

On Making it Through

By David Morsey

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***B**eing a series of helpful observations on
wholeness—Body, soul and spirit.*

*To the wilderness wanderers,
This book is warmly dedicated.*

*To those for whom
The way has been hard and rugged;*

*Who have walked the earth
In sorrow and pain;*

*Who have known the heartbreak
Of frustration and failure;*

*For whom the fragments of life
Have not fit neatly together;*

*Who care not to make it through, grandly,
But merely to make it through.*

*Who need very much to know
That they, too, have favor with God.*

Introduction

Getting through life

Is a problem.

Getting through life
With a sense of success,
Is a greater problem.

Getting through life,
With a sense that
God is satisfied with us,
Is an almost insurmountable problem.

There are thousands of formulas.
There are myriads of self-styled prophets,
Anxious to be luminaries for their fellow man.

How do we know which formula?
How do we select a guide?
And why do we need a guide?

We need a guide
Because life is too complex
To handle it without help.

Far too much knowledge is needed,
And learning by experience, alone,
Is far too costly.

But how to select a guide?
Where are the answers?
Whom can we trust?

In the end, we have to choose what works;
What makes sense to us;
What ties things together, and brings us peace.

For centuries, the Bible
Has been a reliable guide.
But many have had trouble
Understanding it and applying it to life.

In part, the problem has been
Confusing church dogmas with Biblical
precepts;
In part, with misunderstanding the Bible itself;
In part, with the gap between ancient and
modern cultures.

Without apology,
And for want of better,
We have selected the Bible
As our most reliable guide.

We have carefully shunned
Religious traditions and dogmas,
And private revelational claims,
As narrow and without certainty.

The Bible is broad and of many authors.
Properly presented, its precepts
Should flow harmoniously
With minds created by the God that it
portrays.

If the observations on the pages that follow,
Make sense to the reader, and tend to comfort
and peace,

Then possibly they will be of value
In making it through.

I. *On Looking At Life*

Trying to live successfully,
Without knowing what life is,
Is like trying to drive successfully,
Without knowing what an automobile is.

What we understand
About the nature of life,
Will largely determine
How we approach the living of it.

God made us in His image,
And breathed into us His life,
And we became expressions of His glory,
Clothed in human flesh.

As spirit beings, very like God,
We moved in harmony with God;
And flowed with nature,
In the world made by God.

Then came the Tempter,
Evoking rebel deeds from untamed desire.
The divine flame died,
And flesh became a mortal prison.

The Creator responded
With a stream of redemption
Equal to the sweep of devastation.
The spirit was born anew—free of the
mortal prison.

Restored by the sacrifice of Christ,
The human spirit can be occupied again by
the Spirit of God.
But nature, now distorted,
Does not flow in harmony with it.

The rebel deeds had brought to earthly power,
Satan and the force of evil.
The enemy of God, cast from heaven,
Rules, now, the kingdom of this world.

Occupied by the Enemy,
The kingdom of this world is a perilous
place,
And does not provide comfort
For the children of God.

The "Prince of this world" targets the
people of God
And seeks to destroy them.
But, his power is limited by the sovereignty
of God,
And the inner spirit is invincible to him.

The invincible spirit grows in stature,
Strengthened by the winds of adversity,
As the trees at timberline
Are made stalwart by the storms.

But the flesh—the realm of the mind—
Is not invincible;
And there the enemy
Mounts his attack.

The mind is the storehouse
Of all our knowledge—
The instrument of our humanity,
And the well-spring of our personality.

The mind gathers the threads of experience,
And weaves them
Into patterns of perception;
Into tapestries of earthly vision.

The enemy attacks this realm,
And turns it into a wasteland
Of warpage and willfulness,
Of prejudice and pride.

We lose our way in the wilderness
Of conception and misconception,
Chasing the butterflies
Of transient, temporal dreams.

While the fortress of faith stands secure,
The flesh becomes a battlefield,
Where the enemy oft prevails
And lays the warrior low.

God did not spare His own people
From the ravages of this battle—
Not the patriarchs, or the prophets, or
the apostles,
Or even His own Son, Jesus.

God did not spare Joseph,
Deliverer of Egypt,
Falsely imprisoned
By the fury of a scorned adulteress.

God did not spare John the Baptist,
Peerless prophet and forerunner of Jesus,
Beheaded at the caprice
Of a sensuous dancing girl.

God did not spare the Apostle Paul,
Ageless architect of His church,
From shipwreck and beatings,
From imprisonings and beheading.

The endless parade of suffering and afflicted,
Yields an inevitable conclusion—
God did not send His Son, Jesus,
To eradicate earthly ills.

To measure faithfulness or faith
By deliverance from earthly ills
Is contrary to the constant course of the
faithful,
And trivializes the sacrifice of Jesus.

It is not wrong to pray for
Deliverance from earthly ills;
It is wrong to insist upon deliverance,
As the inalienable right of the redeemed.

Adversity is more important than prosperity,
In the shaping of our spirits.
“Our light affliction. . .
Works an eternal weight of glory.”

Only when we understand,
That God is more concerned with
Our spiritual vitality; than our earthly
prosperity,
Can we live successfully in this world.

Human life, as created by God,
Consists of spirit, mind, and body—
A threefold being, complete only
When God indwells the spirit.

In the metaphor of the automobile,
The body is the vehicle;

The mind is the engine;
The spirit is the driver.

The body without the mind
Has no control;
The mind without the spirit
Has no direction.

The purpose of the automobile is the
transport of persons.

The body may be battered; the engine faulty,
But when it transports persons,
Its purpose is fulfilled.

The purpose of humans is to glorify God.
The body may be infirm; the mind imperfect,
But when the spirit is possessed by God,
The purpose is fulfilled.

Though catastrophe follow catastrophe
And this earthly frame be devastated,
If the purpose of God be fulfilled,
The success of life is assured.

II. On Finding Functional Faith

If God be the Giver of life,
And His Spirit within, the essence of our being,
How do we get in touch with God?
How do we get Him to dwell within us?

If you want to get in touch with persons
You simply talk to them.
If you want to get in touch with God,
You simply talk to Him.

So talk to God, and ask for His help.
He responds to you by touching your spirit;
By awakening the desire
To know He is there.

But how will I really know?
What will He do for me?
Seek not what He will do for you;
What He does in you shows He is there.

But persons, I can see and hear.
I know that they are there.
God is more real than they,
As spirit is more real than flesh or matter.

What do you mean? I don't understand.
The flesh, you see, is your natural self—
It pertains to the body and mind.
It's what you think and feel and see.

The spirit is more than that.
It functions beyond the mind.
It sees what the eyes can never see,
And hears what the ears cannot hear.

It senses what the mind cannot possibly know
And believes what reason cannot confirm.
It gives the substance to human relationships,
That stays beyond actions and words.

It loves when the feelings are void of affection,
And trusts when the reasons for faith are not
there.
It blankets the mind with an aura of peace,
When human emotions run wild with despair.

But what must I do?
What are the rules?
What does He expect of me
Before He will hear?

Do nothing but talk to Him.
The rational mind can only cry out to God.
It cannot find Him, or define Him
Unless the inner spirit is renewed.

But He will not hear me, so I've heard,
Until I first confess my sins,
And change my ways,
And promise ever to live for Him.

But none of that is possible,
Until your spirit is renewed.
And your spirit will only be renewed
When God has heard your cry and comes
to you.

If the spirit be not touched by God,
The depth of sin can have no meaning.
But when His spirit comes to yours,
He stirs the strings of failure and remorse.

But what of Christ?
Unless I know Christ, so I am told,
And own Him as my Savior and Lord,
I cannot even speak to God.

Christ is but the face of God to man.
When you talk to Christ you are talking
with God,
When you are filled with Christ,
You are filled with the Spirit of God.

And yet, when you talk to God,
You are talking, in fact, to Christ.
There is no touch between man and God,
Except through Christ, the face of God
to man.

Christ as Jesus, came to earth—
God in human form.
On earth He died, sharing full,
The accursed depths of sin.

As God, He rose again, and thus expressed
His power over death and sin.
He joined in death, His creatures,
That they, in life, could join with Him.

But I really do not understand
How Christ can be Jesus, and God and man.
How much must I know,
Before I can walk in peace with Him?

Do you think God hears you for what
you know?
Must you be a theologian in order to
come to Him?
The prophets and sages through ages of time
Have not comprehended the nature of God.

Jesus said, "Come unto me,
Your soul will find rest;
For I am lowly and meek
And easy to know."

And John, His apostle said,
"As many as received Him
He gave them the power
To become the children of God."

Jesus and all the apostles agree.

Eternal life is a free gift of God.
There is nothing required before God can
give it—
Nothing except the desire to come.

But I have been told
That faith is the ultimate key.
Without it my prayers will never be heard,
And God will not come to dwell with me.

Yet how in the world can I ever achieve it.
It stands like the Matterhorn between me
and God.
Before its awesome, invincible height,
I languish in lowlands of vain human longing.

And even should confidence carefully
crafted,
Arise in a noble moment of hope,
It vanishes quickly in a fleet glimpse of guilt

Or the slightest zephyr of withering doubt.

If faith be so fickle, what chance have I,
Chained in the dark of the human “Bastille?”
Who but the angels could dare contemplate
A constant, unchangeable concourse
with God?

There is no chance at all
For human minds to fashion faith.
It comes to you—a gift from God—
When you, in search of truth, reach out
to Him.

