a stranger but like we belonged to the Gaspé. We had heard about Gaspesian hospitality but I must admit the experience surpassed our expectations. Our memories from our stay in the Matapédia Valley are unforgettable, and even more so since our three children were born there.

The medical practice was just superb. My wife acted as my secretary and I worked in a private clinic as well as working in the hospital. Like other doctors in the region, I worked in all fields of medicine: obstetrics, emergency, hospitalization, long-term care, and intensive care. I enjoyed my practice immensely since I was very fond of the people I was taking care of, and very attached to the people I was working with.

As far as my spiritual life was concerned, though, there were many "bugs", as we often say today. My thirst for the Word of God was growing constantly and I was discovering treasures which I had never imagined. The Gospel, which I had heard in the Roman Catholic church since my tender youth, was suddenly coming alive. I was not attending any church; I preferred my personal relationship with God, something which was completely new to me. Aside from reading the Bible, I spent time talking to him. I was experiencing something I had never felt before and I would talk to him about it. It was a feeling of well-being that I could hardly explain to myself. In contrast, as soon as I would come out of my room and return to my family or to my work environment, I was back on terra firma and dared not speak about it.

I didn't tell anyone I was reading the Bible because I was afraid to be judged. I even kept it from my wife, who was finding me a little bizarre. Although my thirst was growing and the Bible was feeding me, a great number of conflicts remained unresolved. I remember, for example, an emergency nurse who said to me about a patient, "You saved him! You saved his life." What a shock to my heart! I knew deep inside me that I had not saved anyone. For me, life was not confined to earth but rather went far beyond. I had the impression that to save someone meant something much more than what I had done. I was quite conscious that what I was doing was useful only in extending someone's life, and that the person would one day die anyway. And, what happens afterward? In one instant my ambition as a doctor to save lives was put into question. I knew from that moment on that I was not saving lives but merely prolonging them. For many years I had been preoccupied with human physical health for which I had cures and solutions. But, there I was, preoccupying myself with a much deeper dimension of people's lives, for which I had no explanation.

My last years in the Gaspé were very difficult. The conflict was expanding within me. I asked God to help me share the great treasure I had discovered in Jesus, since I was incapable of doing it by myself. The first obstacle was my pride. Secondly, how could I explain to others what I had discovered and what was happening in me? I already knew that a great majority of the people I was caring for needed to hear a word of hope when they were discouraged, depressed, anxious, or without hope, as is the case for so many people in our society. I knew I had the solution for them, but I was afraid to talk about it and I did not really know how to broach the subject. I asked, "Lord, please help me to come out of my shell and share with others the things you show me. Help me to be able to do more than just prolong life. Guide me and I will follow you wherever you want me to go."

Without making any connection to that prayer, we happened to meet a super couple called Marc and Lucie, who owned a milk farm. A deep friendship which still exists was starting to grow between us. I was also entertaining the idea of owning a farm. In effect, my anxiety about my inner conflicts had become so great that I thought the solution might be to run away to a farm: me and the cows, some small animals, my garden, and my self-sufficiency. It did seem to be an easy solution, to quit medicine and

become a farmer. I never thought that one simple sentence spoken in jest by our friend Marc at a supper would change all our plans. "Hey, Luc! Why don't we put a guitar on top of your old '71 Chevrolet and go south?" I must admit that on a winter's day that idea seemed quite attractive to me. We continued to laugh, but, the more we laughed, the more it became serious. We thought to ourselves, "What could stop us from doing this?" By the end of the evening, we decided to take a year to prepare for an adventure in an old school bus which we would customize as a camper. With the help of Lise, I had to transfer my medical practice to others and leave my patients in good hands. Marc and Lucie had to sell their milk farm.

Our plan was to head towards Tierra del Fuego by crossing the United States, Mexico, Central America, and South America. I did not know at the time that God had a plan in store for us. For me, this adventure represented a way out, an incomprehensible hope that something would change my life. One week after that unusual supper, we bought the bus. Shortly after, each of us started to prepare to leave.

To add a little colour to our preparations, Lise became pregnant with our third child and gave birth about 6 months before our departure. We therefore had a beautiful, 6-month-old baby to travel with. One year and a few months after our crazy decision, we were ready to leave in our bus which we named "Bobépine", or "Bobby Pin", and which Marc, Lucie, and Lise had transformed impressively. And, just like the hippies of the sixties, we were on our way south. We made the wise decision to stop for a few months in the Canadian West to pick fruit in an orchard in order to get accustomed to our new life.

The cross-Canada trip was a wonderful one. We were comfortable enough in our bus although there were 10 of us (5 in each family). Fruit picking was also a fantastic experience besides being very relaxing. Near the end of the season, however, Marc and Lucie decided not to make the trip as originally planned but rather to travel a bit during the winter and return to the orchard the next year. The bus, was now too big for the five of us, so, considering the scope of the trip, we decided to buy a pick-up truck and camper and continue on with just our family.

After having our fill of the delicious fruit of the Okanagan Valley, we set out on our journey south. In three months we crossed

the United States going through Washington, Oregon, and California. By that time, I had started to come out of my shell spiritually. Ever since our departure from the Matapédia Valley, I was reading my Bible without locking myself in my room. Although we had some very good moments on our trip, we also had some particularly difficult ones. Five people living in a small camper, the long rainy days, and the fact I saw people working while I was not (I had worked since the age of 10), all led to anxious moments for me. On the other hand, compensating for the more difficult moments were the discovery of adventure, the freedom I enjoyed as far as time schedules were concerned, and the magnificent scenery — not to mention the beautiful family times.

We spent a fantastic week with Bill and Geraldine, some friends who taught aikido in Santa Barbara, California. Our visit included an unforgettable Christmas at their home. We met up with our friends Marc and Lucie to spend one month with them on the lower California beaches, to catch up on our school schedule; our oldest child, Dominic, should have been in Grade 1 and we had decided to teach him ourselves on the trip. We crossed the Mexican border on January 8, 1991.

What a shock! Simply crossing the border, the stark difference between the wealth of the United States and the poverty of Mexico was evident. No more green spaces. We saw houses half falling apart but still inhabited, and other houses constructed with sheet metal or a few pieces of wood. All around us were barefoot children shabbily dressed. It is difficult to describe the sights. Even with the word "poverty" in mind, you could not imagine a worse sight. Coming into contact with this kind of situation, everyone has a different reaction. Either you deny reality or you try to discover why these people live in such circumstances. You may tell yourself that you can't do anything about it, and you try to put it out of your mind. Then you try to find the guilty party. When you cannot label anyone as responsible, you blame it on God.

In any case, just like everyone else who crosses that border, we did not feel at ease. However, we were already in love with Mexico and its people.

After a few days on the road, we ended up at a splendid beach in Lower California called Baja Conception. We decided to settle there for a month, a rest which we well deserved after three months of travelling and

moving daily. We intended to spend some precious time with Marc and Lucie before they returned to Canada. What a beautiful life that beach had to offer: scallops, heat, and extraordinary scenery. Marvellous! How could I imagine that I was about to reach a major turning point in my life?

Dick and Weezy Bundy, a retired couple from the United States, set up on the lot beside ours for a week of holidays. They were working for a mission. For the first time in my life I sensed a sort of peace I had never known before. Although I couldn't describe it, they had an air of serenity about them which I had also never felt in my life. They would speak about Biblical characters with such conviction. The day after their arrival they were together on the seashore reading the Bible. They also talked to us about the Mission they helped. It was an orphanage with all kinds of services to help the poor of the region. They mentioned that the doctor who had practised there for one year had to leave in May, which meant in three months, and a relief doctor would surely be appreciated.

At first sight, the idea of working in an orphanage seemed very interesting to Lise and me, especially for our children. A great experience! We agreed to write a letter to the Mission offering our services. The answer could be mailed to my in-laws, who arranged the follow-up of our mail from town to town according to the itinerary we communicated to them. Still, I had one fear. I remember praying, "Please, Lord, let me be accepted in this Mission only if it is your will. I do not want to interrupt the relationship I have with you and fall back under the domination of a religion." What I was experiencing with God was so much more intense and alive than anything I had known in my youth when I simply practised a religion; I didn't want anything to hinder that relationship.

After two or three more weeks of travelling in Lower California, we took a ferry from La Paz to Mazatlan. We were eager to find out what adventure was awaiting us. For a long time we had been hoping to meet some Indians living in the mountains. But how?

That question was answered a few days later when we met a Mexican who worked with the natives and for the government. He offered to have us to follow him in the mountains of Mexico. We didn't realize that most Mexicans were afraid to venture into these parts, as strangers were rarely welcome there. There were murders and many other stories of the kind,

particularly in relation to the gold mines, which the natives did not want to share with foreign exploiters. We were not aware of any of this. Although we were planning to leave at 3 o' clock in the morning, fear gradually took hold of us. Were we being taken in? Did someone want to rob us of our kids? Why leave so early? On the other hand, something was urging us to go there.

We arrived at the specified pre-arranged address. It was our introduction to the Sierra of the Tepewanes, one tribe among 125 ethnic groups in Mexico. We drove on roads which resembled rocky footpaths. We crossed rivers and even a lake of several hundred metres before finally arriving at the first village, San Andrés, where we stayed for two weeks. What struck us most was the distrust of these people. Although we were parked right in the heart of the village, it took two days before people came to see us. The first asked us what we were selling. The second wanted to know what we were buying. Another person showed up with a beautiful, gold ball and put it in my hands. By its weight, I could tell it was pure gold, for sale. Of course, I declined.

We experienced some insecure moments, but little by little during the two weeks we became friends with a few people from the village. Without knowing we would be working for the next five years with natives like them, we were fascinated to see Mexican culture displayed so vividly by these people. How exciting! And how ignorant on our part. We showed a definite lack of prudence in our encounters. One man offered to guide us on our next adventure and take us to the Cora tribe. After two weeks, we were off on a second journey, this one much more difficult emotionally. Lise was on the verge of crying the whole two weeks. We could feel an oppression which was difficult to describe. The man was accompanied by a 14-year-old girl. He kept telling us stories of people who had been killed, robbed, or mistreated in the different locations we passed. A few days after he left, we learned he was a sorcerer. He always dragged with him feathers he used to heal the sick, or so he said. He would demand enormous sums of money which bankrupted the people. Ever since we had been with him, everyone looked on us with suspicion. Later we even learned that he had stolen the young girl who was with him and that the girl's father was chasing him to get her back. The sorcerers dominate and exploit the native population of Mexico. Although a lot of people trust them, I was to learn in the years that followed of all the damage they

were causing around them. The last days of that trip our daughter, Claudine, was stricken with severe gastroenteritis, with bleeding and fever. To top it off, we were not certain we could easily leave the mountains: Our supply of gas was getting low.

After that adventure, my wife said, "You know, Luc, I'm very glad we made it. I feel that trip brought me closer to God." In any case, we were happy to be together as a family in a safer environment.

From there, we took the road to Guadalajara, stopping for a week at Tepic. When we arrived in Guadalajara, we had been travelling for three months since our meeting with the missionaries in Lower California. We met dozens of fantastic Mexicans all along the way. In contrast to the suspicious people of the mountains, the Mexicans of the other regions were cordial, hospitable, and even ready to give us anything despite their extreme poverty. We were blessed with wonderful moments with them. Our children adapted to every situation. They learned the language in no time and were becoming our Spanish teachers after a few weeks in Mexico. The three of them developed a multitude of fascinating techniques to make friends with the Mexicans we met all along the road. As soon as we arrived in a village, before we had a chance to turn around, Dominic, 6, and Claudine, 4, had already disappeared. Claudine could be found in a nearby house, doing the dishes with a woman she had never seen before. Dominic would be climbing a mango tree with a whole group of new little friends who were teaching him how to pick mangoes, and especially, how to stain his clothes. Étienne, 1 year old, for his part, took very little time in learning how to win the hearts of teenage girls. They would come from the surrounding area to take turns playing dolls with him. We certainly had a lot to learn from the children concerning human relations in a foreign country. Lise and I profited from these open doors to make new acquaintances. We felt amply gratified. If you have the opportunity to travel with your children, do it; it is so much more enriching.

Our first goal in Guadalajara was to go to the post office. As a matter of fact, when we were in Mazatlan, we had been advised that our next stop would be in that city, but the anticipated two weeks of travel had turned into two months. Amongst the pile of letters to savour was, to our great surprise, an answer from the Mission. We had already abandoned the idea of the Mission since there had been no answer at Mazatlan. That letter, written

two months previously, said they were interested in my services as a doctor at the Mission. After five days of camping, faxing applications, and doing telephone interviews, we finally received a positive response. They would wait a maximum of 5 days. They were hoping we would arrive before the departure of the doctor on hand. A little happy and a little worried, we turned back towards the north-west. In five days we managed to travel the distance we had travelled in three and a half months. As I drove up the kilometre of dirt road between the main road and the Mission, I glimpsed the first building: a big church with a cross. I remember thinking, "Lord, where have you sent me?" My uneasiness was the same as three months before. Would I have to jeopardize my relationship with God for a religion?



We were greeted with much love. We were told where to put our camper until a more comfortable one became available. I was slowly learning to get to know people, with caution and hesitation at first. I could sense in most of the people the same peace that I had felt with the missionaries on the beach. The people at the Mission would get together to pray, sing, and study the Bible, although none of it seemed "religious". To my great surprise, these people all had a personal relationship with God like the one I had discovered a few years earlier. They were not meeting to commit themselves to a person or religion; they were doing it to grow together in their faith. Love and forgiveness were integral parts of daily life. Each person was not living for self but for others. Each had the Mexican people at heart. The Mexican people live in incredible poverty. Families with 10 to 12 children are crammed into houses of cardboard nailed to tree branches, on soil which transforms itself into mud during the rainy season. The majority of them are native people who came down from the mountains in the south of the country to find work. Unfortunately, it often happens that they find themselves in worse conditions than they experienced in their own villages.

