

Short Steps

A spiritual journey

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Short Steps is a guided reflection that is meant to take a person from his or her most rudimentary experience of God to a clearer understanding of what we believe and why, and why we live and practice faith.

It is called “short” steps because it breaks down the basics into shortest possible mental steps!

There are many ways to make the journey.

You can read this little book at one sitting.

Or you can take your time, and give the truth of faith more time to sink in and take root. Here are two possibilities:

You can make a reflection before or after meals (or breaks) three times a day, and add one more before you go to bed. This way the journey will take a little over a week.

Or you can do one a day, and this way the journey will take a little over a month.

In either case, check off the box following the last reflection you read. Consider re-reading it before you read the next one.

The Short Steps

When I look out at the world, or look closely at anything, I experience that it comes from something greater, and this, of course, is God. []

I understand that the God who made the world must be as great as anything I can imagine, and this means, among other things, that He knows me, loves me, and pays attention to me. []

I understand that the God who made the world must be as great as anything I can imagine, and this means, among other things, that He made me to have what He made me to want—to live forever, to have all that I can dream of and more, and to see Him face to face. []

I understand that the God who loves us would not have asked us to live on earth where we have to work, sometimes suffer, and certainly die, if it were not for a very good reason—to give us more than He could give us if He made us to just appear in heaven. []

I have figured out that we are here to do what, in fact, we are doing, which is growing. And I see that, ideally,

growing means growing in love, and this makes us more like God, and prepares us to share His life more richly forever. []

I now see that to involve us in our creation through our work, our decisions, and our sacrifices, was God's way of letting us be "like" Him in the greatest way possible—we, too, at least a little, are the source of our own existence! []

I understand that everything comes from God and this means everything that happens, too. I understand that God knew what would happen when He made the world and what He did was to put into action a plan. []

I understand that God's plan for "everything" was also God's plan for each of us—that we be born, and what would happen the next day and the day after that, knowing how we would respond. This way God gets us to be the people He wants with Him in heaven—best prepared to see and understand Him—and we still do the work of making us us. []

When I think about the difference between who I am and who I want to be, I can see that God's plan is making each of us into no more than the "seed" of who we will be when we die, and this is a seed that God will transform when our

work on earth is over, and bring to life something so much more than we as seeds could ever imagine. []

I understand that God is infinite, and that He puts infinite attention into everything He does, and this includes every aspect of His plan, and this includes every aspect of my life, and this mean NO LESS ATTENTION than He has put into His plan for anyone else. []

I understand that my faith, especially my faith in God's plan, is the right reason for me to be thrilled to be who I am (so far) and to have the life that God has given me. []

I understand that to love myself is the necessary first step toward a sincere love of other people. I will never feel good seeing in the good in others unless I see the good in me. I do not need to feel that I am MORE special than others; but I do need to feel that I am no LESS special—and I am not! And it does not matter whether others can see this NOW. []

I understand that the peace which faith gives, peace with myself, with things I cannot change, and peace as I look into the future, comes from faith in God's plan. It comes from knowing that when things have happened and cannot be changed, God's plan has spoken, and the best thing for me has happened, whether or not I can see this YET. []

I understand that God made us for heaven, and so He made us to want heaven, and so nothing I can get here will ever satisfy me completely. That's why if I say "if only this... if only not that," I am suffering for nothing. Even if I get what I think I have to have, soon I would say "if only" for something else. []

I understand that the good things I have, and the good things I see, if only from a distance, help me to imagine the perfect life I will have with God forever. My dreams do not mock me; they give me joy. And looking into heaven is the most joyful thing I can do while I am still here. []

I understand that God has not asked me to love other people in order to say "good-bye" to them forever. No, God has asked us to love others because we are all His children, the family He wants with Him in heaven. In fact, we are going to share God's life AS a family, where all of us are going to share with all the rest of us, everything that each one sees in God and gets from God—just like in a good family here! In other words, in heaven, all of us are going to be richer for the holiness of each of us. []

Knowing that we are going to share God's life as a family helps me understand the grand purpose of God's plan when otherwise it makes no sense or does not seem fair: Each person has an irreplaceable part to play in the formation of

our family, and each person will share fully in the fruits of what our family has accomplished. []

Understanding that I am here to get ready for life with God, and to help my family do the same, gives my life an absolutely important purpose. Getting ready for life with God gives life the only absolutely important purpose it can have because nothing else accomplishes anything that lasts. []

Since we are going to be a family in heaven, we are in this together now. So that we would get together and work together, God made us so that our lives are in every way richer when we are together—if we are a family, a family in faith here on earth. This family is called the Church. In order for us to be the Church, one Church, a place where all God’s people feel they should get together, God had to send someone to call us together. This was Jesus. []