But I have sought for faith so long,
And have not found it, I confess.
Why have I ever sought in vain?
What is there that I have failed to do?

Nothing and everything,
Is the puzzling paradox.
All your human effort,
Is destined but to fail.

You have failed to do everything.
For there is nothing in your human mind
From which to fabricate the sense of God—
The sense of that which is beyond the mind.

And yet, in nothing have you failed.
The faith you seek, you have already.
If you did not have it,
You would not now be reaching out for God.

Something in you seeks for God.

You know not what, or where.
And yet you know to seek beyond
The realm of all material things.

Do you look at a stone and call it God?
Do you plead with a pumpkin or a post?
Something in you says God is more,
And persistently you press the search.

Faith is a sensing within the spirit—
More than the feelings of the flesh.
Feelings are made of deceptive threads
Woven by thought patterns in the mind.

Faith comes to our spirits—
With the coming of Christ
And stays there in spite of
The fickle feelings of the mind.

But how does God come if I don't have faith?
He comes because you ask
And you would not ask,
Had He not first implanted the faith.

But why has He not responded
To my prayers?
He has, but you have not known
That it was He.

But I asked for health and He did not heal;
For wealth and He left me in rags.
I sought for friends and I walk alone;
For happiness, and found only tears.

The problem is not with the faith you possess,
But what you perceive faith to be.
It is not so much how God responded,
But what you expected Him to be.

The faith that comes with the coming of
Christ,
Is not human confidence, or feelings of trust.
It is the energy of God empowering our spirits
To be one with Him for eternity.

Human confidence feeds on evidence,
And fluctuates with changing feelings.
The faith of the spirit feeds on God,
And remains in us, as changeless as He.

So Divine faith is a product of the Spirit—
The result of coming to God.
Human confidence is a product of the mind—
The result of convincing evidence.

If we think that faith is a matter of feeling—
That certainty and confidence
Are proof that it's there;
And that its fragile existence has vanished
When countered with feelings of doubt and
despair;

Or, if we think faith lies in achieving—

In getting from God whatever we seek;
To grant us prosperity or freedom from pain,
Or health or companions, or anything we ask.

Then we have not understood
The meaning of faith,
Or the difference between
The spirit and mind.

Feelings are made of the stuff of the mind.
Ignorance and illusion; knowledge and error,
Are the dubious sources
From which they all come.

The spirit and mind are often in conflict.
So says even, the Apostle Paul.
Much goes on within our minds
That never will touch the spirit at all.

As the body may be weak,
And yet the mind be quite strong;
So, the mind may be weak,
While the spirit is strong.

Remember—the spirit is the fortress,
Where faith rests secure;
The mind is a battlefield
Where nothing is sure.

“Be vigilant and wise,” said the redoubtable
Peter.
Satan, as a lion is ever near,
To snatch from the mind its peace and trust—
To falsely contend that God is not there.

But, God has not left, though the mind,
deceived
Is certain that He has gone.
Think you that He is so weak, He must run
Before the roaring of the Lion?

God will never leave you, nor forsake you.
To think that He has, is Satan’s lie.
But you cannot test His presence with you
By what you see with human eyes.

No, it is not a lack of faith that is your problem.
It is misconceptions of what faith ought to be.
It is measuring faith by human standards

of trust,
And putting weight on what you think or feel.

III. On Putting Problems in Perspective

It is painful to live in this world.

It is not a sin to worry or “hurt;”
It is not a sin to have problems;
It is not a sin to be in conflict.

These are all part of
The process of living,
Of growing;
Of growing up.

Becoming a Christian
Does not give one
A passport to prosperity.

It is not an automatic solution
To personality problems;
Or marriage problems;
Or money problems.

The main issue of faith
Is not ridding life of pain and problems;
It is acquiring a proper perspective;
It is seeing life as God sees it.

There are many Christians with problems.
Some of these problems
Could have been avoided;
Some could not.

Some problems come with birth—
Personality problems;
Physical problems.

Some problems come with living in the world—
People problems;
Environment problems.

Some problems come from our own mistakes—
Wrong decisions;
Wrong choices.

Some problems come from the mistakes of
others—
Problems with the people we live with;
Problems with the society we live in.

Some problems can be changed by our
own actions—
Correcting mistakes;
Correcting habits.

Some problems can be changed by God
alone—
Change of circumstances;
Change of attitude.

Some problems can be changed by God, but won't be
For the sake of our growth;
For the sake of His glory.

Some problems cannot be changed by us or
by God—
Irreversible choices;
Unwilling persons.

Problems are germane
To the process of life—
For Christians,
And for non-Christians.

The coming of Christ
Was not for the purpose
Of solving earthly problems
But to recover spiritual vitality.

A Tranquil life can hinder
The growth of the spirit;
A life of conflict is more in keeping
with growth
Than a life of bliss.

Coping with conflicts and chaos,
Is a greater expression of faith
Than pressing God
To resolve them.

If God must eliminate our problems
To keep us content,
We become perennial prisoners
Of the fleshly playpen.

Problems pertain to the realm of the flesh.
They should not be used as a gauge of the

spirit—
Either of its vitality,
Or of its favor with God.

The circumstances of the apostles
and prophets
Were constantly chaotic.
Satan seemed bent on badgering them;
God seemed unconcerned with their
earthly comfort.

Growth in the spirit cannot be fostered
By guarantees in the flesh—
Of physical vitality,
Or of material prosperity.

If God does not choose
To change our circumstances,
Perhaps He is perfecting us
In the capacity to cope with them.

The ultimate purpose of life on the earth,
Is not grooming the self for earthly success,
But grooming the spirit through earthly
experiences.

“Getting one’s life together,”
May not be as important
As getting from each day’s events
That which cultivates our spirits.

We live out our days in the process of life—
Oft doing well, and more often, not;
Plagued with the thoughts of things
poorly done;
Pressed with projections of things yet to do.

We say to the heart, “Be still;” to the
mind, “Be wise;”
To the body, “Behave, when I speak.”
But they are so very slow to respond,
“For the spirit, indeed, is willing, but the
flesh is weak.

And always, the promise that things will
be better,
Midst moments, disheartening, when all
seems awry.
Yet, who ever come to earth’s final curtain,

With all problems solved, and all goals
satisfied?

We seek out Christ, and He comes to our spirit,
Bringing His peace and power to live.
He takes what we have of human resources,
And gives the desire to use them for Him.

He does not remake us to be someone else—
To fit some religious pattern, or mold.
He takes personalities just as they are,
And helps us to make them all they can be.

Nor does He change our circumstances
To be what the “proper” Christian’s should be.
Sometimes He leaves us to languish at length
In conditions that frustrate and cause misery.

The heart then cries out, in anguish, to God,
“The burdens are beyond our enduring.
Why won’t you do something—fix things up.”
But He seems completely unhearing.

***D**oes He really care?
Am I just too unholy?
Have I not enough faith?
Or, done something amiss?*

Think you that God withholds His assistance
Because you are not very holy or good?
What kind of father would such a God be?
You see Him as only His enemy would.

“You are hungry because you are
misbehaving,”
Whispers the enemy of God in your ear.
“You’ll just have to stay sick;” your mind
harbors doubt;
The wavering weakling, He will not hear.

*But was it not James, the Apostle, who said it,
“If you doubt, you’ll never receive?”*
Alas, that is one of those gross misconceptions,
That comes from not thoroughly knowing
God’s Word.

James wrote in Greek; but was misquoted
in English.

He spoke, not of doubt, but debate.
Paul used the same word addressing
the Romans—
“Receive one another in faith, not dispute.”

Faith is of God, when He dwells in our spirits;
Debate is the chaos of human expression.
Faith is the energy of God revealed in us;
Debate is the product of human confusion.

“If you lack wisdom,” said James, “you
may ask it of God,
But not for disputing and strife.
Ask in the nurturing context of faith.
He’ll give to you freely for growth and for life.”

So, think not that God has attached a
condition,
Without which He never will hear the
heart’s cry,
Demanding control of all rebel feelings,
Before one can hope for response from on high.

Would parents turn coldly, in anger away
From an unruly child in distress?
Would they ever refuse medicine, or food,
Or leave it alone in the wilderness?

What gross misconceptions we tend to believe,
If we would treat others as we think God
treats us,
His whole revelation of grace we would mock,
And fail at the love we are urged to express.

W*hence, then, have come the host of
afflictions?*

And why does not God give relief?
Adversity comes not from God, but from Satan,
Who rules this world since the coming of sin.

But does not God have ultimate power?
Can He not stay the enemy’s hand?
He can, but He doesn’t for His own reasons.
All goes according to His sovereign plan.

In truth, the victory is already won.
Satan can have no power, you see,
Over those who dwell in the realm of the real—
In the spirit realm, where God reigns supreme.

By the sacrifice of Jesus,
The human spirit was forever free.
For all who will, the chains of sin are broken,
“If the Son of God shall make you free,
you shall be free indeed.”

***B**ut why, if Satan has no power*

*Over those who belong to God,
Do I have so much trouble?
He does what he wants—his power seems
very broad.*

But his power is limited to earthly things—
To the terrestrial sandbox, as it were.
He buffets the flesh, but the spirit grows
stronger.
Whatever he does makes his defeat the
more sure.

As the potter works the lump of clay,
To fashion the vessel as he, himself, pleases,
So God oversees the events of our lives,
Shaping our spirits in the way that He chooses.

And if He allows Satan to touch us adversely,
It is for purposes He has designed.
Something will come of it—we know
not what—
But in the end, our spirits will be refined.