The Mission helps these people by giving them food, clothing, and tarpaulins to protect their houses. They offer comfort, relief, and love. A nursery takes care of native children whose mothers must work because of an absent father. Other missionaries give courses in reading and writing to

those who want to learn. The Bible School offers courses to those who seek to know their Creator better.

This Mission is primarily an orphanage, housing 80 children in groups of 12, and several buildings. Couples are responsible for each home and create a family atmosphere for the children as much as possible. Finally, in addition to a variety of other services, there is a clinic, or rather a few rooms in a former chapel where free medical care is provided to all the poor of the region. Free medication is supplied by different organizations.

Since the doctor was leaving the orphanage in two days, the greetings were short. Two days later I was responsible for the clinic, which was quite different from the clinics I had worked in Canada. I was surprised and even amazed to see the work accomplished by all these people. And, I felt the weight of responsibility which had just been handed over to me. Were we ever thankful we learned Spanish during the preceding five months of exploration.

We gradually became involved in that fantastic work which had been founded 25 years before. We realized there were hundreds and thousands of missions like this Mexican one, operating in many places all over the world. These missions were directed by people who trusted God. Our mission accepted volunteers who came alone or in groups of 2 to 50 and who came from just about anywhere in the United States, Canada, and even Europe. They came for a week or more to help build, clean, etc. They all had something in common — their faith in Jesus. Interestingly, these people did not necessarily all belong to the same type of Christian church. Their churches were Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and Charismatic. Others came from non-denominational Christian groups. In short, this army of people who committed themselves to God were not only Christian in name but in heart. These people loved God and they loved others, whether rich or poor, black or white, and without regard to social status, health condition, or any other factor. This was a new world to discover.

A few months after our arrival, I realized I had learned more about God and human beings in that place than during the eight years between becoming a resident doctor and my arrival at the Mission. I learned that you can admit your faults and past mistakes. You can ask God to forgive you and acknowledge your need for Jesus by giving yourself to him and asking

him to rule in your life. When you do these things, the Spirit of God comes and lives in you. The Bible calls this being "born again". The Bible teaches that the Spirit of God lives in us the moment we open our heart to Jesus. He transforms our being and directs us towards aspirations founded on the love of God. He intensifies our thirst for God and his Word. He stirs up within us a new love for our neighbour as well as a desire to act according to the will of God. God has never stopped loving the beings he created, without exception. At last I could understand my experience from eight years earlier. Everything was there and well explained in the Bible, although it was still fuzzy to me.

My desire to work at the clinic and help people was growing. Lise was an enormous help to me as she assisted me with minor surgeries, delivering babies, secretarial work, and unpacking and sorting the incredible number of gifts of medications, instruments, and medical supplies.

She sometimes found my spiritual enthusiasm somewhat exaggerated. She had always believed in God but she did not believe that God intervened directly in human lives. He had created us but he remained idle. A change began to take place in her life.

One of the problems we had to deal with was children's malnutrition. One day, someone brought to the clinic a little girl named Teresa. She was the most malnourished child I had seen since the beginning of my stay in Mexico. After examining her, I discovered she was about 18 months old but had the appearance of a 6-month-old baby. She was literally skin and bones. Teresa was nearing death, so Lise agreed to take her in and feed her so she could survive. Teresa had no father, as is often the case over there. She was being kept all day by her 8-year-old sister, in wretched conditions. Her grandmother was an alcoholic and her mother worked very hard but was unable to cope.

Lise tried as best she could to feed Teresa with a dropper but she refused to drink. She was too weak. The situation was becoming desperate. One day at noon, as we were coming back from the cafeteria with the little child in her stroller, we met Charla, the founder of the Mission. Charla was a very simple woman. She was married to a Los Angeles firefighter and she had an average level of education. Many years before, she had accepted the challenge God put in her heart to establish that orphanage and Mission. She was confident he would take care of all the needs that would emerge. She stopped

to greet us, and then as a natural gesture, she put her hand on the child's head and prayed, "Lord, heal this little girl." She went on her way. Although we were getting used to people praying with conviction, we never expected to receive such a speedy and clear answer. As soon as we returned to the camper, Teresa started to drink milk from the bottle in gulps. It was the start of a healing. Lise was convinced from that day on that God is not so distant. He was present, eager to help us in our needs, and ready to respond to our requests. At that precise moment Lise asked Jesus to come into her life.

The fact that I was working with Lise and surrounded by our three children fulfilled my deepest wishes far beyond what I could have asked or imagined. But God had not finished surprising us.

People loved to sing at the Mission, especially at their morning meetings. I could see the orphans were thriving in an atmosphere bathed in music. The idea came to me to teach them music. My mother had taught me piano from the age of 6. I had taken guitar courses in high school and learned how to play concert flute and saxophone during my stay in the Gaspé. I loved music but I had left it behind because of lack of time. Here it would be useful.

My project was accepted with enthusiasm. Shortly after, we received a gift of fifty recorders. And the courses began. Forty-five orphans regularly attended each week. We would get together to ask God to supply more instruments. They came from all over: saxophones, trumpets, clarinets, trombones, baritones, guitars, concert flutes, and many other instruments. With such a variety, I had no choice but to learn to play them in order to teach the orphans. A few months on recorders, a few months on the other instruments and we were ready to form a small orchestra with wind-instruments. We started to give two concerts a year. This activity highly improved the orphans' self-esteem. They were the only musicians in the whole San Quintin Valley where we lived. These young children who were underrated at public school because they lived in an orphanage were accomplishing something unique and impressive in front of the whole village. The applause and congratulations encouraged them and made them feel like human beings with as much self-worth as anybody else. In time, Anita and other new teachers took a turn with the group. Two or three years after the beginning of the music courses, a wild idea grew in my heart and in Lise's: to come back to Quebec and organize a tour with the young musicians. When we finally decided to talk about it,

this project was also greeted with great interest. We received donations from everywhere to defray the cost of plane tickets and other expenses.

With the help of many people from Mexico, the United States, and Canada, this dream became a reality. Our friends and relatives offered their hospitality. A crew from Quebec provided meals, clothing, and transportation. During the winter of 1994, we were on the road to Canada with 15 of our young musicians, on a Christmas tour. The young people had the opportunity to play in 13 different places in Lanaudière, the Eastern Townships, and the Gaspé. What an unforgettable experience for these orphans! They still remember Quebec as a warm, hospitable, and generous land. That trip also contributed to their hope in life and confidence in people.



God astonished us again. Two years after our arrival at the Mission, a man donated \$100,000 to buy the materials for the construction of a new clinic. The people from the Mission had been praying a long time for this. We needed someone to design the clinic, supervise its construction, and start up the professional health activities. We accepted to stay three more years to take on that new challenge. Thanks to dozens of volunteers from all over and donations ranging from toothbrushes to sophisticated radiology and dentistry equipment, the clinic was completed in two and a half years. It has been running for nearly three and a half years with two Mexican doctors and one Alaskan doctor, some nurses, one dentist, and a chiropractor. These professionals are full-time volunteers. In addition, visiting health professionals also help to relieve the pain of those who are suffering and have no other recourse.



The five years we spent at the Mission are the five most beautiful years of our family's life. Two and a half years after our return to Quebec, our children still want to go back. During those years, however, my heart was not completely in Mexico. The memory of the Quebec people kept coming back to me.

I learned while working with the poor that, contrary to what I used to think, their suffering did not come from their poverty. In fact, in spite of some Mexican families' intense poverty, many experienced happiness and a fullness of heart because they knew Jesus. They lived to give, to share, and to love. The children were also happy. Little by little, as I became better acquainted with their culture, their way of life, and their heart, I noticed that those who suffered were not the poor but those who lived through the same problems we find in Quebec: family problems, children without a father or a mother, alcoholic or violent husbands, depression, burn-outs, suicidal ideas, drug addiction, unwanted pregnancies, sick children, serious or incurable diseases, and a lot more.

The more I became conscious of these factors, the more I started to ask myself what I was doing in a foreign country while my people were also suffering. Many people came to my mind: people who had everything they needed materially but whose hearts were empty, and people who were not really happy. Statistics show that the suicide rate among Quebec youth is one of the highest in the world. The number of broken homes is among the highest in America. People are turning their backs on faith in God — who is so good — because of human error and religion. These things stimulated in me an intense desire to come back to Quebec. Yes, the Mexicans' suffering really touched Lise and me, but the suffering of Quebecers was even stronger on our heart. We saw happy Mexicans, full of hope in spite of their poverty, and we would think about Quebecers who, despite their wealth, were becoming more depressed, burned out, anxious, and fearful.

This growing desire brought us back to Quebec after five beautiful years at the Mission. We knew that only Jesus could resolve the problems of our people and our young Quebecers. Only Jesus could heal the broken hearts. He was the only one who could not only prolong the life of a person, but save that person.

We have been back since August, 1996. Our love for our people, our good Quebecers, is growing continuously. We recognize that the hearts of Quebecers have been wounded, misled, and disappointed. Still, their hearts are beautiful. Their hearts are searching, and God says that whoever seeks shall find.

We are happy to be home and I am happy practising medicine here again. I have no desire to live on a farm. I have found freedom in Jesus. I don't need to isolate myself because I belong in the midst of people. I can help them with their ailments as a doctor and I can help them with their heart, too, knowing that Jesus is able to transform their lives. He can bring them eternal joy. He can make them happy despite difficult circumstances and even change those circumstances. I believe the Quebec people are a fantastic people. My desire is to continue fighting for their good.

Our family lives in l'Assomption. My wife takes care of our children and her parents, and volunteers in schools and at church. She opens her heart to those who need love. I do a lot of palliative care in patients' homes. Fortunately, I have more than morphine to offer my patients in their last days. What joy I feel when I can bring comfort to seniors in residences and patients at home or treat patients at Clinique l'Assomption.

My family joins me in sharing this good news with you: Jesus is alive and he loves you. Come to him with confidence.

DR. LUC CHAUSSÉ

...a Prayer

Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
Relent, O LORD! How long will it be?
Have compassion on your servants.
Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
for as many years as we have seen trouble.
May your deeds be shown to your servants,
your splendour to their children.
May the favour of the Lord our God rest upon us;
establish the work of our hands for us —
yes, establish the work of our hands.

A PRAYER OF MOSES (1446 B.C.)

The Happiest People

Happiness is the only thing which doubles when you give it away.

DR. ALBERT SCHWEITZER (1875-1965)

Many do not understand why a person would choose to reveal his or her private or intimate life. More often than not, they would consider this narrative to be the revealing of difficult moments and situations which one's pride should not permit him to mention. A friend recently told me that the word "pure" in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5, originally meant "transparent". "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matt. 5:8). In the following paragraphs, I hope to express this transparency of heart in such a manner that it will be a source of encouragement to you.



I was born in Grand-Mère, Quebec, into a family of believers who attended church regularly. After the death of my three-month-old brother, Michel, I became an only child and the focus of all my parents' attention. I benefited from many extra privileges including classical studies and a university education. At the age of 20, I rejected religion — I was afraid that it was real — and put God on a shelf. I reasoned that it was impossible for me to meet his standards of holiness. To tell the truth, I wanted to give free rein to pride and its accompanying passions. However, God was waiting for me at the turn in the road, and the spiritual questions become the only ones that really mattered.

In January 1982, my wife and I attended a conference on nutrition in New Orleans. One night as we were celebrating with some friends in a very fancy restaurant, Madeleine, a woman from the group who was seated near us at the end of the table, began to talk about Jesus. She suggested he was waiting for us to ask him for gifts while we were here on earth. "God wants to give us good things because he loves us," she said with conviction.

The next day we returned to the restaurant and Madeleine insisted on praying for my wife who was suffering with terrible pains in her legs. Praying in a restaurant, out loud! Madeleine closed her eyes and held my wife's hands. I could not believe what was happening. Eyes open and red-faced, I desperately hoped nobody was paying any attention to this childish act. There was no earthquake or intervention from bystanders, but my wife began to cry softly. And God answered the prayer; all the pain in her legs completely disappeared. Before the end of the convention, we had promised our new

friends we would go to a Christian businessmen's breakfast in Montreal. We were about to reach a turning point in our lives.



True to our word, we attended the breakfast hosted by the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International (FGBMFI) on March 6, 1982. The guest speaker shared the touching testimony of his life, and his transparency was incredible. I recognized myself in so much of what he said and at times I even wondered if he was telling the story of my life. Like him, I had been unfaithful to my wife and my life consisted of constant partying. I drank a lot. I was full of myself, seeking only to enhance my esteem and make myself look good. Also like the speaker, when I drank too much every other word was a foul one.

But now he was different. He seemed to enjoy life; he was happy and loved other people. He concluded by saying Jesus had set him free. This perplexed me, and though I could hardly believe what he was saying, at the same time I appreciated his candour. After all, he had openly admitted his pride, his verbal violence and his mistakes before an audience of 160 people! His public confession made a deep impression on me, especially as concerning my hidden conduct. Something was not right in our marriage: I was leading a double life which produced in me the strange feelings which accompany lying and hypocrisy. I drowned out these thoughts in a multitude of activities and distractions: work, studies, sports, social events, and so on. I even worked in three different dental clinics at the same time. I became a workaholic, seeking recognition from those around me and building up my reputation. Despite all my ambition I still experienced feelings of extreme emptiness and dissatisfaction. I had to excel at work, at the Optimist Club, on the golf course, and on the tennis court, to name a few. What a pitiful situation for somebody who had the means to succeed and be happy! I was not looking for God at all and had no desire for him.

I couldn't explain the healing of my wife's legs other than that it was the result of a simple prayer to Jesus. Without realizing it, we had received our first gift (as Madeleine had told us): the revelation that Jesus was alive,

that he could heal , and that he knew who we were. Jesus was truly present and he loved us!



My wife's healing was certainly the event that pushed us to attend that first breakfast, and many more since then. My wife enjoyed them immensely. They benefited her and she began to change. I also began to change and to see her in a new light.

