



# Gate 22

An Airport Offers Faith-Based Lessons  
for the Life of Almost Everyone

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# Prolog

The waiting areas at airports are spiritually unusual places. Especially for people with long waits, they become very familiar. This extends from the marks on the furniture to the faces of airport workers and fellow travelers. After a while, the waiting area becomes our *world*. It becomes *our* world; but tomorrow this same place becomes someone else's world. Especially because we are talking about airports, which facilitate many dramatic moments in people's lives, we can presume that the same place is sometimes the only common thread that connects some extraordinary pieces of human history. *Gate 22* is the story of one such place.

What makes *this* place special is the coincidence of events from which we might learn so much about life, especially as informed by faith.

# The Nice Looking Couple Who Were Not Smiling

Patrick and Judy were again not talking.

Another trip had not gone well.

Once again they had left for a trip with high hopes. This was trip number . . . , it was too many to count. Always the same illusion: *This* is what we need. *This* time it will work. We just need to get away. We just need to get away from the pressures that were getting to us. We just need to get to some place nice; then *we* will be nice.

Things start out OK. And then some stupid little thing happens and everything unravels, fast, and both are angry again.

It had been this way for a while, almost from the beginning.

Even before the beginning there had sometimes been trouble.

They had started out well enough. Boy meets girl; girl is good-looking; guy is nice; they go out; there is interest. They go out again. Everyone is behaving their best and they go out again. It's nice to have someone to go out with, and they go out again. Now there is a little game playing: I need to get the other person's "story." That goes OK. They keep going out. More game playing and they cross a couple of lines. Things are said. "I feel the same way." Now they have a "relationship." Other people have to approve. That doesn't go badly. Now it seems likely that they will get married.

There were, of course, a few bumps along the way. At some point they had become "comfortable" enough with each other to get angry. In retrospect, it always seemed silly—little things that seemed big at the time. Jealousy over almost nothing. One person getting loud. The other person getting quiet. Finally, more anger is expressed than either thought they had; and a couple of times it looked liked, "it's over." Then there was a reconciliation—it wasn't so much that

someone said “I’m sorry,” but more often, “I still care about you”—and making up was fun.

Finally, someone said “I love you” and, to the extent that they understood it, both of them meant it. They *had* come to think about each other all the time. They needed to communicate often; and the events of the days had to be shared; otherwise these events did not “mean anything.” There were many moments when the other person looked especially beautiful; and “I could barely believe my luck that I am here with you.” It was an especially new feeling when “if something happened to you, I was more upset than if it happened to me.” “This must be love,” they almost thought out loud.

They went to the Church, because this was expected, and the “classes” they took were more interesting than they expected. They liked hearing high sounding things about love—how love is holy, how caring about someone besides yourself is being like God.... Much of what they learned made sense; and they felt that they “got” it, and that they would remember.

One thing they did not remember was something they were especially asked not to forget: a rule about human nature called “we want our feelings to be returned.” What it meant is what it said: We want people to feel about us the way we feel about them. This means that if I love somebody, I need this person to love me. If I fall in love and it is really love, which means that I have seen your soul and it is beautiful to me, I need you to feel this way about me. In plain speech: If I adore you, I need you to adore me. This, it was explained, makes people who love each other very SENSITIVE to the other person, SENSITIVE to anything the other person says, or doesn’t say, or does, or doesn’t do, that makes me doubt that you are crazy about me.

What is worse, the explanation went, because people are so sensitive and easily hurt, they will instinctively hurt back. And, because the other person is also sensitive, this person gets hurt, and will instinctively hurt back, and so it goes.

In real life, this “dynamic” leads people back into selfishness. It leads to numerous scenes and other offenses that the offended party doesn’t forget. This, of course, results in the opposite of unity. Now both people are on edge, not just sensitive, but rather on the look-out for the next sin of the other person.

This is where Patrick and Judy had been for a while. They were both angry more days than not. There had been a couple of really ugly scenes. In their marriage classes, they had been asked to swear “I’ll never use the word ‘divorce’ unless I really mean it” and this word *was* used and maybe the person who said it did really mean it. (This was not really certain, however.)

But, once again, fear of consequences brought out a reconciliation, and the hope that getting away would help them make a new start.

It broke down quickly. He didn't carry her bag. She didn't thank him after he did. In terms of anything that might be gained, the trip was over before it started. Life, after all, offers almost countless opportunities for two people who are sensitive to offend one another. And this is even more true when there have already been lots of offenses and so there is little will to be careful and sweet.

Now they were back from another bad time. What was worse, their lay-over would be long. They were at Gate 22, sideways facing the airline counter. The flight was posted but no one was working. There were a few others waiting—a guy by himself, an older couple (who had somehow “made it”), a mom with two kids. But no one was talking and so there was nothing to overhear. All they could hear were recorded announcements. All they could see were people walking, not too many and not too fast. Who knows where they were going? Who cares?