Some things are hard—meant for our
chastening,
As parents must discipline the growing child;
But always are tempered with wisdom
and love.
If in grace, we receive them, more grace in
us they will yield.

So, problems will always be with us.
They will stretch end to end
Through our life on the earth.

We're like players on the football field,
Whose world is nothing but problems
From the moment they step on the turf,
'till they leave.

So do not expect God to help you
Sweep all your problems away,
And leave your life free of debris.

Let Him show you, instead,
How to cope with the problems,
And remain at peace within.

You surely may pray for His help,
But leave to Him to determine
What kind of help it will be.

Put everything in His hands
And be at peace.
He is with you forever.

And if your mind be troubled, remember,
God's peace goes beyond the mind,
Remaining in the spirit, forever unchanged.

It is not a sin to worry—
It is a natural thing in the flesh.
But do not add to your problem, the burden
of needless guilt.

So if your problems have not been resolved,
And you think God does not hear, or care,
Let your spirit be lifted by the thought,
That He trusts you with the burden you bear.

And finally, remember, that you'll make
it through,
Not by your faith in holding to God,
But by His faith, within, holding you.

IV. On Problems of Personality

But, my biggest problem
Is really myself.
I'll never be good enough for God.

So what does that mean—
To be good enough for God?
What does He want you to be?

*I guess He wants me to be like Him—
Holy and kind and good,
And thinking always of
heavenly things.*

*I try, but I never can keep it up.
And I pray and pray,
But I never change.*

First we must ask
What you're trying to change—
Your spirit or your personality?

The spirit must change,
But it already has,
When God came to dwell within.

Without such a change
You'd never be able
To relate to God at all.

When God made man,
He breathed into him
His Spirit,
And made him a spirit-being
like Himself.

But, in the process of
human rebellion,
The Spirit of God withdrew,
And concourse with God
was cut off.

It is only restored
When His Holy Spirit
Comes to dwell within us.

*But what of the mortal self—
That which remained of us
When the flame of God
expired?*

“Ay, there’s the rub”—
The self; the natural man;
“The flesh,” as Paul
called it.

“In it,” said Paul—“In me,
There dwells no good thing.”
While Jesus said, “The flesh
is weak, but the spirit is strong.”

And, experience has taught us,
That whatever heights the
spirit achieves,
The flesh is a problem, continually.

So, while the spirit is fully
restored—
Filled, forever, with Christ—
The self is uncertain as
long as we live.

*But, what is the self?
Are not self and spirit
the same?
Should they not change
together?*

The self is you, as a
person—
What has evolved from the
genes—
All your character traits
and mannerisms.

It’s how you act and think
and feel—
Things you were born with, and
things you acquired.
It’s sometimes called “the ego”—
the personality.

And what is personality?
It is the sum total of our
behavior patterns,

Both from the environment
and from the genes.

The brain and nervous system

Are the physical instruments
Through which the self is
developed and expressed.

The brain stores up knowledge
and experience,
And uses the data for shaping
Our thoughts and feelings and
actions.

If the brain is the physical
organ,
The mind is the brain in action.
It is a filing system, storing
and using data.

The data forms a pattern,
or grid
On the surface of the brain—
the cortex.
From it arise all thoughts and
feelings and actions.

In the natural sense, we are
captives of the grid.
We cannot think outside it;
The mind must follow the
pattern.

But the data is faulty
and incomplete—
Full of gaps and errors
and bias.
So we cannot fully depend
on the natural mind.

As the ideas we fashion with
the mind,
Are subject to much misconception,
So, human expressions of truth,
Alas, are full of confusion.

That is why absolute truth
Can never be fashioned

With finite, human minds.

Absolute truth exists in the
spirit,
When Christ exists in the
spirit,
For Christ has said, "I am
the Truth."

*So what is truth?
"Truth is reality"
As the Greek word
expresses it.
Christ is the
ultimate reality
Truth is only the
Human and faulty
Effort to define reality.*

The problem comes when
the truth in the spirit,
Is faultily framed and
expressed,
Through the limited instrument
of the mind.

And just so, the other qualities
of Christ in our spirits.
We have Christ's love, when
we have Him—
But, our human expression of
love is faulty.

So, also, peace and joy and faith.
While we try to feel and
express them,
We often struggle with anxiety
and doubt.

But the peace of God is beyond
understanding.
The joy of Christ, beyond pain.
All is well in the spirit—the
struggle is in the mind.

We are filled with the
"fruit of the Spirit,"
As soon as He comes to
dwell within,

But the flesh, you see, often
obscures the reality.

The tug-of-war is always
there.
We fight so hard to
control the feelings,
But there is no need for
guilt or despair.

God understands the
fleshly conflict.
He regards not the
feelings in our minds,
But what is in our spirits—
That we care about Him.

*So, what does God do in us?
In what way do we change,
If the self is still subject
to weakness and error?*

We change, first of all, in our
spirits—
In our attitudes toward God
and self and others.
We care what God thinks of us,
and we care about others.

And, caring, we have the motive
To control the natural mind—
How we behave toward God
and self and others.

And, having the motive,
We have also assistance—
God does help us to do what
is right.

The question is, how much
change could there be.
If the natural self were
actually changed,
We would have no further need
of God's help.

But, Jesus said, "Without me,
you can do nothing."
And Paul said, "We have no

confidence in the flesh—
Our righteousness is of God
in the spirit.”

*But is there no place for
change in the self?
Shouldn't our conduct improve
with our growth?*
Ah yes, but the change is in
the conduct and not in the nature.

There is a difference between
change in behavior,
And change in the inner nature.
If the nature were changed,
it would need no control.

If behavior requires conscious control,
There has been no change of nature,
Though behavior be ever so much
in control.

If the Spirit of God
Had come into our flesh,
It would be changed and not
need controlling.

The spirit, possessed by God,
Tends always to see things
as God sees them;
While the mind only follows,
when consciously controlled.

The evidence of change in the spirit
Is that it wants to please
Christ,
And constantly cares when the
self is failing.

Though the spirit changes, the
flesh does not.
It struggles with continual
weakness—
A weakness Jesus shared, when
He came to dwell on the earth.

When the human in Jesus
cried out on the cross,—
“My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”

It was a genuine feeling and not
just an act.

Jesus was never weak in the Spirit,
Though He was oft tested in the flesh,
And knew, Himself, our feelings
of weakness.

Throughout His lifetime, Jesus
admitted
To things that hurt Him, and
things, He did not know—
To hunger and sorrow and
weariness.

But God is never unknowing,
or weary;
And Jesus, in Spirit, was God.
So, His Spirit was Divine, but His flesh
was human.

And, just so, ourselves, who possess
the Spirit of God.
We are oft tested, it seems, beyond
enduring
But steadfastly we hold on to God.

*So agreed, then, the spirit is changed,
But the self must control its behavior;
How, in the world, do we handle
self-control?*

Take not lightly the truth,
That the spirit is changed,
The spirit gives motive and
direction for control.

If the spirit were not changed,
Whence would come the desire
To keep the self in control?

But keeping the self in control
Does not make us spiritual;
Having the Spirit, gives the desire
to keep the self in control.

We try to keep the self in control,
Because we want to please Christ.
We want to please Christ, because

His Spirit is in us.

The true motive of
self-control,
Is not the law without;
It is the law within.

The beginning of control
is desire.
The will is no match
For an adequate motive.

The level of motive will
determine
The level of control.
God is essential to the
motive.

Without God, there is
no reason for control.
If life ends at the grave,
Self-interest is all that
makes sense.

But the Spirit of God within
Frees us from the prison
of self-interest,
And shows us the horizons of
His purpose.

And God helps us with motive,
By showing us the futility
Of faulty human choices.

Sometimes He shows us by
His word—
Teaching us what life's all about;
Sometimes by painful
experience.

For instance, bad choices are
often costly.
When it has cost us enough,
We make our choices more
carefully.

While changes in spirit require
the power of God alone,

Control of the self requires
Discipline, energized by
the power of God.

Sometimes God lets us
“pay the piper.”
He is not sending adversity
as a penalty;
He is showing us the
cost of carelessness.

God deals with us as
children—
With kindness and care;
With assistance and
chastening.

But always God's purpose,
Through prosperity or
adversity,
Is the shaping of our
spirits.

Paul said, “Affliction
produces patience.”
James said, “Let patience have
its perfect work.”
But remember, it is God who
controls the afflictions.

The greatest thing that God
can do for us,
Is to free us from dependence
on earthly good,
For inner peace and contentment.

Once we have peace with God
in our spirits
We pursue the handling of self,
With the quiet confidence
that God is with us.

We have latitude with God
To cope with the problems
of self—
To know He is with us, in spite
of our failures;

To regard ourselves as part of

His family;
To know we can talk to Him—
Though we feel weak and
unworthy.

Satan attempts to discourage us—
To drive a wedge with feelings
of guilt—
But Paul said, “Nothing can
separate us from God.”

We won't make it through,
without Him there.
We know He's still with us,
Because in our spirits, we care.

*But then, how do we deal
With the problems of self?
What should our attitude be?*

First, we regard it as normal—
A constant human problem—
Not something that drives us
from God.

And then, we see—though the
spirit is changed,
The flesh needs constant control;
And the desire to control shows
God is with us.

Also, we accept adversity,
and prosperity,
Not as measures of faith
or piety,
But the handiwork of God,
shaping our spirits.

Further, we learn from the
cost of our carelessness,
The importance of self-control,
And the value of listening to God.