One of the things that struck me about the different speakers at these events was the common denominator in all of their situations: There was an obvious improvement and progress after they gave their lives to Jesus. They also maintained that God satisfied them spiritually, physically, and even financially; and the latter aspect intrigued me particularly. From my childhood I had understood that God provided our food, clothes and other essentials, but it had never occurred to me that he could also help us with our finances.

I eventually realized that I was a sinner who needed to turn to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. I understood all the love he had for me and became aware of the importance of asking him to live in my heart and take over my life. He heard my cry and from that day on, everything changed for me. He gave me new love and incredible strength without asking for anything of me in return. Joy, peace, and trust filled me. I felt God's presence with me everywhere I went. His Holy Spirit became my counsellor, my comforter, and my advocate. I just couldn't do without his presence. Those around me were surprised at the change. My children knew they had a different father; they didn't have to worry about me leaving the family anymore. I fell in love with my wife all over again and cherished my three daughters more than ever. And I even began to hunger for God's Word, which also was a miracle for me.

Some friends enjoyed watching the effects of our rebirth. Their well-meaning advice was that we make the most of the euphoria — as we'd be back to normal again in six months. Fortunately for us, this passionate love we have for God, for each other, and for our children has not stopped, but has just kept growing and spreading out to others.

I remember how selective and restricted my love had been before the Lord touched me. I didn't care for Christians from other churches nor for English people. No doubt that is why, one day at a Christian meeting the Lord sent an English Canadian to me, asking permission to pray for me. God honoured his prayer to the point that my whole being began overflowing with the presence of the Holy Spirit. My wife, who was at the other side of the room, also experienced the same flood of joy and fullness. At this point, Georges, a member of a charismatic movement, put his arms around me and gave me a great big hug. I could usually not tolerate such a simple and innocent gesture, but at that precise moment it was a liberating gesture. Huge walls inside me crumbled, and overnight I became able to tell my own father I loved him and to take him in my arms. What an intense moment when we freely expressed our love for each other! Even today I can put my arms around my father and hug him. He's 86.



God became involved in my professional and financial affairs. During my post-graduate studies in orthodontics, I was invited to attend courses at the Myofacial Pain Center in Washington, D.C. I hesitated to make my decision because of the expensive tuition and travel costs, but after praying and seeking God's will, I felt a peace and assurance that this opportunity was a gift from him. I signed up. To this day, I still feel a deep sense of gratitude to God, since the knowledge I acquired there has served me well in the treatment of problems relating to the articulation of the jaw.

God also wanted me to prosper financially. The Bible says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6: 33).

In October 1988, the Stock Market dropped drastically and many investors lost their fortunes. I had invested \$125,000 Canadian. Prior to this drop, a return of 18% and higher, from high-risk companies, was attracting me, and I was thinking about transferring my money there. Each Monday morning, a group of members and friends of the FGBMFI gathered to pray, and in August 1988, at an early-morning prayer meeting held at my home, a woman in her fifties had a word from the Lord for me. She said the Lord

told her I was to do what I had in my heart to do. You see, just that weekend I had discussed with my wife the idea of pulling out all of the money I had in the Stock Market. Surprised at this message from God, I decided to pray and ask him to confirm it. At ten o'clock that very morning, my broker phoned unexpectedly and suggested I sell everything, given the risks of the market. I did so on the spot. In his goodness, the Lord had saved my investments. And the Lord also helped me to put my affairs in order.

I decided to concentrate my efforts on my main dental clinic. At the end of the first year my net residual income was higher, plus I had more time to devote to my family and to my activities within FGBMFI. The following year my testimony appeared in "Voice", the bimonthly periodical which FGBMFI publishes in 30 languages and 150 countries. The article was called "A Big Success." Compared with other Canadian and foreign businessmen whom I mixed with, I did not consider myself to be such a big success, but I was proud nonetheless. Everything I had accumulated seemed to be the fruit of my own efforts and reinforced my sense of self-sufficiency. I really didn't need God for success in that domain.

Yes, I had developed the talents God has given me, but I never recognized him as the source of these blessings. Pride hardened my heart. According to the Epistle of James, the proud and arrogant attitudes of the rich are not pleasing to God. Fortunately, he corrects and disciplines his children. As a loving Father, he warns before he chastises. His love and compassion are genuine and when he must intervene, it is not to crush us.

The period of correction was difficult for my family and me. We lived through some very painful moments. After more than 25 "fat cow" years, I wasn't prepared for this test of my faith. At times we had a difficulty understanding God's plan for our lives.

In August 1994 an evangelist from Great Britain by the name of Alan Jones gave me a warning from God. "Jacques," he said, "when I was preaching on Job this morning, in front of this audience of 400, the Holy Spirit showed me that you are going to live some of the same trials Job did. I thought about you so much I had a hard time to concentrate on my sermon." I was shattered. Me? Lose everything? But why? I had absolutely no idea what was in store for me.

The Bible speaks of prophetic words that other Christians communicate to us. This was the case in the words of the woman who prayed for me in my home and in the words of Alan Jones. Eugene May, a man I didn't know at the time, also came to me and told me that one day I would have a lot of money and would help a multitude of works and organizations. I was happy to finally hear some encouragement after my severe warning. In the months that followed, though I didn't really understand what was happening to me, I saw the hand of God destroy the fortress I had trusted in and depended upon: my financial security.



I held on, struggling to avoid the shame of bankruptcy. I hired counsellors to analyze my lifestyle, my investments, debts, tithes, and charitable donations. Nobody could put their finger on the precise reason why the castle I had built with my own hands was now crumbling. We reduced our expenditures to the bare minimum and paid off part of my debts with my entire pension fund, which was supposed to be my old age security. I lost my luxurious home, my car, and the dental centre. We never did discover what caused this free fall.

Two weeks before our bankruptcy appearance, my counsellor discovered an erroneous balance sheet, resulting in significant tax arrears. I couldn't believe it! The sum was enormous. According to him, even if I earned \$100,000 more per year, I still wouldn't be able to catch up because of the interest rates and penalties. I acknowledged defeat and the Lord allowed me to go through the inevitable trial of bankruptcy. But he never abandoned me! At the moment of my release, he provided for me in an unexpected way:

In January, 1998 an ice storm battered our region and I was forced to close my office for a month, resulting in considerable loss of income. My insurance company informed me they would reimburse me for the lost income, based on the amount from the same period the previous year. This turned out to be enough for payment in full!

As the Bible says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him..." (Romans 8: 28). I learned through this experience that the Master of the universe controls everything. In retrospect, I

can say that despite the difficult aspect of a divine reprimand, my bankruptcy was probably one of the greatest blessings in my life.

In April 1998, Eugene May and his wife Sherry came for a visit. After our meal, he took me aside to give me a personal message from God. I was going to have a change of my workplace. That word gave me a sense of insecurity since I had been co-owner of the same dental centre for 20 years. "You will have a new home," he told me. Then he added that God wanted me to be the Canadian president of FGBMFI and his favour would go with me. Next day, a Sunday, my wife and I were praying while driving on the autoroute. We asked the Lord to guide us to another dentist whom I could count on so I would be able to continue my practice. Ten minutes after arriving at our destination, Jesus placed before me a dentist who opened the doors of his clinic to me. I decided to take this step of faith and jump into the river of God where the current is strong and my feet don't always touch bottom. I committed myself without a lease and without money. My wife and I were trusting God. One week later, the Lord prompted a Christian friend to offer me the financial assistance I needed to realize the project of my future dental clinic. It is the most beautiful office I've ever worked in and contains state-of-the-art equipment. Glory to God! None of this would have been possible without the Lord's intervention. I am so happy I dared to believe him. If I had not taken this step of faith, I would never have received all of these blessings.

In that same month of April, the Canadian president of FGBMFI stepped down. FGBMFI brings together thousands of Christian businessmen throughout the world and unites their efforts and financial means to spread God's love and salvation in concrete ways all over the planet. As first vice-president, I had to replace him at a moment's notice. I was surprised at the speed God's word came to pass. In November, 1998 the Canadian directors made me president. God is precise when it comes to accomplishing the things he has ordained. He knows what is best for us. He knows everything. I am so happy I gave myself to him.

I smile today when I think that in times past I told the Lord I didn't believe his words anymore because, in my eyes, there wasn't enough time to accomplish them all. That year (1998), during our annual assembly, Bible verses had been placed at each plate for one of the meals. My verse said, "I

the LORD have spoken, and I will do it." (Ezekiel 17: 24). I dare not comment on his actions since that time. God knows me better than I know myself. He knows the least of my thoughts; therefore, I am actively waiting for the fulfillment of the other things the Lord told me. I will become prosperous like Job so I can give generously and invest in the kingdom of God.



Dear friends, do you now understand why it is wise to trust in God? This omnipresent, omnipotent God loved us to the point of giving himself for us by dying on a cross. He took upon himself the punishment we deserved. No sin can separate us from this merciful God except our own decision to refuse to enter into a relationship with him. I can only encourage you to ask him to come and live in your heart and become your Saviour. Why not ask him now; you have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

DR. JACQUES PHILIBERT

...a Prayer

Teach me, Great Architect of the Universe
to make good use of the time You have given me to work
and to use it rightly without losing any.

Teach me to benefit from past errors
without falling into the trap of consuming doubts.

Teach me to draw up the blueprint without worrying,
to imagine the work without becoming distressed
if it turns out otherwise.

Teach me to marry haste and slowness
serenity and fervour, zeal and peace.

Help me at the start of the work
where I am weakest.

Help me at the heart of the labour
to keep taut the thread of attention.

And above all, fill the gaps of my work Yourself.

Great Architect of the Universe, in all the labour of my hands
leave Your grace to speak to others
and an awareness of my need to speak to me.

Keep in me the hope of perfection
without which I would lose heart.

Keep me in the impossibility of achieving perfection
without which I would lose my pride.

Purify my sight: when I do wrong
it is not certain it is wrong
and when I do right
it is not certain it is right.

Great Architect of the Universe, never let me forget
all knowledge is in vain except where there is work
And all work is empty except where there is love
And all love is hollow that is not connecting
me to myself and others and You.

Great Architect of the Universe, teach me to pray
with my hands
my arms and all my strength.

Remind me that the work of my hands belongs to You
and it belongs to me to give back to You

That if I create for the taste of profit
like a forgotten fruit I will rot in autumn

That if I create to please others
like the flower of the field I will fade at eventide

But if I create for the love of goodness
I will dwell in goodness.

And the time to do good to Your glory
is now.

Amen

Anonymous prayer by a 12th-century cathedral builder.

M emories of France

*That you call him destiny, you err not:
He is the One everything depends upon.
That you call him nature, you are not mistaken:
He is the One everything was born from.
That you call him providence, you speak truly:
It is the wisdom of God that governs the world.*

CARL VON LINNÉ (1707-1778)

Walking through the streets of Montreal, I could not help looking back. Only a few months ago I was still in my native country of France where I practiced medicine for eighteen years.

I realized how life is a mosaic of important decisions and how they determine the path of our existence.

I was born in a small village in Vallée de la Drome in the south-east of France. Our village was nestled in foothills and vineyards, and my memories of it are still quite clear. I remember the narrow lanes lined with trees whose shade we appreciated in the heat of summer. The scent of lavender reminds me of the splendid blue fields and of my mother lovingly handcrafting some little pouches out of Provençal cloth for scenting the linen closets in winter. I can still see myself running in my small shoes over the stony ground, the grass sparse and short, chasing sheep to caress their wool. The hills were high and the roads difficult, but nothing could stop me. I derived a feeling of freedom from nature. I was not big, but I loved climbing the hills to try to discover the most beautiful scenery. A pleasure worth treasures was picking peaches, sitting in the grass at the base of a tree, sinking my teeth into the fruit, and allowing the juices to run the length of my arm or onto my dress.

We lived in the country close to the farmers, shepherds, and lavender workers.

Four years later, my father's work brought us to Raon l'étape in the Vosges. We began to know the meaning of long and harsh winters. My father would be forced to take us to school by toboggan because of the snow, ice, and freezing rain. The town's water pipes froze and the residents had to get their supply from a few fountains in the area. Everybody helped each other. My parents remember this difficult period well, while I only remember buckets of water by the stove, snowball fights, and tobogganing with the neighbourhood children. For me, Raon l'étape is winter. In the summer, which was never long, we had the privilege of going away for four weeks of vacation. We would take the opportunity to visit an unknown region in the south, usually on the Mediterranean coast.

I did not truly discover the region of the Vosges until I settled there as a family doctor in 1980. Why Etival Clairefontaine, a town of 2500? Quite simply because I loved the rural setting and the mountains.

In the evening, after my appointments, it was easy for me to walk with my two dogs up the forest path to arrive an hour later at the top of the hill, where I would admire the setting sun. I loved the damp scent of the undergrowth and the fragrance of the resin. I admired the eternally green firs and threw fir cones for my dogs to joyfully fetch. I rarely saw another person. The hill seemed to belong to me. After a day spent with patients, explaining, comforting, or hearing confidences, these moments were very precious to me.

From the town square, I could hear the muffled, faraway sounds of Etival's famed Clairefontaine paper mill. There was not a family I treated that did not have one of its members employed by this company of 800 workers. The mill was both Etival's pride and source of income, and consequently, the town followed the rhythm of the company. The school timetables were calculated according to the work schedules of the various work groups, and it seemed nobody, no matter how important, could change that fact.

In the summer we had the privilege of picnicking in the cool undergrowth beside the brooks that crossed the forest. A few friends would get together to play a game or two of pétanque. In France, nobody travels without pétanque balls in the trunk of the car.

In the winter we would go skiing on trails on Saturday or Sunday. The closest trails were half an hour away by car. If we wanted a vast skiing area, we would travel four hours south to the Alps and stay a week or more. We rented an apartment in Tigne from one of my husband's colleagues. Also, that is where we took our first ski courses. We quickly got into the habit of taking the cable-car to the summit. We liked to stay there a moment to admire the mountain range so gigantic and imposing. The whiteness dotted with grey, sheer rocks stood out remarkably against the blue sky. Even though the temperature was a chilly minus 35° Celsius, it did not keep us from standing still to allow this incredible view to be etched into our memory. It took us about three hours to get back to the lowest station, where we drank a large hot chocolate before leaving.