Jesus was God’s Son in a special way. This is true in several ways. First, he was “the” Son to teach us that we are all God children. We ARE God’s children—flesh of His flesh. Nothing can be if God does not sustain it. And how does God sustain things? He sustains them with His power, with His love, with Himself. There He is... in your fingers, in your hand, in your arm.... You are made of the love of God. God is *that* close, He is *that* aware of everything happening to you, you are *that* valuable. []

Jesus was born poor and this was just the beginning of a terrible life in which he was going to suffer some version of every hard thing that can happen to us. This way we know that God knows what we are going through; we do not feel worthless because we have to go through it; we understand that we, like Jesus, can conquer any hard thing if only by accepting it. []

In order to show the truth and not just talk about it, Jesus was asked to risk his life to teach it. His teachings threatened the religious establishment of the time; and they, really out of envy, threatened him. He did not run and was arrested, tortured, and crucified. []

Jesus' suffering spoke for God the Father just like everything else Jesus said and did. In this case, it was meant to show that God suffers with all of us in every hard thing that happens to us. God knows everything. He knows our thoughts better than we do. He knows our feelings for all that they are. And to know our feelings *for all that they are*, God needed to feel them as we do. Out of a parent's love for us, He is willing to do this. We are never alone; and least of all when we are suffering! []

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was meant to show us not just one but FOUR things. First, that God suffers with us. Second, by giving up his life, him-self, Jesus is representing what the Father did in making us out of His

love. Third, by giving up his life, him-self, Jesus could do no more to show us love; this represents the Father who put all His has into making us and could not love us more. Finally, faith and love unto self-sacrifice, are the way to glory. []

The night he was arrested, Jesus had one last supper with those he had chosen to take over for him after he was gone—the apostles. He wanted to do something to pass on to them his mission. He wanted to do something to pass on to them *himself*. He blessed bread and wine and told them that these were his body and blood that they should eat and drink so they would have him within them. This is the origin of what we call the Mass. []

As Jesus' followers continued to celebrate his last supper, they came to realize how divine was the plan that Jesus left behind the Mass. First of all, in showing us Jesus' decision not to run and to accept the cross, Mass is a way to repeat Jesus' sacrifice without having to crucify someone. Second, in the bread and wine we bless, Mass most obviously represents to each person present the love that God presented the first time on the cross. Finally, as a holy meal, Mass provides the most human way possible for Jesus' followers to feel they are a *family* and not some other kind of "group. []

Jesus' death showed NOTHING if Jesus' life came to nothing. The cross is beautiful only if it led to glory. God wanted to show that. And God knew that unless He did something to show that Jesus was, indeed, His Son sent to call us to be His family, we would not have a good reason to feel that God really wants us to be members of any particular Church. This is the main reason that Jesus appeared to the apostles after his death. []

If Jesus had not appeared to the apostles, we would not have a good reason to feel that God really wants us to be members of any one family in faith. We would not have a good reason to make sacrifices in order to be this family. We would not have what we need in order to realize our potential as God's people. Creation would not work! This is one important way we know that Jesus did appear to apostles after his death. []

The fact that we need some sort of resurrection in order to make sense of Christianity doesn't mean that it must have happened. We also need historical and credible testimony if we are to believe that something amazing happened after Jesus died. What we have is the testimony and life-sacrifice of the apostles. This is what we see in the explosion of missionary activity in the first century that carried the faith to many thousands and planted Churches all around the Roman Empire. []

We know about the testimony of the apostles thanks to the writings they left or inspired. These show that the first Christians proclaimed their faith in Jesus the Son of God—who could do anything, whose death saved the world, who was coming back soon—because they were convinced that he had risen from the dead; they did not claim that Jesus rose in order to keep following him even though he had gotten executed. []

Today we ourselves are struck by the beauty of the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. It rings true in our hearts *the* way that God would speak to us and show us the truth. Indeed, let us notice that Jesus' resurrection showed the truth that it confirmed—that we *were* made for life after death, that love unto self-sacrifice *is* the way, and we can trust God's plan even if it sends to us a cross! []

Our job now is to understand the truth, and decide that we indeed do see it. Our job is to resolve that we are going to live it, learning more about it, talking to God so that we will know Him better, and loving better wherever life gives us the chance. This way we will grow, help others grow, and help create a richer life for all forever. []

Because we understand that God has done He has done so much so that we would become the Church, we are called to commit ourselves to come to church, where we will learn more about our faith, grow spiritually in many ways, help

others grow if just by our presence, and build the life that all of us will share.

You made it!

A Practical Creed

God made us for life in heaven.

The way to heaven is a life of faith and love.

God guides us according to His plan for everything He sends into our lives.

We are going to share heaven as a family where all of us are going to be richer for the holiness of each of us.

Jesus was sent to teach the truth, to found the Church, and to accept the cross on which he taught and showed us love.

The Eucharist is the meal we share to be God's family, and it is also God's way to show us again and again the love He showed us first on the cross.

The rest of the life of Jesus was planned to show us that faith can conquer any adversity.