So God does help us to
control the self—
Oft through experiences He
allows us;
And oft through the force of
His Word.

We alter the patterns of
our minds—
Losing old habits; gaining
new ones.
Nothing is permanent, but
the need for control.

Some things God does; some
things we do—
But all is a life-long
process,
Of working in union with God.

Some problems go with us
to the grave—
Like the “thorn in the flesh”
of Paul.
But therein is revealed God’s—
strength and grace.

All of us have things in our
lives to cope with.
We were born with them, or
acquired them,
But God has allowed them.

If we accept them and cope
with them,
Our spirits grow stronger.
If God would remove them
we would not grow.

So go day by day and live
in peace.
Let your faith be in God and
not in your feelings.
Judge not His actions, but
trust in His grace.

V. On Looking at The Law of Love

But, even if I do control my actions,
Handling my feelings is something else.

*I know I should love God and others—
even my enemies.
But I'm not sure I can love everyone.*

*Most of the time I don't know how I feel.
I don't think I really know what love is
all about.*

You're not alone—very few know what
love is all about.
In the Bible, however, it is quite clear.

As faith is the substance of our relationship
to God,
Love is the “caring-consciousness” of it.

Faith is the flow of God's energy through
our spirits,
Which sustains our capacity to be vitally
related to Him.

Love is the flow of God's caring through
our spirits,
Which infuses that relationship with
sensitivity towards Himself and others.

The “Law of Love” governs the interaction
between ourselves and God,
And the interactions between ourselves
and others.

*But what do you mean by love?
It seems so elusive and uncertain.*

The problem is with the inadequacy of the
English word, “love,”
As well as with human expectations and
illusions about it.

The English word is used for clothes, dogs, and
hamburgers and sex,
As well as for the love of God, and for the

tenderest personal affections.

It is used so indiscriminately as to lose any significant meaning.

It is absurd to apply one word to so many different kinds of emotion.

The Greek language, in which the New Testament was originally written, Has no such absurdity, as one word which answers to the English word, "love."

The Greeks used the word, **agape**, for "respectful consideration,"

The Bible lifts the word, and uses it of God's "caring" for the world.

They had another word, **phile**, for the warmer affection of family and friends.

And yet another—**eros**—for the more simple physical attraction.

The Bible uses **agape**, both of God's "caring" for the world, And the "caring-consciousness" that He brings to our spirits.

Agape—a sense of caring for others— is an expression of the spirit.

Phile—a feeling of affection for others— is an expression of the emotion.

*But isn't caring also an emotion?
What's the difference between "sense of caring," and "feeling of affection"?*

There is a "sense of caring" that goes beyond emotion.

It is "others-consciousness," more than "self-consciousness."

A**gape** "caring" involves a consciousness of need in others—
Not necessarily a feeling of attachment to others.

Phile was used of human emotions, produced in the mind,
And expressed in the warmer feelings of

family and friends.

To understand love then, we must
distinguish between
The “caring” of God, in the spirit, and
human affection in the flesh.

The spirit, where God dwells, possesses
His divine “caring.”
The flesh—the realm of the mind, or self—
produces human affection.

What do you mean by affection?
I'm not even sure of that.
Commonly, affection is what most people
mean by love.

It describes mild to intense reactions
of pleasure and appreciation.
It is used in this book to denote various
degrees of human love.

And what do you mean by “flesh?”
I always thought that was our “bad” side—
the “unholy” desires.

The word “flesh” is applied to all natural
functions of the mind.
These functions are not necessarily
unsound—but always undependable.

The flesh, or self, is the human instrument,
through which the spirit functions.
It only functions well, when submissive to
the Spirit of God.

The flesh, touched by sin and death in
the rebellion,
Does not, itself, possess the Spirit of God.
It remains subject to human frailty.

The human spirit, which is possessed by
the Spirit of God,
Must exercise constant control over the
functions of the flesh.

For the spirit may, indeed possess the love
of God,
But that love is expressed by a human

instrument.

If the human instrument be not controlled,
The love of God cannot be properly
expressed.

The control of the instrument is a
continual problem,
But the Spirit of God within, gives
strength in our weakness.

The nature of the love which the spirit
possesses,
Is the “caring-consciousness” of God
dwelling in us.

Agape is God’s love dwelling in our
spirits, and
Expressing itself in infinite “caring” for
the world.

Phile is human feeling produced in the
mind, and
Expressing itself in infinite craving for
companionship.

The **agape** of the Bible is not the
changeable “caring,” of human emotion;
It is a changeless sense of “God-consciousness”
and “others-consciousness.”

Agape does not preclude human feelings,
But human feelings are not a reliable
gauge of **agape**.

Phile is neither unimportant nor
undesirable.
It was the common word for family
relationships.

It was much in evidence among the early
believers,
But was never pressed as central to salvation.

It seemed to describe the warmer friendship
Of those who had developed a
camaraderie in Christ.

The Bible makes a clear distinction between

agape and **phile**,

In a famous encounter between Jesus
and Peter.

It occurred on the shores of Galilee, after
the resurrection.
Peter had denied Jesus; Jesus was testing
his loyalty.

Remembering Peter's boast of peerless
fidelity,
Jesus asked if now he could say that he
even cared.

For Peter, devastated by his shameful denial,
"Caring" was not enough; he must vow
affection.

Jesus had used **agape**—"Do you really
care so much?"

Peter responded with **phile**—"More than
that, I am your friend."

Grieved that his love should be classed
as "caring,"
He wanted assurance that friendship was
restored.

Jesus finally accepted Peter's expression—
"If you really are my friend, feed my sheep."

God requires of His creatures, only the
will to care.
He does not demand the response of
human feelings.

While human emotions cannot always be
separated from **agape** "caring."
Neither can they be relied upon as a stable
part of **agape** "caring."

Peter's pressing of the more personal
feelings,
While quite acceptable—even admirable—
was apparently voluntary.

How can human emotions ever be
mandated,
Since they involve too many diverse and

complex factors.

For some, the feelings flow freely—
As part of the nature they were born with.

Some, of a more conservative nature,
Hold their feelings in check.

While others, crushed by constant
catastrophe,
Have long been dulled to pleasure or pain.

All have equal favor with God,
He measures not love, by human emotion.

Human emotions arise from patterns in
the mind—
Often a fixed part of the personality.

The love of God in our spirits,
like faith and joy and peace,
Functions beyond the mind, beyond
feelings, beyond personality.

The love of God in our spirits remains
pure and selfless;
But is often distorted, when channeled
through the faulty patterns of the mind.

Given the limitations of the human mind,
It cannot adequately express the love of
God within.

Thus, feelings about God are undependable,
As a measure of our true love for Him.

It is not a matter of feeling good about God,
But sensing our integral union with God
in the spirit.

“The Spirit, Himself, bears witness with
our spirits.”
We communicate our caring beyond
human capacity.

We have true love for God, when we have
Him within.
“For God is love, and he that loves is born
of God.”

Such love in the spirit is as stable as God,
In spite of the changeable feelings of
the mind.

The mind cannot judge the measure of
God's love in the spirit,
Because such love is beyond the mind.

Thus, to say one loves God, or does not
love God enough,
Is only an evaluation of surface feelings.

It is not that feelings about God are
undesirable;
It is only that human feelings are
undependable.

Satan attacks the mind and stirs it to doubt.
He confuses it with earthly feelings and
illusions about God.

It is better to trust in God's own love in
our spirits,
Than fragile feelings about God in
our minds.

The proof of our love for God is not our
feelings for Him,
But the continual sense in the spirit of our
oneness with Him.

There is a deep, underlying sense that He
is there,
In spite of surface feelings, reflecting
doubt and conflict.

The reality of God's love is independent
of all feelings.
And is continually sustained in our spirits,
whatever the state of the emotions.

Possessing God's own love within our
spirits,
There is a quality to it, that is forever
complete.

S*o, granted, my love for God is complete;*

What about my love for others?

The “love” for others that is commanded
in the Bible, is **agape**.
What is required in “loving” others, is not
affection, but “caring.”

“Caring about others,” is God within us,
reaching out in love;
“Liking others” is the self reacting in
human emotion.

Human emotions are important,
But often based on shallow appraisals.

Human emotions are desirable, but
changeable,
And not a valid gauge of God’s love in
our spirits.

When we try to express God’s love with
human emotions,
We distort it with the faulty human
instrument.

The love of God flows naturally from
within our spirits.
When His Spirit is in us, it is natural
for us to care about others.

*But, I am not sure at all that I care
about others.*
Perhaps you are confusing “caring,”
with faulty human emotions.

Perhaps you care more than you realize,
But you do not always like the ones you
“care” for.

We can relate to others with God’s Spirit
of caring.
When human emotions may be negative,
or absent.

We are commanded by God, to “care”
about people.
We are not required to “like” them.

But, didn’t Jesus specifically teach us to

“love our enemies?”
Jesus used the word, **agape**—“Care about
your enemies.”

Jesus “cared” about the religious leaders
—the Pharisees,
And wept over them, as He wept over
Jerusalem.

But, He did not like them at all,
And called them “serpents and sepulchres.”

*But, I am told that I must love God and
others more.
So, I try, but I cannot always control
my feelings.*

First, we must ask what you mean by
“feelings”—
What are people supposed to feel?

*I don't think I've ever tried to define
feelings.
I'm not sure I can tell you what feelings
are all about.*

And that is why there is so much
confusion about love.
People talk about love, but don't
understand it at all.