My thoughts stop at the sight of a restaurant terrace where a few people linger over a cola and fries. Eight months ago I would have spied pairs of lovers sipping very black coffee and eating a croissant or pastries.

Each French region has its culinary specialty and every good cordon bleu must know the various recipes required to regale the guests. The

joy of the woman of the house is always to offer a beautiful table of fine cuisine and delicious varieties of cheeses accompanied by red wine and followed by fine pastries. I remember meals that lasted three or four hours, where each person was not only pleased to do justice to the dinner, but to share conversations, points of view, and ideas. Even after the meal, the sharing would continue over strong coffee and small, dark chocolates made of 70% cocoa. Time seemed to stop when everybody had expressed and compared their opinions.

How can I share my culinary knowledge here in Montreal? At times I would love to taste Alsatian sauerkraut with a good white wine or an onion pie. Who has tasted tripe, so popular in Caen? A cassoulet simmered for three hours? Oysters from Oléron with a few shallots?

France is my country, my culture, my family, and my friends. It will always remain dear to my heart. I also love Canada. I do not regret leaving my loved ones a year ago to establish myself here with my husband and children. We followed the feeling God placed in our hearts and saw him open all the doors. I believe God wants us here.



In my family, it was customary to pray together each day. We never had a meal without first giving thanks to God for his blessings. My parents had decided to devote their lives to the Lord, and my father was pastor of a Reform Protestant church. I lacked nothing. I benefited from the affection of a united family and the joy of laughing and bickering with six brothers and sisters. Money was not plentiful but we had all we needed and more in our simplicity.

Despite my upbringing and my parents' sincere desire to pass on a part of their faith to me, I could not honestly say God was alive for me. I could not speak to him directly, and although I believed in God and had a deep respect for him, I did not believe he could do anything concrete for me.

At the age of 17, I had only one desire: to live in a university residence and start my studies in medicine away from my highly structured environment. I was suffocating in my role of continually setting a good example for my younger siblings. As the oldest, I already had enough

responsibilities. After much hesitation, my father finally agreed to sign my registration for university.

That signature was my freedom.

That first year, I started to live on my own, answerable to no-one. I was in my element. I loved studying and wanted to do all that was necessary to succeed. I also wanted to become familiar with my surroundings, to go out evenings, and visit different friends. On weekends, when I returned home, I resumed my serious religious ways and lifestyle. I could change hats depending on the circumstances.

A year passed. The freedom I had looked forward to like a treasure satisfied me less and less. I did not find the deep reasons for my existence. Although I tried many friendships, I was often disappointed.

My encounter with some young medical students who really lived out their faith made me realize my need for a personal relationship with Jesus.

As they shared their life and experiences, I understood that everything I was looking for in nature, in my thirst for beauty and purity by admiring the landscape, I could obtain within me by establishing a living relationship with my creator.

Love emanated from my friends and from God to me, and started to transform my heart, pushing me to accept the Lord and Master.

One evening some students invited me to join them at an interdenominational Christian meeting where everyone freely shared their faith. The meeting took place in a university classroom.

I enjoyed Bible stories, and being a pastor's daughter I thought I could share my literary knowledge. When the meeting started, I did exactly that. To my surprise, my new friends seemed more interested in my experiences than my knowledge. They wanted to know how I came to know Jesus. I was unable to answer the question. I had assumed I was a Christian since I had been born and brought up in a Christian family.

One night, alone in my room, I prayed my first sincere, spontaneous prayer. "My God, since you exist, please show me whether I am a true Christian. Tell me whether I need to meet you in a personal way."

I calmly picked up my Bible and turned to the epistle of Paul to the Romans. Despite the void in my heart and the sharp awareness of the

missing part in my being, I did not expect what was going to happen next. As I read, God showed me how he saw me and how hypocritical I was. I faced the reality of my life and had no other choice than to tearfully ask him to forgive me.

God did not stop there. During the next three hours, face to face, he walked me through my whole life, showing me each event I had lived without pleasing him. I asked forgiveness, and each time, I felt genuine relief and the assurance that my mistakes were erased. Then he brought to mind other details I had totally forgotten. Each time I had only one desire: to hide from his gaze and make myself as small as possible to escape this presence so impartial and powerful, yet so full of love. I understood well that he could not approve of what I had done because my behaviour had not been commendable. I also felt the immensity of his love — the only thing that could erase my mistakes forever.

He knew everything in detail and forgot nothing.

When I got up after three hours in the presence of God, I was not the same person. I knew deep down God loved me. I was forgiven and my past had been wiped clean. I knew that after this life there was another one in his presence for me to enjoy. I neither looked for nor deserved this, but it was offered to me. I was like a child who discovers real life for the first time. The knowledge of these spiritual realities was somehow instantly imprinted within me.



And then, I met Francis. I was in my third year and we were selling Bibles outside the university restaurants. He was studying physical sciences and chemistry.

We were married eighteen months later. The next six years allowed us not only to finish our studies and have three children, but also to set up a medical practice and run a medium-term hospital service.

Francis taught applied physics at university but still was a great help in bringing up our children. Together we learned to handle problems and difficulties with God's help.

Never in my life did I doubt the truthfulness of the Bible, but as a scientist, the question of divine healing persisted in my heart.

In Christian gatherings I had heard testimonies of miraculous healings but found the testimonies quite subjective and lacking in scientific proof. This did not prevent me from believing in an omnipotent God for whom nothing is impossible. At times, though, I found the people in my circle too quick to believe. After all, wasn't divine healing reserved for extreme circumstances now that modern doctors are capable of treating the sick?

God decided to reveal himself once again.

In the middle of the night, without warning, Francis woke up suffering from a violent, burning, retrosternal, thoracic pain. He described it as being in the middle third of his esophagus. It was impossible for him to swallow.

Francis was never sick and never complained about anything. At the age of 27, he had never had any health problems, and that evening he had seemed all right.

After trying some basic analgesics which proved ineffective, I decided to give him some viscous Xylocaine. The local anaesthetic allowed him to go back to sleep. Next morning he was still unable to swallow a single sip of water.

A gastroenterologist with whom I frequently worked agreed to see him to provide a more precise diagnosis.

I will always remember that small examining room: Francis lying on the couch, trying to resist the gag reflex upon the insertion of the endoscope; my colleague and I discussing the large ulcer we had discovered in the middle third of his esophagus. What was the cause? Had he ingested acid while conducting chemistry experiments? Why the middle third of the esophagus and not the throat? Why hadn't he felt anything before? There was no logical explanation. Francis begged us to finish the examination and discuss the situation later.

We left with dietary advice, orders to rest for several weeks, and a prescription for a treatment to aid healing and digestion.

Francis had a heavy workload and didn't accept the idea of staying at home. He had seen divine healing before and that evening decided to ask a few friends for prayer. I was there and nothing in particular happened. Francis was still attempting to swallow a teaspoonful of water with the help of anaesthetics. I don't think he realized until that moment how pleasant it actually was to be able to eat and drink freely and without pain.

The next two days, however, he gradually increased his dietary intake, and the third day when I got home from work, he asked, "Can you make me some fries for lunch?" Sitting across from him, I could not help staring at him to catch the slightest hint of a grimace. Was he really healed? For him, there was no doubt he had been healed. Medication was out of the question.

Later in the week, my colleague called to have news, and he was greatly surprised when I explained what had happened. He said, "You can't ignore this. You need a new control!"

I had a great deal of difficulty convincing Francis to return to that examining room to verify his healing. He had no doubts. I definitely wanted to see and compare that examination with the one from a week previous.

My colleague and I found absolutely no trace of the ulcer. We had both seen it with our own eyes, described it, and tested it. But as we passed the instrument the length of his esophagus and even checked his stomach, we didn't find so much as a scar. After that appointment I was forced to acknowledge the greatness of God. Only he can heal without leaving a trace.

Since that day, I have never again doubted the power of God. I know he has given me the opportunity to care for and even heal patients, but he alone is capable of surpassing medicine when he deems best.

In my personal and family life, I had never before seen a miraculous healing. It seems God wanted to ensure I understood he was omnipotent even though I had to face the daily reality of illness in my profession and in my contact with others.

A month ago, my sixteen-year-old son, Jérémie, started to complain of dysesthesia (a loss of sensitivity) in his feet. The tingling spread progressively up to his pelvis. A week later he was having trouble walking

and it looked like he had locomotor ataxia. He was admitted to hospital for almost two weeks of testing and observation, including an MRI and a lumbar puncture. It turned out to be a viral myelitis.

After a period of getting around in a wheelchair, Jérémie began gingerly to reuse his legs. A clinical test showed progressive recovery of his reflexes. We knew he would be healed without any after-effects, but we still had to have recourse to the health system.

Only God knows why he heals on one occasion and not another. I do know he intervenes whenever we ask him to. It may be a healing or it may be through another way in a person's life.

In France I was working in a medium-term care unit of thirty beds, five of which were reserved for palliative care. How many times did I have the chance to see the intervention of God at the bedsides of the suffering and dying!

I remember André in Room 9, a patient in the terminal stages of cancer of the bladder. He suffered despite significant doses of morphine, but it always seemed to me the suffering had more to do with his morale than his body. All his life he had managed a company and given orders. He was a very proud man. At the age of 59 he refused to accept a life of physical deterioration and especially to be seen as ill. He refused to speak of his illness.

One evening, seeing his suffering increase and realizing he was desperately battling death, I decided to spend some time sharing and talking with him. He confided he had been remarried and that his second son, Joseph, had never accepted it. He had not seen him in 18 years. We discussed at length the concepts of life, existence, sickness, and even the hereafter. Then for the first time, he admitted to me he knew he was dying but wasn't ready. I asked his permission to call Joseph to try for a reconciliation. He was yearning for it.

André benefited from prayer even though he wasn't physically healed. He passed away in blessed serenity, having made peace with himself, with God, and with his son, who had always wanted to make peace but hadn't known how to deal with his father's pride.

It is true I encountered all kinds of patients and temperaments, but whenever I met a sick or handicapped person whose faith in God was still alive, I observed that faith is a power that puts an illness into perspective and lifts our gaze up into the realm beyond the visible.

Nothing belongs to us: neither life nor death, our health nor our future. The only thing that does belong to us is the way we act and react, knowing that God is always there to bless, sustain, and teach us. Life on earth is very short compared to eternity. I pray that the troubles of this life do not take up our time to the point where we forget eternity in the presence of the most magnificent and wonderful God.

DR. FRANCINE NICLOUX

...a Prayer

Like a gust of wind,
His Spirit lifted me up
And showed me his Face;
He revealed himself to me as
Tenderness, Love and
Infinite Kindness;
Then he overwhelmed me with Blessings
And offered me Manna in abundance
So I could share it with my brothers;
He walked with me in the country of oblivion;
From below, among the dead
He took hold of me;
Out of those who forgot him,
He resurrected me,
Restoring memory to my soul.
O Lord, I am grateful!
May Your Gentleness, O Lord,
Be on us all;
Blessed be the Lord,
Forever and ever. Amen.

ANONYMOUS

Beyond Loneliness

Yet it is in this whole process of meeting and solving problems that life has its meaning. Problems are the cutting edge that distinguishes between success and failure. Problems call forth our courage and our wisdom; indeed, they create our courage and our wisdom. It is only because of problems that we grow mentally and spiritually.

DR. SCOTT PECK

The Road Less Traveled

I practise medicine in Trois-Rivières, Quebec, but grew up north of Montreal in St-Jérôme. At the age of eighteen I moved away to attend university. At first I studied at a polytechnical school to become an engineer but switched to medicine the following year.

My father's work kept him away most of the time and we didn't see much of him. My mother, however, devoted herself to raising us. She took us regularly to church, and as a youth I became aware of religious matters. At the age of 14, I urged my parents to buy me a Bible which I read from cover to cover during my adolescence.

I tended to be a loner. I had one or two good friends and wasn't sportsminded. My relationship with my father was difficult and I would avoid him by shutting myself up in my room to do homework or to learn everything I could from books. My father was a real workaholic. No doubt the insecurity he suffered in his youth caused him to throw himself into his work to try to find security in material goods. He was practically never home. We went fishing a few times and once he played baseball with me, that's all. On Sundays he slept. I always felt that somehow he saw me as a competitor or as a threat to him. He kept his distance and I sought to get away from him. Our relationship remained superficial.

As I said, my mother often took us to church and, as a result, I acquired a taste for spiritual things. I was even offered a scholarship to study to become a priest but that didn't appeal to me. I preferred to read my Bible alone. Long robes and celibacy weren't for me. At the age of 18, because of my studies, I moved in with two other boys my age. Religion meant nothing to them. They sowed doubts in my spirit and I turned my back on God, convincing myself that religion was a human invention. I read and followed the philosophies of humanistic atheists such as Rostand and Henri Laborit. I thought if existence was so absurd, I might as well take advantage of whatever I could. It was as though I was facing a gulf of despair and loneliness. I thought my past beliefs had failed me and I had wasted my time on nonsense.

During the next three years of practising atheism, Bible verses came to my mind from time to time. Some pieces of the puzzle were missing though. I knew Bible passages but I did not understand the message. I did

not have a personal relationship with God and couldn't see why I had to be redeemed from my sins. What sins?

Later, I travelled to Europe. I had the opportunity to visit many interesting places including some churches and catacombs. Thinking about the first-century Christians, I wondered what they had grasped that I was still missing. Again, I was drawn to the Bible. Had I overlooked something? I didn't want to go on without discovering what had been so important to others before me.

I returned to Quebec to start my courses. Soon afterwards, I was invited to participate in a series of group studies on the Gospel of Mark. My motivation for going was to debate and prove to the others — using their own arguments and Bible verses — that Christianity was outdated and irrelevant. But I did not succeed. One of the members had a master's degree in theology and answered my arguments satisfactorily.

Even more important than winning or losing a debate was my consciousness of the fact that something was escaping me. I quickly realized that perhaps faulty atheistic reasoning was preventing me from discovering the most precious and important revelation in the universe.