So it becomes some undefined and mystic
sensation,
Which they do not understand, and
therefore cannot handle.

Even love for God, for most people is a
vacillating feeling,
That seems always inconstant, or out
of reach.

The problem is the misunderstanding of
human feelings—
What they are, and what, the limits of
their reliability.

So, before we can talk about controlling
feelings,
We must understand the nature of feelings.

What are Feelings?

Feelings or emotions, are a product of the
mind.
They're the result of stimuli from the
external environment.

The external environment is whatever is
going on around us.
It includes everything our senses experience.

It is everything we see, hear, feel, taste,
and smell.
It is everything we pick up through billions
of nerve endings.

Stimuli are whatever affects us from the
environment.
Everything around us gives off signals, or
stimuli.

Stimuli are energy impulses that touch the
nerve endings,
And are transmitted through the nerves,
to the brain.

The brain is an instrument, collecting the
data from these signals.
The mind is the self, assessing and using
the data.

All these signals of experience are
recorded on the cortex of the brain,
Where they form a pattern which governs
our behavior.

As the brain receives the signals, it sorts
out the data,
Combines it with existing data, and reacts
according to the pattern.

One's reaction, for example, to touching
a hot iron,
Will depend on one's experience with
things like heat, pain, irons, and salves.

One's reaction to an unkind remark, on
the other hand,

Will depend on one's experience with life
and people and one's own personality.

Sometimes the reactions are physical
As when we cut ourselves with a knife.

Sometimes the reactions are emotional,
As when someone cuts us with an unkind
remark.

Both experiences—physical and
emotional—
Are reactions to impulses, transmitted
by nerve cells, to the brain.

The mind automatically reacts according
to the pattern on the cortex,
Unless conscious control is exercised.

Therefore, the way the mind responds to
the signals
Depends on a great many complex factors.

There are complex physical factors—
Chemical makeup; brain function; nerve
condition.

And, there are complex psychological
factors;
Character traits, behavior patterns;
stored-up data of experience.

These complex factors have come from
the genes—what we were born with;
Or from knowledge and experience—what
we have acquired.

They have not so much to do with
“spirituality,”
As with forces, within and without, that
work in our minds.

Given the millions of fragments of data
that affect our responses,
The possibilities of faulty feelings are
endless.

And given the complexities of the human
mind,

We cannot depend on these feelings, or
use them as a basis of judgment.

Feelings: Eros—Physical Love

But there is yet another facet of feelings
to consider—
Physical attraction, or fascination.

The Greeks called it **eros**, and applied
the word,
When neither caring, nor affection were
primary considerations.

Physical attraction is the granddaddy of
mischief in love.
It often produces transient ecstasies and
lasting miseries.

There is great peril in **eros**; it affects the
nervous system as much as drugs.
Persons give off energy impulses, as do all
other elements around us.

Eros often passes for genuine affection,
or even caring.
But it can trap the unwary in addictive
attachments, akin to habituating drugs.

Where attraction is present before the
knowledge of the personality,
It is likely to be based on surface
appraisals, or nerve impulses.

Where one cannot break from another
despite obviously questionable qualities,
There is likely to be an addiction as
tenacious as that of drugs.

Eros is not necessarily an illicit love,
Not does it always exclude affection
or caring.

But **eros** does have physical love in focus,
As **phile** focuses on affection, and **agape**
on caring.

Conclusions:

So, you see, feelings are neither mystical,
nor mysterious.
They are responses of the brain to stimuli
of the nervous system.

***B**ut, your descriptions of love, sound very
mechanical to me.
It takes all the warmth and vitality out
of it.*

On the contrary, it takes all the illusions
out of it.
So that warmth and vitality may be real.

There is more to love than impulses and
nerve cells,
As the whole is more than the sum of
the parts.

But, unless we understand the meaning of
emotions,
We will abuse them, misuse them, and
remain captives of them.

Applied to our relationship to others, the
misunderstanding of love,
Will fester unsound relationships, and
spoil true ones.

The technical description of feelings may
be somewhat disenchanting,
To those who are comfortable with the
more traditional idealisms.

But to those who have had difficulty in the
area of feelings,
It may bring a measure of understanding
and hope.

The problem with idealistic views of love
and emotions, is that
Sooner, or later, they tend to bring
devastating disillusionment.

It may seem logical to assume that human
feelings of affection

Ought to be transferred to God, as part of
what we call “love.”

And, that problems with such feelings
would indicate problems with “love,”
Which should be corrected by prayer and
“spiritual” exercises.

This view may seem adequate, until one
experiences
Persistent, negative emotions—
Emptiness, depression, or even anger
and doubt.

The reasons may have to do with normal
physical, or psychological reactions,
But, if they be treated as spiritual problems,
they confuse our true relationship to God.

Further, when too much weight is placed
on human feelings,
The loss of them can bring bitter
disappointment, and needless guilt.

It is not always possible, or advisable, to
separate the various facets of love.
But, where there are difficulties, such
evaluation is a good place to start.

Human emotions are complex, and may
partake of many facets.
Friendships are usually enhanced and
stabilized by **agape** caring.

On the other hand, **phile** “affection” is a
normal and common part,
Of the close ties that exist in our
relationship with God and His family.

Still, we confront the persistent principle
regarding human feelings—
The complexities involved, preclude
Undue judgment about them, or
reliance on them.

But, given the sensitivity and sympathy of
Christ for human “brethren,”
We have liberty to wrestle with these
Troublesome feelings and still retain

His favor.

While forces affecting our feelings are
often beyond our control,
The way we cope with the feelings is
our own responsibility.

We cannot always help how we feel.
We can help how we deal with how we feel.

*But doesn't our human nature change,
with the coming of Christ?
Doesn't Paul say that all of those in
Christ are new creatures?*

Paul also said, "In my flesh there dwells
no good thing."
It is the spirit that is new, and not the flesh.

Problems of the natural self do
not necessarily change.
Some things may change—some may not.

*But how is it that some things change and
some do not?*
Traits we are born with do not change as
readily as traits we acquire.

Some traits are inherited, like sensitivity
to pain.
We call it the "threshold of tolerance."

Response to physical, or emotional pain,
Depends on the "threshold of tolerance."

As some people feel physical pain more
keenly than others,
Some people are more easily hurt than
others.

Hypersensitivity is but one example
Of traits, not necessarily changed by the
coming of Christ.

Other examples are shyness and
forwardness; emotionalism and reserve.
And many more, which have nothing to do
with spirituality.

Some traits are acquired, and may change
with the coming of Christ.
Selfishness is a good example; and
tendencies to loss of temper.

Some traits are complex mixture of
heredity and environment—
(Habits we develop, based on areas of
vulnerability)—and change with difficulty.

Encouragement in the matter, comes from
the reality,
That God is patient and gives us the
freedom to work with our feelings.

David said that God has pity on us as a
father, his children;
“For He knoweth our frame; He
remembereth that we are dust.”

No effort was made to whitewash the
weaknesses, even of His prophets.
But, as He said to Paul, “My strength
is made perfect in weakness.

*So, if the natural self is not changed
How, then, can I control my feelings?*

We have discussed the meaning of
feelings.
Now we must ask what you mean by
control.

Are you talking about deception, or
perception?
Are you thinking of discretion, or
pretension?

***I** don't think I understand—all I know is,
I try to feel the way I should about God
and others.*

And how should you feel? Trying to feel
things
May be merely mental manipulation.

Forcing feelings, or denying them, are
only forms of deception.

Understanding feelings and coping with
them is insight, or perception.

Masking feelings with a false front, is
hypocrisy—pretending.
Exercising care in the expression of
feelings is wisdom, or discretion.

There is as much misunderstanding about
the word, “control,”
As there is about the meaning of “love,”
or “feelings.”

What Kind of Control

To control something means to be in
charge of it.
Neither denial, nor falsification can be
classed as control.

*But, if I just let my feelings go,
They cause too much trouble for me, as
for others.*

That is quite true, but, we are not talking
about “letting go,”
We are talking about understanding and
handling the feelings.

It is not controlling the feelings,
themselves, we are talking about;
It is controlling the actions and reactions
involved in the feelings.

Since feelings are natural reactions to
stimuli,
They can only be genuinely changed,
By changing the stimuli, or the patterns in
the brain, that cause the reactions.

Thus, whatever is affecting the feelings
must be dealt with.
And that is a matter of understanding and
handling the feelings.

*But, isn't “handling” just another word
for controlling?*
By no means! Controlling means
restricting, or masking the feelings.

“Handling” the feelings means facing
them, and coping with them as they are.
Or, if possible, changing them by dealing
with the cause.

*But my true feelings for God and others
are sometimes negative.
In fact, I often have doubts and conflicts
and uncertainties.*

Pressing oneself to feel for God, or others,
what is expected, but not genuine,
Is not handling feelings, but engaging in
deception.

Realizing the faulty nature of feelings, and
not relying on them,
As a test for the love of God, is a way
of handling, or coping with them.

It is quite possible to have a lasting and
constant identity with God,
And still experience uncertain human
feelings and mood-swings.

It is both unnecessary and foolish, to feign
feelings for God, or others.
It is not a sound, spiritual effort, but
self-deception.

On the other hand, care in the expression
of feelings is discretion—
Quite another thing, than masking the
feelings by pretending.

There are many ways to exercise care in the
expression of feelings,
Without being false, or hypocritical.

One can be gracious, without being ardent.
One can imply concern, without implying
affection.