I dared to pray, "Lord, if you really exist, please make yourself real to me." As soon as the words left my mouth, I began to laugh at my stupidity.

Nevertheless, despite appearances, God heard the cry of my heart. Several months passed. One morning, as the first rays of dawn broke, I was walking alone under a bluish sky when I decided to make my peace with God and invite him to live within me. I know that beginning at that intimate moment of reconciliation, something changed.



That was twenty years ago. Since then, I compare my life to rafting, where I have to hang on tight to the raft as it courses down the river, experiencing pleasures, dangers, rapids, and, of course, water in the boat. I don't know why, but I expected my life with God to be free from adversity and failure. I was quickly brought back to reality. My foundation was built on sand rather than the Rock. When the winds blew, the walls collapsed.

My greatest desire was to start a family; to get married, have children, and lead a quiet life. Four years after my conversion, I married a young woman who attended the same Bible study as I did. After knowing each other for four years and going out for a year, we felt ready for marriage. It was like a dream for me. I had never been with another woman before and she had never been with another man. Both of us had determined to wait for the right person before having sex. We had sex for the first time on our wedding night. I loved her and envisioned spending the rest of our lives together. I was thrilled.

Seven years later our marriage fell apart. I cannot tell you who was responsible for the break-up. My wife eventually left me and made a new life for herself with another man. It seemed God had completely abandoned us.



God never abandons anyone, but I was convinced he had made an exception and rejected me. To make matters worse, I now belonged to a group of "second-class citizens" — divorcees. When I was a child, a divorced woman had lived upstairs from us. I pointed my finger at her throughout my youth. Now here I was, divorced and completely devastated.

After that time I was working in an emergency room and fortunately, I had many good friends there to help and encourage me. They weren't necessarily religious or believers, but their love was sincere. One young man even invited me to move in with him for a while, since I just couldn't stand being alone. I was too broken to face my situation. The men took me fishing and hunting and one instructed me in deep-sea diving. Some were nurses; others were ambulance attendants. The fact that they weren't rich and that our social status was different touched me all the more.

In time, and thanks to the support of these friends, I recovered. Little by little, a desire to bless the people around me was growing. I started by teaching ambulance courses on a volunteer basis and that led to a government job. From 1992 to 1998 I served as head doctor for all the ambulance workers. I worked on courses on the use of defibrillators (devices that administer shocks to a patient having a heart attack) and courses on the installation of tubes into a patient's throat to aid breathing.

I introduced these services to the entire region, including Trois-Rivières, Victoriaville, Drummondville, and Lachute.

Mother Teresa's ministry had always made a deep impression on me. One of my prayers was to be able to serve humanity like she did. One day the Salvation Army invited me to give a conference on the problem of drug addiction. After observing their excellent work with the destitute, I gradually got involved.

Some of my co-workers found it hard to understand what happened to me. Our relationships remained friendly, but they had a hard time imagining how a doctor could be interested in visiting welfare recipients and raising funds door-to-door for charity. They could never understand how privileged I feel. My wealth is having friends among the poorest of the poor — lowest on the social scale, least important, and despised. All they have to offer is their friendship. You can't put a price tag on that! Their inner being is like a treasure, more valuable than art or paintings.

Once I distributed food to the homeless in downtown Montreal. The look in their eyes moved me. I came face to face with God. I don't know how to explain it, but I saw God in the eyes of the poor. I finally understood what Mother Teresa was trying to express.

The desire of my life is to experience God. I want to find the pearl hiding at the bottom of genuine interpersonal relationships. By discovering the soul of the poor, I discover myself. The Bible says, "Love your neighbour as yourself." In essence, all humans possess the same common elements. It is important to realize that the situation in which some of the poor are living could very well have been my own. When I love these people, when I listen to them without prejudice and try to understand and help them, it is then that I meet God.



God is faithful and he supports those who put their trust in him. He helped me to overcome my trial. There are still after-effects however and, in my case, a deep wound. Some may have a hard time to understand what I want to share, but I believe these words will help other men going through the same problems. Others may find food for thought.

After my divorce I began to feel ashamed and inferior. Everything I had undertaken so far had succeeded. It was the first time I experienced downright failure. Even during my studies I had never failed a course. I could have tried to stop feeling guilty by placing the blame on my wife, but that wouldn't have worked. I couldn't clear my name that way. I had to admit to myself I had never been able to truly open up to her, and part of the problem stemmed from having an overbearing mother. I had a wall inside me and my wife had detected it. It is something that lasts and is a reaction to the domineering mother. Also, feeling attracted to my wife but not being able to translate this attraction into intimacy made me feel inferior to "normal" men. I thought I was different and emotionally handicapped. All this stayed camouflaged under an air of success. I was a doctor, after all. I had a beautiful home and a motorcycle; I travelled the world over...

As a result of my pain, I developed an aggressiveness towards women in general. What to do?



First, I made a firm decision to refrain from sleeping with anybody. I believe sexual activity outside marriage brings ruin and makes you a wreck. It's a form of escape.

Deep down, the desire of my heart was and is for my wife to come back. Despite our personality differences, we could try to rebuild our lives together. We'll see! In the meantime I keep busy and never plan ahead any more than six months at a time.

Having determined to go it alone for a while, I wanted to learn how to deal with my loneliness. I have wonderful friends, but of course they will never be able to replace my wife. I need to learn to live with that. Sometimes it's depressing, but I try not to make a mountain out of it.

Another option is to start over with another woman, but with so much animosity still inside me, I don't think it would be wise.

Should I count on psychoanalysis? No thanks. Psychoanalysis may produce masterpieces of understanding of one's self but wouldn't really change much in my case. You see, being honest and conscious of the problem always leads in the right direction.

Sexual abstinence doesn't keep me from functioning. I have worked in a hospital emergency room for 17 years. It's a heavy workload. I am very much involved in general medicine. Besides my private practice, I'm the head of an active geriatrics department, president of the Council of Doctors and Dentists in the Trois-Rivières region, and an endocrinology consultant for diabetics. I work hard but also enjoy 10 to 12 weeks of vacation each year.

When I was young, I skipped two grades in school, and so the other students in my class were two years older than I was. Often they humiliated me. Perhaps at that time I learned self-sufficiency and how to accept challenges. To be honest, I see in all of my activities an attempt to increase my self-esteem and dress my wound. From the outside, people see me as a hard-working guy and they respect me, but I know very well, looking at this wound, something will have to happen.

Going back to the subject of sexual relationships, I would like to provide more clarification.

When a man and a woman get married, their goal is to live in unity for a long time. This need for unity exists in every human being's heart of hearts. If I decide to unite myself with a woman for a few weeks, several months, or even just one night, I'm actually creating a lie within my own heart. Sexual intimacy involves our deepest emotions, and using a person with no intention of seeking a lasting relationship reduces him or her to an object of satisfaction. Those who go from partner to partner believing they can avoid all harmful consequences are deceiving themselves. To think it is possible to remain superficial is another lie, and the antithesis of relationship.

The Bible uses the term "dissolution" to define promiscuity. Uniting sexually with many partners causes us to "dissolve". In other words, the quality of authentic love weakens and gradually becomes insipid. I know some people who have adopted this lifestyle. Eventually they become so blasé they don't know what the word "passionate" means anymore. As far as I'm concerned, I don't want to exchange the passion that burns in me for ephemeral relationships. I don't want to compromise the quality of the relationship I'm looking for. Living without passion would be like existing in black and white and never truly experiencing colour. Having affairs with many women would mean lying to myself and, moreover, lying to others. Even my capacity for true

friendship would be affected, not to mention the danger of contracting AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases.

Let's talk about true friendship.

After a divorce, if people don't see you with another woman, some will suspect you are homosexual. This is exactly what happened to me especially since I openly admitted my need for healing and a time of restoration. I chose to ignore the innuendoes. When I began helping the needy, people gossiped. Jesus himself spent so much time with prostitutes and criminals that people wanted to stone him. For me, the depth of relationship and quality of friendship that follow from crossing social barriers are well worth the price.

Genuine friendship is a source of healing. A friend opened up his home to me the first year after my divorce. Not surprisingly people asked questions. Our society promotes so many clichés: Real men don't cry, or express their feelings, or comfort each other with a hug. Every day men fight a kind of homophobia in their interpersonal relationships. They are afraid to express any tenderness towards each other for fear of homosexuality. But it's just a cliché. We learned young to keep our feelings inside and to associate tenderness with homosexuality.

Homosexuality is a perversion of our need to experience true friendship. It is a sin. It is to desire another man and want to caress him. We can, however, wrap our arms around a guy without desiring him at all. In my opinion, homosexuals are living a lie. I don't reject them as individuals and I have even helped many homosexual patients who suffered bitter disappointments and nervous breakdowns. Their eyes seem full of sorrow. They are disappointed in themselves. I believe they are looking for their own masculinity in other men and trying to appropriate it to fill the void. Actually, it produces the opposite effect. They don't need other men. A woman confirms and reinforces masculinity. That is why so many men become effeminate and never attain satisfaction.

I know some men who practised homosexuality for many years. After giving their lives to Jesus, they changed completely. They no longer frequent bars and they have gradually discovered their masculinity.



A good friend of mine also grew up with an absent father. What I had been looking for through friendships, he found in the martial arts. He prefers this as a safe and healthy form of contact with other men. We have a number of common interests and participate in many activities together. When we go on a hunting trip with our guns over our shoulders, it brings to mind the image of the man we would have liked to have had instilled in us. In our friendship, our transparency is precious. I know I can share anything with him without being judged. God is the same. In the parable of the prodigal son, the father didn't reprimand his son by saying, "I warned you not to do that. You'll have to figure it out for yourself." Instead, the father took his son in his arms and welcomed him home with compassion.

There is something about friendship that is eternal. The New Testament speaks of ties of friendship that last beyond this world. It's a valid investment.

It is not easy to develop deep relationships in today's society. Men feel alone, like desert islands in a choppy ocean. The only solution is to give of ourselves. By persevering, and with God's help, we can succeed. It's a progression. When we remember God's attitude towards our sins, it helps us to get closer to others without wearing a mask or judging. It is pointless to keep hiding behind walls. When I aspire to live transparently, a reconciliation takes place. Even if I still need healing in many areas of my life, people are attracted to my openness. Many of my workmates have come to me when they were going through difficult times. In fact, they were drawn to the Lord without realizing it because he placed these qualities in me. Without being pretentious, I believe what the Bible says: We are the aroma of Christ; the fragrance of his love. I am thankful to have remained close to Jesus despite my difficulties. If I had abandoned him after my divorce ten years ago, I am certain things today would be very different.



I would like to conclude by saying that the void in each human being can only be filled by God. We prefer to try anything and everything else, but it only leads to disillusionment. My father worked all his life to achieve financial security. At the start of his retirement in November 1996, he was diagnosed

with cancer of the pancreas. He entered a time of despair and became inconsolable. He had carefully planned everything to ensure comforts in his later years. He died in September 1997. My mother said he ran all his life to get to the top of the staircase and when he wanted to grab the doorknob—he fell into a black hole. I will always remember that analogy.

Before my father's death, I saw hopelessness in his eyes. I don't want to have that look in my eyes at the end of my life. I want to leave this world content. I can honestly say if I had to leave tomorrow, I would be satisfied with the fullness of the life I currently lead.

I am proud to be a doctor. Many people know I love God and, far from being intimidated, they talk about it with each other and come to see me in my office. They know I have something more than prescriptions to offer them. When the occasion presents itself, I talk to them about God and see their eyes light up. When I must break the news that a patient's condition is terminal, I am aware that this earthly life is only the preparatory stage for the real life to come. I consider my relationship with God to be a very integral part of my profession.

DR. CHRISTIAN CLAVEL

...a Prayer

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.

You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"

even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.

When I awake, I am still with you.

A PRAYER OF DAVID (1010 B.C.)

N ever-ending pain

When someone says that such-and-such a case is hopeless, he is simply stating that he does not agree with our concept of hope for total healing. Before God there are no hopeless cases. Although faith does not always guarantee a return to perfect health, it gives strength and solace in the midst of weakness, anguish, and despondency. The Bible offers us a hope that goes beyond the weaknesses of the human condition.

DR. SAMUEL PFEIFER

Die Schwachen tragen (Rally Round the Weak)

My name is Leigh Clarke. You can see by the spelling of my name that I was born into an anglophone family. I grew up in Toronto and learned French in high school. After studying medicine, I was a resident doctor in Montreal. I forced myself to speak French and even asked bilingual francophones to speak to me in French. I was used to reading in French, and very slowly I also learned to express myself. I didn't always understand what people were saying, but I persevered for several months by always asking the same questions and always receiving the same answers. At last I became familiar with the French medical terms.

Seven years later, my wife and I came to spend a weekend in Montreal. Our hearts became attached to Quebec. Later, we moved to Sherbrooke. In 1976, I worked in emergency rooms but still had trouble expressing myself. My first night on duty, I made a wrong diagnosis because I didn't understand exactly what the patient had told me. The light came on, however, when I found out the other members of his family were suffering the same symptoms. It turned out they had eaten bear steaks that weren't well-cooked. After a few weeks, my communicating ability improved.

I studied medicine with the conviction that I would like my profession and I was not mistaken. The human suffering that pierces our existence has become my challenge. It hasn't always been easy, though. I've fought my whole life to relieve the suffering of others while my own body was crying out in pain. In fact, I have suffered during most of my medical practice. The only good to come out of this has been a sensitivity that allows me to better understand my patients.



In 1953, on the day of Queen Elizabeth's coronation, my parents went to a neighbour's house and I amused myself by climbing on the roof of a small garage and hanging upside-down by my feet. Since I was not as skilful at this as my friends, I slipped and fell head first onto a pile of bricks. Later I started having headaches, which became more pronounced as I grew up. I had a headache almost every day; the pain was terrible. At age 28, I developed acute arthritis at the nape of my neck. The X-rays revealed heavy damage in my joint discs. Nothing could be done for me. I was forced to take more and

more medication to find relief. It caused me other frustrations as well. I often asked God to heal me but the pain persisted. I had no alternative but to face my situation and realize I would most likely suffer the rest of my life. My worst nightmare was coming true.

After a while, I let go. I told myself my frustration would only add to my problems. I believe that by accepting the reality of my illness, the tension in my nervous system decreased, and to my great surprise, the pain became more bearable. I was able to reduce the doses of my medication considerably.

The fact still remains that I suffer each day. There is not a minute of the day nor a day of the year when the pain stops. I go to bed with a headache because I was standing all day; I get up in the morning because the pain prevents me from staying in bed any longer. If I stay lying down, the pain increases. It's like that all the time. The only difference is I don't consume narcotics or large doses of medication anymore. I take Tylenol from time to time to reduce the pain so I can finish my daily work or sleep better. The narcotics used to effectively extinguish my pain, but I knew as soon as the medication wore off, the pain would return. I wanted the illness to go away, but that was an unrealistic expectation. The morning I get up without a headache will be the day I have died and gone to heaven.

As a resident doctor, I developed ulcerative colitis. This disease caused me to have bowel movements twenty or thirty times a day, which often meant blood accompanied by strong pain. I had to be near a bathroom each half-hour to avoid unfortunate incidents. I got into the habit of bringing extra underwear and clothes with me. I bled a lot and became anemic; my blood count was 50% of the normal rate. Fatigue was getting the better of me and cortisone weakened me even more.

With all these health problems, I found it difficult to devote time to my family. I was not there for my children as I would have liked to be. This created a certain distance between us. I regret not having been able to better evaluate my priorities and desire so much to make up for lost time now.

In 1980 the risk of cancer from my ulcerative colitis was high and, in view of the ineffectiveness of the medication, I had to undergo surgery. I spent a week in agony in a hospital awaiting the results of the pathological exam to know if they had found traces of cancer. In this circumstance, I had time to take stock of my life. I was only 36 years old but at a certain

moment, I understood I was not immortal. As a Christian, I believe in eternal life, but it is difficult to yield to that reality when your body is headed towards the grave.

I would have liked to do many things in life. My illness has stolen a lot of time and strength. Sometimes I must put aside certain dreams and even many good things. I told myself to stop wasting time and to give priority to the truly important things in life. I do not believe, however, I have successfully honoured this commitment. For example, among other things, I liked painting. Art absorbed me completely. I had to choose between my painting and my priorities. I could not be doctor, artist, and father all at the same time. Therefore, I decided to give up the paintbrush.

Then, I was the victim of another cancer; this time, skin cancer. There was no trace of cancer in my colon, but several years later a mark appeared on my forehead. Some friends who were doctors and surgeons examined me and found nothing serious. My wife had read an article in a medical journal about this type of melanoma, and she suggested further testing. She was right. An operation confirmed that it was indeed cancer. After studying my case, the doctors on the committee responsible for testing tumours decided to make a larger and deeper incision and perform a skin graft. Fear was growing inside me.



The morning of my operation I decided to read a Bible passage. The text for my daily reading was the story where Jesus leaves Capernaum to preach in the surrounding villages. As I turned the page, a thought came to my spirit, a quiet voice that said, "You didn't pray this morning!"

It was true. Not wanting to dwell too long on this observation, I was about to resume my reading when the voice continued, "You usually pray in the morning!"

"Of course I pray, but today I want to read."

"You should pray," it gently murmured in my mind.

"Very well. I'll pray later."

The voice instructed me, "Pray, now!"

"Yes, Lord, I will pray."

I prayed for God's comfort before being taken to the operating room. To my surprise, when I finished praying and turned the page, I read, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people." (Matthew 4: 23). The people brought the lame and paralytics to Jesus and he healed them all.

This voice so quiet, like a thought in my head, strengthened me on the inside and banished all my anxieties. The matter was closed: God had healed me. The voice kindly exhorted me to pay more attention to my health and to wear a hat. The skin on my head is very sensitive to the sun and I am at risk for cancers of the skin. Since that time, I wear a hat when I go out!



Most people cannot understand what it means to live with a disease unless, of course, they have gone through a similar trial. We are often torn between what we would like to do and what we are able to do. We must shoulder the responsibilities common to all humans plus face up to the suffering and penalties resulting from fragile health. This state of being obviously produces an accumulation of extra tensions at the core of our relationships with our loved ones.

My wife and I have passed through various phases and periods of adaptation made necessary by situations we couldn't foresee at all at the start of our journey together. Fortunately, we are still in love and standing by each other.

At one point we decided to go work in Africa. A group called the Mission to the Interior of Africa offered us preparatory training to help us meet this new challenge. Around this time we were very busy. My wife worked for a school board and was involved in many other activities. Besides working, I was a member of a hospital administrative committee and was working in a Christian organization at the provincial level. We were both doing excellent work, but it took its toll on our relationship as a couple. Our relationship slipped to the bottom of the list. From the outside, everything looked fine. We shared our faith at church; meanwhile, our home life was falling apart. We harboured bitterness in our hearts towards each other. We also had a

false understanding of what was fair or unfair concerning our expectations of each other. Our quarrelling affected our children. How sad! It is wonderful to call yourself a Christian, but you must live out your Christianity at home first of all. God allowed the leaders of the Mission to recognize our problems and counsel us to reduce our activities here and there and to invest in our marriage before thinking about becoming missionaries.

We followed their advice and saw a therapist to help us enter into a dialogue. We were able to express openly the ways we were hurting each other and experienced intense moments of forgiveness.

One evening at home, I was angry at my wife over nothing. I criticized her for some of her past actions and words. Actually, I hadn't really forgiven her. She ended up feeling hurt and confused. I persisted in telling her I would never be prepared to accept certain habits of hers. Our endless debates resurfaced. Suddenly, there was a moment of clarity and we thought to pray. It was not easy, but we prayed on the spot. Immediately I thought of a Bible verse, the one where God speaks of husbands loving their wives.

That was not just advice, it was a command! The light pierced my darkness. I was disobeying God. Far from loving my wife, there were moments when I hated her. Bitterness and rage were controlling me.

After that moment when I acknowledged my faults before God, our situation improved greatly. I know very well we will always have misunderstandings, but when we sincerely turn to God, he helps us.



I would like to write a few words about the goodness of God versus human suffering. I have discussed this question with quite a number of my patients. People who are suffering sometimes have the impression that God and his goodness have made an exception for them. This problem troubles many people, Christians or not. They dare not say God is evil, but some find him unfair. In my own suffering, I have reflected upon this, and I offer you my thoughts.

First, man has a natural tendency to place the blame on others for all his problems. Diseases or daily disappointments; consequences of poor decisions or failures — it's easy to point the finger at God. And then there are

the unanswerable questions: "Why is life the way it is? Why does everything seem to work for one individual and not for another? Why is there misery and this suffering? Why me?"

Reflecting a bit, is this presupposition of attributing to God the responsibility for all our woes inconsistent with his nature? There are two possibilities: either God is evil or he is good. Considering his omnipotence, if he is evil, he must be the worst devil in the world. Conversely, if he is good, he must be radically and totally good in all his dealings. This includes the things he allows in my life and in the world, including the fact that he gives free rein to suffering and pain. He also permits me to fail to accomplish certain good actions.

Quite frankly, if I think about most of the complications and problems I have encountered along my path, I must recognize that often I alone was responsible. I reap what I sow.

I received a physical and emotional heritage. My father and mother were good parents, but, being introverted, they rarely expressed their emotions. During my youth, I had to constantly perform to win their approval. I had to be a very good student and make high grades to receive tangible signs of encouragement from them. I had to succeed in life. Later, I transferred these requirements onto my loved ones and my relationship with God. I assumed one had to work very hard to please the Lord. It seemed logical to me. Many Christians make the same mistake and believe their list of projects is all right with God. Often, however, what they really need to do is to be attentive to the little things in life and the people around them.

The problem comes from the fact that we don't take time to listen to God. This attitude of listening is not natural for humans, and certainly not for me. Disease may have weakened my body, but it has by no means subdued my pride. It took me years to show a bit of humility in my marriage, towards my children, and even in my medical practice. I had to learn to listen to God and others. I confessed to my wife that it was difficult for me to express my feelings and that I had never known that liberty as a child. Even if I understood intellectually the workings of the emotions, I recognized before God my need for his help to live a transformed life.

Therefore, a large number of our problems result from our own errors and our heritage. God is not there to crush us or point out all our

faults. He loves us and wants to help us. As a friend, he wants to accompany us during our time of testing.

I have realized that suffering is one ingredient of love. Some have understood this truth and chosen to act superficially in their relationships to avoid being hurt. Sometimes we should be careful, but it is impossible to love without being hurt. The Bible says God is love and he created us in his image and likeness. He created us capable of loving and being loved. He could have created a race of robots who could not detect signs of fatigue or weariness in others. These robots would be programmed to buy flowers for their wives, declare tender words from time to time, and sweep the house once a week. No, love is spontaneous and acts without constraints. Moreover, to be able to love, one must be free to love, to hate, or — even worse — to remain indifferent.

When God created humans, in order for love to be true, the opposite had to at least be possible. At the time of creation, evil was but one possibility. God knew in advance that by creating a free being, the latter had the opportunity to make choices contrary to love. God took the risk even though it was possible his decision could backfire and the masterpiece of his creation could choose to ignore and reject his Creator. Parents face the same situation. We desire to bring children into the world and wish the best for them, all the while aware that one day they could turn their backs on us. God's perspective is different from ours in the sense that he sees the long term. I know an element of faith is necessary to accept what I say, but God transcends earthly events. Although I don't pretend to have an answer for everything, this at least explains why God chooses to do things that seem incomprehensible to us. The reasons will become clear only in the light of eternity. If we accept the premise that God is good, we can believe that his choices and actions flow from his goodness and that the final outcome of his acts will reveal the dazzling splendour of his love.

The Apostle Paul said, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Romans 8: 18). I believe God wants to populate heaven with free people who, in spite of their freedom to do good or evil, choose solely the good because of the love they have for God. Jesus said his kingdom was not coming in a way that would turn heads. God accomplishes this work in the hearts of those who love him.

Through both happy times and suffering, we learn to trust him and grow closer to him.

Another question people ask is, "If God is so good, why doesn't he put an end to evil? Why doesn't he stop wars and solve the problem of famines?"

Actually, they are reproaching God for failing to intervene in cases of human injustice and acts of violence. Again, I don't have the whole answer to this question, but I know, nevertheless, that God is just. Those who would like to force God to intervene in various situations caused by egoism and violence between nations would be the first to object if God intervened to judge their own wrong actions against others. God does not play favourites. To him, wrong is wrong. It is often because of the greed of the rich countries that poverty affects so many other countries and two-thirds of the human race. Hate and hunger for power create wars; not God! If he had to oppose the human will while staying impartial, he would be obliged to judge the evil in every living being. He could not tolerate our dishonesty and selfishness.

Yes, one day God will put an end to evil, but on that day he will judge every form of evil. He will make no exceptions; not for America, not for Africa.

It is distressing to discover how much we would like to insist that God act according to our agenda while we make excuse after excuse for not doing what he asks us to. We could help our neighbour in so many ways, but we put it off until tomorrow.

God wants to be involved in all aspects of our life, but he will not act without our consent. The only way God can conquer evil is by coming and living in us. He does his work on the inside. He desires to build a genuine friendship based on forgiveness and grace with each person. We deserve judgement; the Bible is very clear. The wrongs we commit, big or small, deserve a penalty. Otherwise, God would not be a just being. In his goodness, however, he decided to suffer in our place the punishment for our guilty actions. Here is the central message of the Bible: Jesus died on the cross to pay our debt. Even the tiniest of lies breaks the universal law and the law of love. God could never remain just by allowing humans to do as they like, without reacting. It requires more than the mere punishment of the offender. If God were to punish evil in an absolutely fair fashion, he would have to annihilate

all of humanity forever. Those who do not understand the importance of what God accomplished on the cross do not understand the consequences of evil either. Nor do they understand that by rejecting God and his love, they are condemning themselves to live forever in the grip of the lie that evil does not result in any consequences. Human pride prevents us from recognizing this ultimate act of love from God, who humbled himself and came to live among us and pay the debt we owed him.

It is the only remedy he could have offered us for evil. There is no other solution. We can either turn to him and receive his forgiveness, or remain indifferent to him and totally ignore what he did for us. It's up to us.

He created us free!



Over the course of my life, God has performed as many small miracles as big ones. I remember one comical event that happened when we were living in the Maritimes just before moving to Quebec. I had opened my first office in a small village. Without doubt, these villagers were in remarkably good health (let us be thankful) — because my clientele was practically non-existent. I saw an average of six patients a day, and sometimes as few as two. At one point I even started to look for other work.

In this village, I opened my heart to God for the first time. Following certain circumstances orchestrated by God (another story too long for these few pages), we attended a wedding. As I was leaving the church, I asked the pastor to pray with me because I wanted to give my life to God. The poor pastor was so surprised he almost fell over backwards.

Next day, I returned to my office as usual, but instead of treating six patients, I treated twenty. About the same number came the following day, and the next, and so on. I could hardly believe it. My average went from six to eighteen overnight.

If I had shown my appointment book to somebody and pointed out the difference between the period from January 1 to June 22 and the period from June 25 (the day after my conversion) to December 31, he or she probably would have thought a doctor had died or moved away around June 25.

I would like to tell you about another miracle. I heard about this incident from a member of an association I belong to.

As I walked with God, I understood the importance of reading the Bible. Many books speak of God, but in the Bible God speaks to us. The more I read, the more I desired that each person on the planet should have the privilege of reading this precious book. I joined a Christian businessmen's organization whose goal is to give away thousands of Bibles everywhere in the world. Later, I had the opportunity to be vice-president and president for Quebec and a member of the national committee. Surely you must have seen the little, red Bibles distributed by the Gideons in Quebec schools and hotel rooms. We distribute about 40 million Bibles each year, which is over one Bible per second. We have Bibles in many languages and formats. We offer them freely in schools, hospitals, and prisons as well as to soldiers and police officers.