It is not wrong to spare another the full
disclosure of feelings.
It is wrong to deceive another with the
pretension of false feelings.

It is not so much a matter of control, as it is
understanding, or perception.
It is not pretending, or deception, but care,
or discretion.

Perception involves facing the feelings,
and coming to terms with them—
Understanding them; changing them; or
living with them, and coping with them.

If they are justified, we must learn to live
with them, and cope with them.
If they are unjustified, we must seek to
understand them and deal with them.

Unjustified feelings may be from
irrational prejudice,
Or they may be from ignorance, or
misunderstanding.

Many times, knowledge and new
understanding, will bring changes.
But often, there are deeply rooted
patterns, not so easily changed.

*But what if I know my feelings are wrong,
And yet, I cannot seem to overcome them?*

Remember, you cannot always help how
you feel,
Given the complexities of the human
mind.

*But, if you say I can't help how I feel,
What keeps me from ignoring my feelings
and taking them seriously?*

The love of God in your spirit is a “caring
force,”
That simply does not ignore such feelings,
or take them lightly.

So do not deny your feelings—that is
deception.
Do not falsify them—that is pretension.

And yet, if they are faulty, or unjustified,
Do see in them the human weakness, and
do seek for understanding.

Do pray, but not for easy solutions—some
magical change of feelings.
Do pray for understanding and
enlightenment, that you may mature.

In the grace of God, we have both the
liberty and the latitude.
To work out, in time, our troublesome and
stubborn feelings.

God is not pleased, of course, with
prejudice,
But neither does He judge, unduly
transient human emotions.

Human emotions are not really matters
for spiritual judgment.
It is not guilt, but good sense, that is
often needed.

*But, are negative feelings about others
Ever justified in the context of Christian
love?*

Yes, indeed, if we take our example from
Jesus.
He had very negative feelings about the
Pharisees, though He cared about them.

Remember, feelings are natural responses
of the brain
To stimuli, or impulses from the
environment around us.

The mind reacts to these stimuli with
pleasure or pain,
Responding alike to physical and
emotional impulses.

Even if the mind may sometimes imagine
pain, without apparent reason,
It cannot deny the reaction, though there
may be need for evaluation.

If one is mistreating us, or someone we
love, we react with displeasure.
As surely as when we experience physical
pain, and react with displeasure.

Jesus reacted with displeasure to the
Pharisees.
They were hurting the people, and He
called them “snakes.”

*But I've been told that we must look for
good in people.
Didn't the Pharisees do any good deeds?*

Jesus did not deny that they had done
good deeds.
He condemned them for hypocrisy and
pretense, and misleading the people.

The offense must ultimately be dealt with,
Despite other qualities the offender may
possess.

We do not acquit a thief, for instance,
Just because he loved his mother, and gave
the spoils to her.

Some Pharisees, like Nicodemus, repented,
and came to Jesus.
These He freely forgave, and warmly
welcomed.

*But, I have trouble forgiving some, and
yet, I know I should forgive everyone.*
Only if they repent, and ask it. Even
Christ extends forgiveness, only to
those who seek it.

Negative feelings are a normal response to
negative situations.
When the situation is corrected, the
feelings usually change.

*And, if they don't change—if one still
harbors a grudge?*
Then, it becomes an unjustified feeling,
and must be so handled.

But always, beyond the maze of human
emotions—justified, or not—
Is the inexhaustible love of God—the
ceaseless “sense of caring.”

*So, we are back again to the distinction
between
The "caring" love of God within, and the
expression of human affection.*

Yes, we have determined that human
feelings are products of
The brain and nervous system, as they
react to forces within and without.

That they are a function of the flesh,
and while normal and desirable,
Are changeable and undependable, as a
test of the love of God.

When we talk about love, we must take
into account, these distinctions.
Otherwise, we will always be confused
and insecure about it.

It is not within the power of the human mind,
To affect the love of God in the spirit.

The mind can only foster, or hinder the
effects of that love,
Either in the contemplation of it, or in the
expression of it.

Either one has God, Himself, and His
love, dwelling in the spirit,
Or one is expressing only a human
fabrication of God and of love.

The true love of God is shown, not by
human feelings about Him,
But by a prevailing sense of identity
with Him, despite human feelings.

If we think that love for God is shown
by feelings about Him,
Our peace and security will always
fluctuate with our feelings.

We will never think that we love Him
enough.
Or, we will think that our negative
feelings separate us from Him.

But, we have determined that the love of
God in our spirits.
Remains constant in spite of our fluctuating
human emotions.

We are therefore faced, not with spiritual
judgments about love,
But with the handling of human feelings.

We have separated “love,” as the
“caring-consciousness” of God,
From “love,” as human feelings, based on
natural responses of the mind.

While the love of God in our spirits is
stable and constant.
Love, as human feeling, requires
continual attention.

But, we have learned that feelings are not
controlled, but handled.
It is the actions surrounding the feelings
that must be controlled.

*So then, the question of how to control
the feelings is unsound.
We should really be asking how to
handle the feelings and control
the actions.*

That is true, and the handling of feelings
is manageable,
When we understand them, and put them
in the proper perspective.

A*nd you say that I do not have to try
to feel something for God?
But is there nothing I can do to cultivate
God's love?*

If you mean changing the quality of God's
love in the spirit—no.
But there is much you can do to change
the sense and impact of His love.

God's love flows through our minds in the
measure of our focus.
If we fill the mind with earthly things,
we cloud the sense of His presence.

If we focus on self-interest, we lose His
perspective on things.
If we neglect fellowship with Him, we dull
our appreciation of Him.

All of these things have not to do with the
reality of His love in our spirits,
But with our appreciation and expression
of His love in the daily life.

The love of God would be absent from us,
only if He were absent from us.
To think of His love as coming and going
with our feelings is absurd.

But, it is equally absurd to think that we
can live as we please,
Without affecting the sense of His presence,
or our growth in the knowledge of Him.

When we cultivate the knowledge of God
and His love,
We have not so much trouble with our
feelings about Him.

Similarly, when we cultivate the
knowledge of His power,
We have not so much trouble with our
sense of faith and peace.

B*ut how do we cultivate our knowledge
of God?
Must we become religious and
contemplate Him all day long?*

No, it is not continuous contemplation,
but steady application;
It is not pursuit of spirituality, but living
with Christ in daily practicality.

We cultivate the knowledge of God
through His Word—
Not by being scholars, but by feeding on
it, as sheep, grazing under a shepherd.

We cultivate the knowledge of God
through prayer—
Not so much in formal intercession, as in

quiet daily interaction with Him.

And, we cultivate our knowledge of God
through the experiences of ourselves
and others—

Sharing our love with Him, day by day,
and sharing with one another.

While the presence and love of God
remain constant in our spirits,
Our daily sense of well-being depends
on our growth and knowledge of Him.

Cultivating the knowledge of God is a way
of handling feelings about Him.
It is changing the thought patterns in the
mind that produce the feelings.

Insecure, or faulty feelings about God,
change by correcting faulty images
of Him.

Feelings of appreciation—even affection—
follow from acquiring deeper
knowledge of Him.

Of course, such changes in the mind do
not change its basic nature,
And therefore must not be seen as
permanently resolving difficulties.

As long as we are on the earth, we will
have to wrestle with the human nature,
But we can foster stability in our daily
lives by cultivating our knowledge of God.

It is important to understand however,
that stability in our daily lives,
Is neither a certain result of salvation, nor
requisite to the favor of God.

Stability is important; it is advisable; it is
admirable;
It keeps the feelings steadier; but it does
not make one more “spiritual.”

Sometimes people who are strongly
identified with Christ,
Seem wanting, nevertheless, in emotional
or functional stability.

A disorderly life may not reflect well on
Christianity,
But certainly will not have a bearing on
one's salvation.

S*o, granted that the uncertainties and
instabilities of our natural selves,
Do not separate us from God, nor bring
us His disfavor.*

*And granted, that feelings are
undependable as a gauge of God's love
in our spirits.
But what if one wants stability in one's
life, and, wants friends and affection?*

*How does one go about developing right
relationships, and handling feelings?
And, what help can one expect from God
in dealing with the self?*

*Where do human affections fit in, in the
matter of love?
How do we view them, and why do we
care, if they are not part of God's love?*

*As a matter of fact, what motivation does
one have,
For "getting one's life together," if it isn't
a requirement of salvation?*

Now, we're dealing with an entirely
different matter—
Stability of feelings and actions in the
flesh, versus strength of inner spirit.

One may have to go through many
experiences of fleshly instability,
In order to understand the weakness of
the flesh, and learn not to depend on it.

But first, as to motivation—we do, in fact,
care about our feelings and actions,
Not because it is required, or rewarded,
but, because Christ is in us.

But, caring about how we feel, or act, is

quite a different thing
Than actually handling feelings, or
actions.

Caring about how we feel, or act, is
a natural result of God's Spirit within us.
Actually handling feelings and actions is
a result of various motivations.

God is, of course, interested in our
developing wisdom and stability.
In fact, Jesus chided the Pharisees for
lack of it.

He is also interested in our developing
sound relationships with others,
Especially insofar as it involves kindness
and forgiveness.

But, whether or not our relationships are
accompanied by human affection,
Is a personal matter and depends on many
controllable and uncontrollable factors.

He is also interested in our developing
sound relationships with others,
Especially insofar as it involves kindness
and forgiveness.

As to how we view human affection—it
is natural, acceptable, and desirable,
But must always be distinguished from the
love of God in the spirit.

The cultivating of human affection is
still another matter.
Whereas **agape** "caring" is commanded;
human affection must be earned.

Our oneness with the body of believers is
secured by the Spirit of God.
It is an eternal unity, and not
dependent on human effort.

But, cultivating friendships with members
of the Body,
Depends much on human factors—
personality, interest, and effort.

It would be simple, if we could say that the

presence of Christ within,
Assures one of compatibility with all
members of His Body.

But the truth is, that all believers, whatever
their claim to “spirituality,”
Have their difficulties with human
relationships.

We must conclude that the maintaining
of friendships is an earthly matter.
Accordingly, losing friends, does not lose
for us the favor of God.

Sometimes the spirit is involved—friends
may forsake the follower of Christ.
But more often, it is human carelessness—
we are selfish, thoughtless, unkind.

The love of God in our spirits remains
steadfast in spite of human behavior.
But human feelings are fluctuating and
fragile.

If we want friendship and affection, it will
require careful effort.
We must control our behavior and handle
our feelings, wisely.

If we do not care to make the effort
of self-control, we may walk alone.
The command to “care” about others,
does not include liking another’s
behavior.

We are responsible for our own actions
and reactions to others.
We cannot put off on God, the task of
making people like us.

Nor can we depend on the patience and
longsuffering of others—
Admirable virtues, but hardly constant,
even in Christians.

We hope that people will be patient with
us, and understanding,
But who can know the moment when
affection is threatened?

Feelings are fickle; they ebb and flow
with changing actions.
Carelessness with another's affections is
risky—the limits are uncertain.

It is the fragile nature of feelings, that
makes them so difficult to handle,
And not dependable as a part of our
essential relationship to God.

Still affection and friendship are
important elements in earthly life,
And worth cultivating, so long as we
recognize the limitations.

But, there is a price to pay—unselfish
and thoughtful treatment of others;
Walking among the people of earth in
kindness and grace.

*But are not all believers supposed to be
that way?
Do not all possess the love and grace of
God in their spirits?*

All believers do possess the love of God,
but all have difficulty expressing it.
That is why the Bible speaks often of the
way Christians ought to treat each other.

All who possess the Spirit of God, have
the “sense of caring” about others.
But, not all who have the “sense of
caring,” express it in appropriate behavior.

Just so, one may have friendship with
another,
And be careless in behavior appropriate
to the maintaining of it.

Carelessness takes many forms—neglect,
harshness, thoughtlessness,
The result is the same—the risking of
the friendship.

The preserving of a friendship is a matter
of priorities—

The value we place upon that friendship,
versus the demands.

If the friendship is important enough,
We will modify our behavior to preserve it.

If, on the other hand, the demands are not
in keeping with our priorities,
We may choose to let the friendship go.

That does not mean we cease to care, in the
agape sense,
But, that we have faced realistically the
limits of **phile**—human affection.

Appraising relationships thus, is the sound
way of handling feelings.
Agape “caring” is universal—**phile**
“affection” is based on priorities and
compatibilities.

When Christians come together in Christ,
they enjoy the unity of the Spirit.
When they gather on a social basis, they
confront human incompatibilities.

Unity in the Spirit—a vastly different thing
than compatibility in the flesh—
Is preserved, in spite of human differences,
when Christ is the focus of fellowship.

Are you saying that Christians should
never come together, socially?
No, indeed—but when they do, they are
more vulnerable to the frailties of the flesh.

If we keep these distinctions in mind, it
should stabilize our relationships—
Both in the security of our love in Christ,
and in the handling of earthly ties.

We will be more conscious of the
constancy of our “caring,”
And more careful in the cultivating of our
friendships.

*But granted, we have the love of God as
His gift in our spirits,
What help can we expect from Him in*

handling our feelings and friendships?

In the first place, the desire for
handling our feelings and friendships,
Comes from the presence of God and His
love in our spirits.

The Holy Spirit within provides us with a
new attitude toward God and others,
And with God's own view of life and the
universe.

In the second place, seeing things from
God's perspective
Helps us to control self-interest—the
greatest of all threats to friendship.

B*ut I know a good many Christians, who
are still selfish.*

There is a difference between knowing
God's view, and actually adopting it.

When we insist on our own view of things,
we obscure God's view,
And become vulnerable to the distortions
of human thoughts and feelings.

In the third place, we can pray and seek
God's help in these matters.
We can ask Him for wisdom and
understanding in our relationships.

We can ask Him to help us sort out our
priorities and purposes,
And to guard us from incompatible
situations and relationships.

We can ask Him to help us with our
feelings and attitudes—
To give us understanding and
enlightenment and grace.

And we can ask Him to help us to be a
blessing to others—
To be more of a help to others, than a
problem to them.

In the fourth place, God allows events and
circumstances in our lives, for growth.

We must be receptive to God's dealings
with us, so we may grow in grace and
stature.

Maturity is essential in establishing sound
relationships,
And in maintaining stability of feelings
and attitudes.

*So then God does help us in many ways.
But are there things we must do to
cultivate friendships?*

There is a certain amount of discipline
and control necessary.
It is the price we pay for the privilege
of having friends.

Remember, what we control is not the
feelings, but the actions and reactions.
Anger, for instance, is allowable—Jesus
was angry on a number of occasions.

But, the expression of the anger must be
controlled—words are hard to retrieve.
And, impulsive actions leave scars, and
destroy friendships.

The tendency to loss of temper may be
inherited, but overreaction loses friends.
Controlling reactions begins with
evaluating what is worth the loss of
friendships.

In the cultivating of friendships,
consideration, thoughtfulness and
kindness is essential.
These are really habits of life that can
be developed into spontaneous reactions.

They are not, necessarily, qualities
produced only by the Spirit.
There are many non-Christians who are
kind, and many Christians who are not.

Sensitivity is another behavior pattern
that can be developed—
Being aware of the feelings of others,
and guarding tongue and action.

*But, are not some people overly sensitive?
Shouldn't they learn not to be so easily hurt?*

It is not possible for us to judge what
should, or should not hurt another.
It is for us to be sensitive to what does,
in fact, hurt another.

Ignoring sensitivities is potentially
damaging both to personalities and
friendships.
Even friendly “digs” and teasings, can hit
raw nerves and spoil friendships.

The practice of kindness and sensitivity
to everyone,
Is the best expression of the love of God,
and the safest rule.

The preserving of friendships requires
continual care.
Life is constantly changing—the garden
must be kept weeded.

It is necessary to be open and honest with
one another.
Hidden problems build resentment, and
erode relationships.

In learning to live with others,
It is important to help them learn to live
with us.

Reluctance to let another know the things
that are troubling one,
Can only bring more grief in the end,
when the disclosure is finally made.

It is, in the first place, unsound to let
resentment build up.
It is, in the second place, unsound to think
discussion will not help.

It is, in the third place, unfair to leave
another with delusions—
To let another assume things are all right
when they are not.

But, above all, human relationships
require patience and grace.
Allowances must be made—behavior
is a complex problem.

Misjudging motives is a common error,
too readily made.
And is too high an expectation—more
from the other person than oneself.

Human relationships are difficult, at best
—we often fail, however hard we try.
And Satan uses our frailties to sow
discord among the believers.

But, though these problems will plague us,
as long as we are on the earth,
In the end, God's caring love prevails,
beyond all human failure.

So, we have three kinds of love—the
agape, "caring," love of God within;
Phile affection of family and friends;
and the **eros** of physical desire.

The "caring" love of God comes when He
comes to dwell in our spirits.
Human affection must be earned;
physical desire is a common human
heritage.

The love God requires for Himself and
others is His own eternal "caring
consciousness."
Friendships and affections are part of
transient human emotion.

Substantial love can possibly partake of
all three facets,
But confusing them causes great
difficulty in a stable relationship to God.

VI. Of Faith and The Family

The distinctions in kinds of love,
apply also in family relations.
God commands “caring;” affection
must be earned.

But how does God view family
relationships?
What is the place of the earthly
family in the kingdom of God?

What Is A Family?

We must first ask, “What is a family?”
Is it a physical, or spiritual unity?

*I don't understand. A family is a
family, is it not?
It's mothers and fathers, and sisters
and brothers, isn't it?*

Is it, really? Jesus said, “He that
doeth the will of God,
The same is my mother, and my
sister, and my brother.”

On the other hand, He said that a
husband and wife are one flesh;
And, that children should honor
their parents.

He thus accepted a physical and
earthly reality.
But introduced, for the first time,
a spiritual alternative.

From Adam and Eve, to Mary and Joseph,
The family unit had been the linchpin
of Jewish life.

Many of the Mosaic laws had to do
with this special earthly unit.
And, interference with it brought
severe penalties.

But, Jesus introduced another element—
the family of God.
Ideally, the family should have remained
in unbroken perpetuity.

But the ugly realities of earthly
madness, shattered the ideal
And, from the murderous Cain, to the
brothers of Jesus, family fragmentation
prevailed.

And so, to the homeless and outcast; to
the widow and orphan,
Jesus offered a viable alternative—
membership in the family of God.

An earthly family—whole, and united
in Christ—is a great blessing;
But, a blessing enjoyed, alas, by the
few—the very few.

Many have never had the privilege, of
a normal family life, and never will.
Many have had “once-happy” homes,
devastated by death and disaster.

Many are single, and have no prospects
of marriage.
Many have made bad marriages, which
cannot, or will not be mended.

Many have longed for children, but
cannot have them.
Many have had children, who have
gone astray.