A member of our organization left some Bibles in a prison in Madagascar. One prisoner who had misbehaved was sent to a stinking, humid, isolation cell. He took with him the little Bible he received. Shortly afterwards, the director of the prison called our office and asked for somebody to go meet him. He was confused and troubled. He wanted explanations so he could understand what happened to the troublemaker he had isolated a few days before. This extremely violent criminal, who sowed terror wherever he went, came out of his cell completely transformed. Whereas before he shouted insults at everybody, now he was praying for the other prisoners. He talked about God to all he met and sang joyfully at the top of his voice. After questioning him, the director understood that the prisoner had been converted by reading his Bible in his cell. The director then asked us to deliver Bibles to all the prisoners and to come regularly to lead a small-group Bible study.

The greatest miracle is seeing the love of God penetrate human hearts, even the hardest ones.

Madagascar isn't the only place where things are happening. Testimonies pour in from everywhere, confirming that the Word of God contains the key to the human soul. How extraordinary to observe how God can act through this little book! "But it's only a book," we say. No! It's more than just a book. There is no magic in its pages, but God expresses

himself clearly through them. His Word can awaken life without any human intervention. That prisoner was converted because he read the Bible and believed God really does exist.

This miracle has happened in the lives of thousands of people, be they prisoners or doctors. God can act in all kinds of ways, but when we open the Bible with a sincere heart, a dialogue is established. Time and again God has encouraged, fortified, and sustained me through his Word. For me, life has not always been rosy, but God has been my support and will continue to be forever.

DR. LEIGH CLARKE

...a Prayer

"In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?"

I said, "I will not again see the LORD, the LORD, in the land of the living; no longer will I look on mankind, or be with those who now dwell in this world.

Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me.

I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me.

I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled;

O Lord, come to my aid!"

But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul.

Lord, by such things men live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live.

Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back.

For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.

The living, the living — they praise you, as I am doing today; fathers tell their children about your faithfulness.

The LORD will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of the LORD.

A PRAYER OF HEZEKIAH (712 B.C.)

Breakfast with God

Too often we do not realize that God is talking to us, or worse yet, we forget what he told us a few days before.

DR. BRUCE THOMPSON

Walls of my Heart

I work as a public health dentist. My life has not been the same since God, in his goodness, came to live in me. He loved me enough to die for me before I even knew him. How could I not want to meet and get to know someone so amazing, someone who certainly does things differently than anyone else? Contrary to all expectations, God loves me. I want him to teach me to love better, too.

In my communion with my heavenly Father, and elder Brother, one of my most precious times is in the morning, reading his Word, the Bible. Morning is a time of calmness and clarity. It is also the beginning of a day in which God calls me to be a light for him. For me, to open the Bible and read a passage, to let myself be touched by it, and put it into action, is to say to God, "Tell me you love me again so I can tell the people around me."

It's an invitation. The Eternal and Awesome God waits each morning for me for a private conversation. It's a reminder of today's game plan and a slap on the back before getting on the ice. It's a mirror as well. You don't leave in the morning without looking at yourself in the mirror, if only to fix yourself up a bit so you won't scare anyone. Through the Word, God reflects my true image back to me and allows me to remove a stain of pride here, a spot of covetousness there, or a mark of anger. Finally, it is the privilege to lift the curtain a little and discover the God I serve and love. By drawing near to him, my life changes.

I write down these moments I spend with my Heavenly Father and collect them like stones. In moments of sadness, distress, conflict, discouragement, or cold-heartedness, it is good to look back on them. I forget sometimes, but he never forgets about me.

God is a personal God. He speaks to me personally. And he will speak to you too.

Luke 1: 1-25

Today, it's back to school day. It's a little like New Year's, where with the best intentions in the world we draw up some wise and pious resolutions. For a while now, God has been impressing me to act, and to put in order the things he has been teaching me in my morning sessions with him.

Writing my meditations down is the best way to recount them and profit from them. I can evaluate them and grasp with more clarity what God is teaching me about himself and his plan for me and for the world. I hope you will also receive the fruit of what God has been saying to me during these mornings sessions.

It is the means he has given me to help me understand his character and his thoughts in depth so I may conform my will to his.

Let us begin with some passages from Luke's gospel.

"And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time." (v. 20)

Zechariah did not believe God's word. He doubted what God could accomplish; he lacked faith and trust. God's word came true regardless: Elizabeth gave birth to a son. For Zechariah, it was more complicated. He chose to doubt and to travel a crooked path. God deprived him of the joy of voicing to the people the miracle he was going to accomplish. Zechariah was forced to remain silent before the God who requires trust.

God is faithful. He will do in my life what he said he would. I am free to believe, to trust, and to follow God on straight paths; but also to doubt, to refuse to line up my will with his, and to branch off to twisting, treacherous roads. The Lord is faithful, but I can complicate my life.

Which road shall I walk on? In whom shall I put my trust?

Luke 1: 26-56

The angel appeared to Mary, a virgin, and announced that she would give birth to the Son of the Eternal God. What a contract! Mary asked how it was going to happen since she was still a virgin. The angel answered in the same tone that she would become pregnant by virtue of the Holy Spirit. Wow!

"I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered.
'May it be to me as you have said.'" (v. 38)

Mary and Zechariah — two similar announcements, two different reactions. Zechariah asked the angel how he could be sure Elizabeth would become pregnant. Come on, Zechariah! Of course, the angel did not answer because his question was indicative of doubt and even mockery. We know the rest. Zechariah remained mute until the birth of John. Mary also asked a question: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Her question was legitimate and conveyed naiveté coupled with profound respect for the word that was given to her. The angel answered the question. Even though Mary was astounded — we couldn't be any less — she bowed before the will of the one who loved her. Here again, we know the rest. Mary let her joy burst forth and pronounced one of the most beautiful canticles found in the Bible.

In all of my twisted intellectualism, am I sometimes a Zechariah who understands many things but refuses what he cannot comprehend? Even so, Zechariah had a deep experience with God since he blamelessly followed God's laws and orders. With his limited understanding, perhaps Zechariah put God in a box, believing him to be incapable of causing an old couple to have a child.

Or am I a Mary, a humble servant of the Most High, who knows that this God she loves is higher than she is, and will therefore do what he asks of her?

"Blessed is she who has believed..." (v. 45)

One would be tempted to add a ninth beatitude.

Luke 1: 56-80

"Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God." (v. 64)

Even though Zechariah's lack of faith resulted in severe consequences — he observed every law and order, after all — he did not complain of injustice or become bitter. During the nine or ten months when he lost his voice, Zechariah was waiting for the moment when he would speak again to proclaim God's goodness. And that's just what he did.

I don't know all the thought processes Zechariah went through during that period, but I do know that at one point he repented. From the corner of his eye — or heart — he saw God's blessing. He was waiting only for the moment when he could let his joy explode before everyone. And what an explosion it was! (vv. 67-79)

If I stay tuned to God and do not shut the doors of my heart to his acts, he will surely manifest his goodness to me as he did to Zechariah. And when I have the opportunity to talk about it, I will.

The goodness of the Most High — you've got to let it out!

Luke 5: 1-15

During that impossible catch of fish, Peter, James, and John saw the Lord Jesus in a way that was going to change their lives.

"They pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him." (v. 11)

Sometimes I hope for such a sign or vision or something gripping that would deeply change my life, as in the case of the three disciples. Sometimes I find my life boring, not that different from ordinary Joe Blow's, who is stuck in traffic, working, seeking entertainment, hugging his children, and making love to his wife. I am a Christian, but what does that mean today? What does it change?

It seems to me that if I had a corner stone to set in my life like the one Peter, James, and John had during that amazing catch, I wouldn't be the same again.

"But because you say so, I will let down the nets." (v. 5)

God is not there to hold back revelations or blessings. As Peter let down the nets — having no professional reason to do so — he realized how far apart he actually was from the one who was with him in the boat. Before him was his God, his Creator. Since he obeyed Jesus' word, the gates of heaven opened. God is not stingy with life-changing revelations.

As long as we let down the nets!

Luke 5: 17-26

"One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there." (v. 17)

"...they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus." (v. 19)

The Pharisees and the paralytic man were both near to Jesus at the same time. The paralytic left carrying his mat and praising God. The Pharisees left, angry and hurt, all the while trying to find a way to discredit or eliminate this spoilsport.

Both came with their mats which were supporting "handicaps": the paralytic with a mat of suffering and the Pharisees with a mat of knowledge, pride, and arrogance. The Pharisees remained seated while the paralytic found himself before Jesus with the only crutch he knew of to palliate his handicap: his mat. He decided to abandon his mat. To a bystander, his mat represented a very unfortunate state, but to him it was the only possible way to alleviate his suffering. He knew of nothing else. Walking meant nothing to him except perhaps the fear of falling, getting hurt, or even dying. Yet, he put aside his preconceived ideas to go in the direction the Lord suggested. We know what happened.

That sad crutch was no longer a sign of weakness and suffering, but evidence of the compassion and power of the one who forgives sins.

The Pharisees did not abandon their mats. On them they sat and on them they will die.

Healing and joy are in front of us.

Are we getting up?

Luke 5: 27-39

"He told them this parable: 'No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. . . .And no one pours new wine into old wineskins.'"

(vv. 36-37)

Theoretically speaking, never having tried it myself, I do sometimes act as if I could patch old stuff with fabric from a new garment. How many layers of more or less spiritual bandages do I sometimes put on my wounds to look halfway decent? How many times do I try to look like I'm wearing a new suit by patching new fabric onto old? It can work for a little while, but when it rains, the old suit tears apart and you find yourself in public, naked. Embarrassed, you put your old, torn suit back on. You patch again, only thicker this time, and live in fear of bad weather. There is no more freedom.

"They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace." (Jeremiah 8: 11)

The Christian life is like new wine. If I want the wine to age properly without fear of losing it and having to restart the whole process ad nauseam, the wineskin has to be replaced. The wineskin thus replaced, the wine matures. I taste it, find it good, and let it age some more to get better.

The Christian life is like new wine that matures.

In the meantime, Jesus calls me not to patch but to change suits completely. He calls me to get undressed and clothe myself in a new suit that will withstand bad weather.

Between the two there is a moment where I find myself naked before the Great Tailor. There lies the small risk.

Do I take that risk?

Luke 7: 1-22

"God has come to help his people." (v. 16)

When was the last time God came to visit me? There were birds on the apple tree this morning, my parents visited last week, the pastor too, the kids across the street (it wasn't really visiting), the mail carrier... but God?

Alex and Tania came this summer. We hosted people from Switzerland. But God, did he come to visit me? Marie would have definitely told me if he had. In fact, the whole neighbourhood would have known about it! We would have served the best beer and wine. We would have done the housecleaning of the century. Had he visited me, I know I would have remembered. But, I remember nothing.

"The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." (v. 22)

That's how John confirmed that the one who was to come, had indeed come. The sick who asked to be healed were healed. The good news was preached to the poor. That's what was preached, and it had never been seen before.

I want a visit from God? It's simple enough. First, I find the poor and the suffering; those who have nothing to offer, who are not attractive, who feel hopeless, or who haven't found what they're looking for yet. I preach the good news they've been waiting for. Then, to make sure he comes, I pray that they will be healed. God heals! It seems obvious at first, but how many times have I asked him to heal me, from being lame, blind, deaf, and dead? He opens my eyes so I can see from the corner of my heart the healing he effects among his people.

And I'm surprised.

He comes more often than we think.

Luke 7: 24-50

Speaking of visits, here was Simon, the Pharisee, receiving a visit from Jesus, King of the universe, Creator of all things, the Living God, he who is slow to anger and rich in goodness, the Holy One, indisputable Sovereign. The King was actually in Simon's house, visiting. Simon discussed theology, doctrine, and concepts. The one who forgives and opens heaven was there before him, and Simon just talked. Simon was driving a Porsche 911 with his foot on the brake. There's no joy in driving like that. It may be safe but it's no fun.

A sinful woman showed up. She did not discuss much. She did not brake. Indeed, she accelerated and threw herself at Jesus' feet. The King of love, whom she did not love, was visiting. The King who liberates, comforts, and forgives was near. She was not worthy of such a car, but the opportunity never presented itself before and maybe would never come along again. So she put the pedal to the metal. She threw herself at the feet of the Holy One; she, the worst of sinners. Obviously, she didn't know how to drive, but the Pilot did. He loved her and would drive for her.

The Pharisee stayed far behind. That woman won the race.

The Lord is visiting. All the power of heaven is here and it is offered to us. The heavenly Porsche 911, the one that surpasses all others, is here and ready to go.

Do I brake?

Luke 8: 19-39

"Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear." (v. 37)

Jesus is an extraordinary person who never does things halfway. He does them to the limit of the spectacular and the radical. When he heals, he heals. When he casts out demons, he casts out demons. When he cleans house, he cleans house. Sometimes it's at the limit of what we can take.

I can just imagine the Gerasenes as they heard Jesus commanding the evil spirits. They witnessed the man's deliverance and watched in amazement as the herd of pigs rushed down the steep bank and into the lake. "Too much! This guy is dangerous. He was going to come and change everything. What's more, he was going to destroy the pig herds. So we kicked him out and told him to go back to Galilee!"

Jesus freed a man from his chains and demonstrated his authority and omnipotence. Jesus showed compassion for this man, and this should engender trust. We should feel like inviting such a person for supper and to spend a few days with us!

Sometimes true love can frighten us because it is radical. Love is a bearer of change in that it calls us to love. I can hear the Gerasenes saying, "If you love us, Jesus, we will be forced to love, too, and our lives will be turned upside down. We want to stay the way we are. It's less tiring. Stay away!"

However, the Gerasenes forgot a major point: Man was created to love. If he does not persevere in the narrow path which is love, he cuts himself off and is no longer whole. If love eludes us, we drift away from ourselves.

Jesus disturbs. But if I refuse to be bothered by him, I say no to myself.