For all of these, talk of happy homes
and blissful marriage,
Can only stir remorse, and nourish
empty longings.

We must view the family realistically—
not as the ultimate in earthly good.
Nor as something to be shunned, in
favor of more celestial values.

But as something ordained of God, for
propagation and preservation;
And, when carefully cultivated, for
fulfillment and pleasure.

The initial injunction of God was to
multiply and replenish the earth.
Long since, fulfilled abundantly, propagation
alone, is of marginal value.

Nevertheless, children are a vital part of
the family unit,
And are regarded by God, as a symbol
of blessing.

Properly cultivated, the family unit is
a citadel—a fortress of faith.
When Christ is the center, it provides
a bulwark against the forces of evil.

It is also a witness—radiating the love
and grace of Christ.
And it is a training center for developing
strong members of the Body of Christ.

It is obvious why Satan attacks the
family concept.
It is essential for believers to unite in
the defense of the family.

So the family is a vital force in the
purposes of God in the world.
It is an instrument of blessing—both
for those within, and those without.

On the other hand, the spiritual family—
the family of God—takes precedence.
Wherever a conflict arose, Jesus urged
the cutting of family ties in favor of God.

Young men were often urged to leave
father and mother and follow Christ.
Anyone who put father and mother ahead
of Christ, failed the test of loyalty.

Even wife and children were not to be
put ahead of Christ.
Nor was heaven, itself, regarded as
preserving earthly family ties, as such.

Similarly, Paul said, “Let him that
is married be as though he were not,”

(Indicating priorities, however, and not neglect of marital responsibilities).

*But it would seem, then that
marriage on earth
Is a human choice, and not
important to God.*

On the contrary, He regards it
of great importance.
He established it; regulated it
and enhanced it with pleasure.

But, importance must be perceived
in light of priority.
Fulfillment of spirit is the
ultimate good; not earthly bliss.

In the realities of the present world,
marriage is not always feasible, or
possible.
But in Christ, one may yet have a
satisfying life, without it.

In the original creation, God judged it
unsound for "man" to be alone.
Accordingly, He divided him, that he
would never be complete within himself.

Since the coming of Christ, this need
is met in our oneness with Him.
One need never be alone, even though one
be completely without an earthly family.

This oneness is of course
spiritual and not fleshly.
Christ should never be seen
as a substitute husband.

The attempt to extract from
the relationship to Him,
Emotional satisfaction, leads to
much disappointment

Since the self is never
satisfied,
Christ, Himself, could never
fulfill our fleshly demands.

What Christ does, in the interest
of our spiritual growth,
Is often unacceptable to us
in our childish ambitions.

The persistent benefits
that Christ provides,
Are in the spirit, which is
not subject to human whims.

While marriage is of great
importance to God,
It is secondary to ultimate
inner satisfaction.

Therefore, there is no mandate
to marry.
But, if one marries, there are
certain specific instructions

Paul says that husbands and
wives must love each other.
He uses **agape** “caring,” and
not **phile**—“affection.”

Phile was not a common part
of ancient marriages.
Even **agape** was absent in
marriages, usually arranged.

In the nature of the case, the addition
of affection is a personal choice.
One must decide whether or not the
cultivating of affection is worth the price.

The requirement of “caring” can be
satisfied with, or without affection.
If one wishes affection, one must pay
the price of learning to please.

In the constant concern for rights
and self-interest,
One often gains the rights and loses
the affection.

God is concerned, of course, with how
we treat one another,
But, the degree of affection is left
to our own discretion.

If affection requires pleasing, pleasing
requires compatible priorities—
Agreement on the purposes and goals
of life.

But what it takes to please another
and sustain affection,
May not be compatible with one's
established priorities.

When one is therefore not able to
please another,
Affection may be dulled by the
resulting dissatisfaction.

*But, if both are Christians, wouldn't
they share the same priorities?*
That would be a natural assumption,
but, unfortunately, not realistic.

Sorting out one's priorities is not
a condition of salvation,
Nor is it an inevitable result of
identity with Christ.

*But what if two people do not
have the same priorities?
Can they still have a happy
marriage?*

One may have difficulty
relating to the other,
And yet can live with the other
in grace and responsibility.

Much difficulty in unequal
marriages,
Comes, not from commitment to
Christ,
But from fleshly expressions
of unkindness and intolerance.

Such a marriage may not provide
what we call, "happiness,"
But, in the grace of Christ, can
still afford a kind of satisfaction.

On the other hand, "happiness," may

not be a viable feeling
“Satisfaction” involves a sense of
purpose and meaning.

Realism recognizes the potential of
hard and changing circumstance.
A sense of meaning can be sustained
where bliss cannot.

One can seek to please Christ
in spite of conflicts.
Satisfaction comes, not from
what others do,
But what we do in spite
of others.

*So, then marriages can be stable
apart from affection?
But what if one wants to
restore that affection?*

Many marriages get mired down
in the pursuit of rights and self-interest.
Affection is foolishly destroyed
by carelessness, unkindness and neglect.

If preserving another’s affection
is important,
Proper behavior is a small enough
price to pay.

Acquiring a companion is like
acquiring an automobile—
We want the benefits, but we tire
of making the payments.

The key to preserving affection is
not, what **must** I do for you?
It is rather, what **may** I do for you?

Loss of affection is a downward
spiral.
Reluctant giving of oneself, breeds
bridled affection.

On the other hand, generous giving
breeds generous affection.
Yet, if generous giving is taken advantage
of, it breeds reluctant giving.

Much marriage counseling could be avoided,
If couples would decide to treat one
another with grace and kindness.

If they would be less concerned with
rights and obligations,
And more concerned with giving of
themselves.

If they would be less concerned with
“straightening out” each other,
And more concerned with enhancing the
other’s affection by grace and kindness.

In marriage, as in friendship, people
must learn to act—not react.
Action must be based on what is right—
not on what the other person does.

The strength of the family begins with
the actions and attitudes of the parents.
More is learned through example than
through discipline, or instruction.

If the parents are kind and thoughtful,
the children will be affected.
If the parents watch their priorities,
the children will observe.

If the parents are real in their relationship
to Christ,
It will be reflected in the home, and
in the children.

Difficult? Yes! But the stakes
are high.
If one is not ready for such
responsibility, one should not marry.

*But, where does love of family
come in?
Are not parents to love their children;
and children, their parents?*

Yes, indeed, but in the **agape**
sense of “caring.”
If parents act ugly, children will
not like them, and vice versa.

*But I thought we had to honor
our parents.*

We do indeed, but the Greek word for
“honor” means to “attach value to.”

We must appreciate their value, and
children must respect their authority.
But if they behave badly, we cannot
respect them, as persons.

Just so, when children behave badly,
the parents may not like them.
Parents may care for them; and
care about them, but still not like them.

There is nothing in the Bible that says
a mother must like an unruly child.
She must not forsake her child, but forsaking
and disliking are two different things.

There is much of sentimental nonsense
in the attitude toward “blood ties,”
That causes people to accept rude and
irresponsible behavior from relatives.

Family ties require **agape** “caring”
as in any other relationship.
But bad behavior should no more be
tolerated from family than from outsiders.

Similarly, compromise of principle,
for the sake of family, is unsound.
So Jesus implied, when He said that His
true family are they who do the will of
God.

*And what of other relatives? What
is our responsibility to them?
What should our feelings toward
them be?*

The same as to all people of earth. We
should treat them with “caring.”
But feelings are still based on reactions
to their behavior, and therefore
unavoidable.

To ever offend God, or His family, just
for the sake of pleasing relatives,
Is a misapplication of the meaning and
obligation of family ties.

Much injustice has been done in the
world to conscientious people,
Through the unscrupulous use of
“family ties” as leverage.

Believers should know better. The Bible
helps us see the difference between
The bonds that unite God’s family, and
those that are the result of random
genetics.

*But after all, didn’t our parents
bring us into the world?
Doesn’t that sacrifice count for
something?*

And, why should it? Our birth was the
result of an act of physical love.
It was based on the desire of the parents
—not the child, who had no choice.

*But haven’t the parents fed, and
clothed and housed the child?
Shouldn’t that be cause for gratitude
on the part of the child?*

They brought the child into the world.
They ought to feed and clothe and
house it.

If the parents want gratitude and
affection from their children,
They must earn it—not by deeds of
obligation, but deeds of grace
and kindness.

So then, the same distinctions apply
in love of family, as in other relationships
“Caring” for one another is commanded—
“Affection and friendship” are earned.

It seems so simple—this
message of caring.
But Jesus considered it the

first commandment of all.

It is the essential ingredient
in every relationship—
God with His people; people with God;
people with people.

Thousands of books have
been written,
Attempting to solve the
human equation.

Psychologists, sociologists,
clerics and medics—
All have added their whims
and their wisdom.

(Whatever did they do before
the professionals
Rode to the rescue—those
errant knights with theories bright?)

If you care enough, you will
surely find a way
To handle your hang-ups
and treat people properly.

If you don't learn to live
with others in kindness,
You may have to live with
yourself in loneliness.

***B**ut, whence comes this
kindness you speak of?
Isn't that something the
Holy Spirit must give?*

The Spirit of God gives us
the spirit of caring within.
And, with the caring, the
motivation for kindness.

The expression of caring, in
kindness toward others,
Requires effort—cultivating
our patterns of behavior.

The natural tendency of the
mind is toward self.

Putting others first involves
changing our habits of thought.

Developing our “others-consciousness”
is essential

To harmony in the natural and
spiritual family.

David Morsey