So, is it yes?

Luke 9: 28-36

"Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him." (v. 32)

I can just imagine Peter, on the verge of sleeping, one eye open and one eye shut. The day had been a busy one, with a lot of people wanting to see Jesus, healings, teachings. . . . It was a well-deserved rest. However, he stayed awake with James and John. We don't really know why — to pray, to keep Jesus company, because it was cold? There they were, watching out of the corner of their eyes. He was praying alone, a little secluded. They were falling asleep but something told them to stay alert. Jesus revealed himself to them in all of the glory he had before leaving his Father. That vision would surely leave a deep impression on them for the rest of their lives.

Those who fell asleep that night missed something. To stay awake is to stay tuned in, to look and pay attention. It's to be ready to answer and to act.

Am I awake? Am I paying attention to his Word? Are my eyes focussing on the Lord when I feel like sleeping? Am I ready to answer his call?

Those who sleep will keep their limited concept of God. Those who stay awake will see the Lord revealed as he is.

Then we will be happy to suffer from insomnia.

Luke 12: 1-21

"Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: 'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.'" (vv. 1-2)

Montreal, with its two million inhabitants — where nobody knows you and you know no one. We are all nobodies to everyone else. With time we become specialists in incognito and anonymity. It is not without its advantages, since anonymity allows one to think, to do, and to act without being recognized or discovered. There is in all of us, a second person who is perfectly devious. The heart of man is deceitful and little known by those who know us, constantly seeking to show itself. In a crowd, you are a stranger — you do what you please and no-one knows. This second person lets its devious inclinations run free in the secrecy of anonymity.

Jesus was among thousands of people pressing against him. Strangers, nobodies, they thought that in the crowd they were nobody to anybody; that they could do what they wanted and no-one would find out. And Jesus, knowing them, put them on guard against hypocrisy.

"You're not two people, my friend. You're one. Stop walking beside yourself in anonymity and hypocrisy, thinking it can bring you a little happiness. Walk resolutely on the path of truth. Stop living as if you were always in a crowd and that no-one knows your thoughts — and open yourself deliberately to a close and intimate relationship, where all hiding places are exposed and rendered useless. You'll see that if you walk far from the crowds and your incognito, you will be known, and you will become somebody to someone."

The Lord created me whole but hypocrisy keeps me from being whole.

Luke 12: 22-40

"Sell your possessions and give to the poor." (v. 33)

Does that mean I have to sell my house? My car? My hiking boots?
But it is a commandment: Sell. So what do we do? Walk around naked? It is
written: Sell.

If it's written sell, well then, you've got to sell!

"Is that your house, Martin?"

"No, it's not mine."

"Not yours? I thought you were the owner."

"I sold it."

"To whom?"

"To Jesus Christ."

"Jesus Christ?"

"Jesus Christ."

"Did he pay you a good price?"

"Yep, a good price."

"Are you going to buy another house with the money?"

"No, I'll deposit it."

"Where?"

"In heaven."

"Heaven?"

"Heaven."

"Where will you stay?"

"Jesus lends me this house."

"Free?"

"Yes, free."

"Woah!"

"You said it!"

"So, this house is no longer yours?"

"That's right. It's Jesus Christ's."

"And what does he want to do with it?"

"He's giving it to the poor."

"Wow!"

"You said it!"

"So, you live here but it belongs to the poor?"

"Yes."

"You're mad!"

"..."

"Did you sell anything else to Jesus Christ?"

"My car, my hiking boots..."

"He wants you to give them to the poor, I imagine?"

"Yes."

"You're walking around in Jesus Christ's boots?"

"In a way."

"You have nothing left then?"

"Actually, I still have quite a lot of reputation, a bit of a career, and a part of my life that's not yet sold: rights, covetousness, security, pride, a lot of time, "and I forget what else". It's not that he doesn't want to buy them; I just don't want to sell yet."

"That must be worth a lot of money."

"A lot."

"Still for the poor?"

"Still for the poor."

"Are you poor then?"

"No, I'm rich."

"Wow!"

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (v. 34)

Luke 13: 10-35

"It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." (v. 21)

I was preparing rolls. I used yeast, of course, so they would rise and everyone could compliment me on my baking skills. Since I had too much yeast, I left the surplus more or less exposed in the pantry with the cookies, bread, cereal, etc. A few days later, the yeast easily forgotten, a peculiar smell wafted from the pantry. My chocolate cookies tasted funny and so did the bread and cereal. I emptied the pantry, opened the half-closed package of yeast, and...oooooh! Flies were dropping! That's when I understood that yeast goes in bread.

Exposed yeast that is not mixed into dough is not only useless, but sours and gets discarded. It is the same with Christianity which does not go out into the world to make the dough rise.

When the bread has risen, we don't see the yeast anymore, but we can taste it a little. The dough is not the same; it is completely transformed. Somehow the yeast has disappeared.

The kingdom of heaven is like this: We no longer see it but we know it's there because there's bread rising and because you can taste it!

For lunch, I'm having bread. How about you?

Luke 18: 1-17

"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (v. 17)

I remember receiving the kingdom of God when I gave my life to the Lord twenty years ago. It was after watching the movie "Jesus of Nazareth" by Franco Zeffirelli. What really gripped me was the scene where Jesus was crucified and John and the women were scandalized at the sight of the Just One being delivered over to the injustice of men. I understood. The kingdom of heaven came closer that night, and I knew I was living in it, then and also for eternity.

I laughed and cried that night: cried because my Lord and God went to the cross for me and died an outrageous death among criminals; laughed because I was a prince in an eternal kingdom, reconciled, forgiven, and adopted. When a sinner receives the kingdom of heaven, there are both tears and joy.

In fact, I received the kingdom of heaven once and for all. Amen!

My name is written above in permanent ink.

Hooray for heaven!

But the heart of man forgets. His head remembers, but the heart...

This morning, did I remember I had received this kingdom? Did my heart receive it? My soul? Were there tears? (Tears are not necessarily wet...) Was there joy? I think of my bad mood this morning, my anguish, my fear, even the feeling that steam was coming out of my ears — I was fed up with traffic, my family, work, and church. I longed for a sheep farm somewhere in the Alps. Well, all that resembles in no way the mood I found myself in that spring evening of 1979 after viewing Zeffirelli's film.

Obviously, I left the kingdom of heaven on the shelf of my intellect this morning. I fed my soul something else.

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.'" (Revelation 22: 20)

It's decided. Tomorrow, I'll skip coffee and pour myself a big cup of the kingdom of God.

And I will drink it on my knees, one hand raised toward heaven.

Luke 19: 1-10

"A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd." (v. 2-3)

Zacchaeus did not just want to see what kind of phenomenon Jesus was, like some sort of circus animal drawing crowds. No, it is written that Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was. So, he climbed a sycamore tree because he was too short to see over the crowd. His desire was completely different from that of someone who catches a glimpse of a passing guru in a bustling crowd and participates in the collective frenzy. He wanted to know who this man was, and he had the means to do so. Too short to see? No way!

"Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." (v. 5)

It seems Jesus was compelled to go and stay at Zacchaeus' house, as if it was an obligation, a duty, or a requirement, as if he had no choice. Of course he did; Jesus was free. He is the "Wild God" who tolerates no constraints. But this little publican who climbed a tree like a schoolboy, knocked at the door, and wanted to know — ended up touching the heart of the Wild God. And because the heart of the personal God was touched, he made a point of staying with Zacchaeus. Not just to wave or smile at him, not just to say hello. No. To stay at his house. And he was compelled to do so, to top it off.

Did Zacchaeus twist God's arm? Of course not. It's too big an arm to twist. But the Lord already said he would come in and eat with me if I open the door (Revelation 3: 20). Well, yes, in a way I can twist his arm.

There's nothing he'd like better.

Luke 20: 20-26

"Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?" (v. 24)

I remember being branded a few times during the course of my life, branded like we brand an ox to indicate ownership and identity. These scars were often visible and sometimes painful: a wound, an unlikely haircut, ridiculous clothing, a mathematics (203) score bordering on the critical, the physique of a wading bird, etc. All these brands were reflected back to me by the people around me and bore — and still bear — a part of my identity.

I am not a denarius but I wear a portrait and inscription. What is it? When people look at me, whose portrait do they see? What seal was stamped on me?

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." (Matthew 5: 9)

I have an identity in Jesus. Nobody else gave it to me and nobody can take it from me. However, it is important for this identity to appear and shine in this world. We do not put a lamp under a bushel.

If I let the Lord use me as an instrument of reconciliation and peace among men, I will be branded by these same men with the seal of the Son of God and recognized in that way.

But sometimes reconciliation and peace require a red-hot iron.

Ask the ox about it!

Luke 18: 35-43

"They told him, 'Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.'" (v. 37)

The blind man didn't see Jesus passing by. He couldn't since he was blind. He was worried about the commotion around him and was simply told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, the One who healed and made the lame to walk and the blind to see. And since he was blind,

"He called out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'" (v. 38)

Jesus blessed the blind man by coming near to him. The blind man did not sneer at the favor. He seized it while it was there, while it was passing by. Another fifteen minutes and the blessing would have passed and it would have been too late.

Jesus is here. He is passing by. He is not passing by everywhere, but he is passing by you today. He may never pass this way again.

Don't miss the train!

Luke 23: 1-25

"Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, 'You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death.'" (vv. 13-15)

Pilate and Herod were right. There was nothing reprehensible in this man. Nothing, absolutely nothing. Not the least fault, not the slightest misdemeanour, nor the tiniest sin. He was the only one of his kind. He could have easily stood before the most rigorous of courts, he, the Veritable One, who was perfectly holy in his judgements. Unless the evidence was a complete fabrication riddled with gross lies, the accuser would have had nothing on him. Herod and Pilate were unable to find a flaw. He was without blame.

"When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer." (vv. 8-9)

Jesus went to the cross on his own. He was not being submissive to Herod, Pilate, or the people. He went because he loved Herod, who treated him with contempt; Pilate, who delivered him over to the crowd; and the crowd, who condemned him unjustly. He loved them all.

"You know, I would climb Golgotha's hill again for you today. Yesterday you demanded that I be crucified, and you will demand it again today. Maybe you'll also treat me with contempt. But, for you, because I love you and do not want you to die, I will go to that cross.

I will do what you require; I will accept the blows meant for you, the scorn, the insults, and the humiliation. I will pass as a common thief, a low, helpless, incompetent person; I will be as a doormat.

I don't have to do this. I am free. Nobody, I say, nobody has power over me. Not here nor in heaven. I am the King and I do as I please. But I will climb that hill, I promise you. Because I love you."

How overwhelming is the love of the God who died in my place.
How can I resist?

Luke 24: 1-8

One evening I was busy looking for something in my basement workshop, my little "mistakes' corner". It had been a long, boring, and dreary day. It was one of those evenings where I would rather go to bed at seven o'clock than search through the contents of a perpetually jumbled workshop. After fifteen minutes of restraining myself from throwing the whole mess out the window, Pierre-Louis showed up in the doorway.

"What are you looking for, Dad?"

"The gadget for cooking."

"Why are you looking in the workshop?"

Deep breath. "Because I think it's here somewhere."

"It's not there, Dad. It's upstairs in the corner cupboard behind the plastic dishes."

"#@\$**%?//!!!#^!!!"

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (v. 5)

I seek God; that's certain. Everyone seeks God. Ever since we cut ourselves off from that beneficial relationship, our lives have been spent trying to find him again. Seeking happiness is seeking God. Seeking to push back the limits is seeking God. Seeking meaning is seeking God. What kind of workshop am I seeking him in? Does it look like a cemetery or a nursery school?

If I seek God in myself, I seek among the dead. If I reduce the Lord of the universe to a little box, fit to my measurements, a box I can walk around, one that makes me feel secure and allows me to exchange untamed, uncomfortable Christianity for religion — then I seek him among the dead. There is no relationship with the one who lives. Pride is death. Disobedience and rebellion are death. So are lying, covetousness, thoughtless love of self, vanity, harshness, lack of sensitivity, and absence of compassion.

To believe we seek God without God, without his Word which communicates, without prayer that brings communion, and without friends who support and correct, is all going to...

...@#!?%!?!?+ =!!!

It's all going to rot and stink. It all ends in religion: empty, powerless, joyless. Without victory. Dead.

"Seek and you will find." (Matthew 7: 7).

But not in a cemetery. He's alive!

Luke 24: 36-53

"Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God." (vv. 52-53)

Nobody expected that. Nobody. Not the disciples, not the Pharisees, not the Romans, nor the people. Nobody. For some, the dream of liberation and relief from their burdens of daily life and from the oppressor had failed miserably. For others, it was good riddance to that weak miracle worker incapable of saving himself.

The chief priests thought their strategy had worked once again: They got rid of the spoilsport without getting the people stirred up too much. They were going to move onto other things; some in sadness and nostalgia, others wringing their hands.

Nobody anticipated what had been foretold for centuries and what Jesus himself had proclaimed all his life. Sunday morning the tomb was empty.

Until that moment, the disciples had not fully understood. Miracles, yes, but not the good news of free salvation from God to man. Suddenly, a light came on. A lamp had been lit. Without warning, the picture painted by the Creator from the law and the prophets until Jesus was revealed to them: the exodus from Egypt, the sacrificial Lamb without spot, the blood on the doorposts, God's judgement passing over their homes, the law, the kings, the prophets, the cross. It was all falling into place. The cornerstone was laid. The perfect Lamb was sacrificed in my place and his blood was spilled onto my doorframe.

And he arose from the dead!

"Wow!" said the disciples. "We expected a miracle worker, and he is changing my life. We expected liberation, and he is breaking my chains. We expected peace to be established, and he is reconciling us to God. We expected life to get better, and now we will live in his house forever."

Nobody expected that. Only God can surprise us like that.

This morning, looking at heaven, I know again that the Lord loves me. That's what changed the lives of those ordinary disciples who followed Jesus. And that's what changed mine.

God died and rose again.
And God loves me.
My life is no longer the same.

DR. MARTIN GÉNÉREUX