The latest fight had something to do with the bag again. Now they were not talking—but both were thinking, angry thoughts.

Both were thinking that this was “it.” “I can't take it any more. This is not working. It's not going to work. He (she) just can't... just isn't the person I thought he (she) was. This is bad. This is sad. What do I do?”

Time passed.

It's funny how things sometimes happen.

You feel angry. More precisely, you feel hurt. You feel fear that all is lost, and that ending it will hurt even more, and be embarrassing.

You keep thinking. Perhaps you do not remember some of the lessons about love that might have helped you. Nonetheless, you do remember one.

Curiously, you don't remember the lesson that is of the most practical use to couples—we want our feelings to be returned.

Instead you think about the grandest thing you learned about love—love means that I am going to choose not to be selfish.

This means that I am going to choose not to make excuses for *not* thinking about what's good for you.

There are always excuses, reasons that justify my choice for me.

“You started it.” (Of course, as God sees it, maybe I started it.)

“You always get your way.” (Of course, the other person thinks the same thing about you.)

“I'm not getting what I need.” (But is that really true? Is what I say I need what I really need, or is it what I want? And if I really want what's good for *you* what should I be doing now?)

Instead:

Do I understand that love is about choosing to care for you, and not to worry so much about me?

Do I understand that this is the divine thing—the thing that makes us like God?

Do I understand that love is the purpose of life, the way we get ready for a richer life with God *forever*, and if this is not true than nothing really matters?

Do I love you, really? Did I ever love you? Did I love you because I saw your soul and what I saw was beautiful? Is your soul *not* beautiful now?

If I were not angry what would I see? If you really needed me, what would I do?

Was I never honest when I said I loved you?

Doesn't what I said mean that I should risk something for you? Is being put down the worst thing that can happen? Don't I get peace if I do what is right?

Do I want what we have to end because of *my* choice, *my* lack of love, *my* lack of conviction about what is love and what is right?

Will I not be happier with myself if I at least *try* to live the love I swore I would live forever?

Patrick and Judy sat in silence for a long time. At different times, both went to the bathroom. While there they took deep breaths and looked at themselves in the mirror.

When one or the other got back to the gate, “I’m sorry about the bag,” one of them said.

# Two People Who Were Not a Couple

Gate 22 was crowded today. People arriving did not have the luxury of putting space between them among the seats, or even picking a seat; there were only a couple of seats left.

A regular kind of guy sat next to a woman he did not know; and she kindly made a little more space for his stuff. Both were married.

“Hello,” he said.

“Hello,” she replied. And that was the extent of it for a while.

Finally, one noticed that the other was reading a rather long newspaper story about how houses today have bigger windows. “I’m for that.”

“Excuse me?”

“Sorry, but I couldn’t help notice that you were reading about how the new thing is to let more light into houses, and I’m really for it.”

“Is that what you have?”

“Not yet. We can’t quite afford it. But this is what I always wanted—light. It gives life. It lets you see the weather.”

“You like weather?”

“I love weather—all weather that *is* weather.”

“What do you mean?”

“Pretty much all weather that knows what it is—sunny, stormy, but not half and half.”

“I see what you mean.”

“Do you have a house that lets in light?”

“Actually I do. It was one of the reasons we picked it.”

“Do you have a view?”

“Actually we do. We look up into a hill.”

“That must be great.”

“It is great.” There was a pause. “If only my father thought so.”

“He doesn’t like it?”

“He doesn’t like anything—at least not anything *I* do.”

“I’m sure that’s not true.”

“I wish it wasn’t but it really is.”

The next comment was well considered in the short time before it followed: “Is it a problem?”

“It’s always been a problem. Nothing I ever...” Now there was another pause. “You don’t need me to talk about my problems.”

“Not a problem for me. I have parents, too.” This comment came with a smile.

“Well, it’s just that..., nothing..., nothing I ever did was ever good enough. Not compared to my brother. And when you think about the problems *he* gave them..., you would think I would look a little better to them.”

“You still feel it?”

“They still do it. ‘This is nice,’ he says, ‘but.’

‘This is no good; you should have called me first.’

‘Did you see the one your brother has?’

I just can’t do anything that pleases him.”

“If you can’t, are you sure you have to keep trying?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I think it’s a rule: If a person just can’t be pleased, you are allowed to stop trying.”

“He’s still my father.”

“Sure. And that means you owe him a certain respect and all that; but, within your heart . . . , if, for human reasons, he is a person who just can’t be pleased, doesn’t that free you from having to try?”

“Oh, he can be pleased—just not by me.”

“Same deal.” It was time for another pause. “I hope I’m not saying too much, here, but human parents are human. They have their own story. There were things they never learned. They got ‘confused’ by life in their own way. They have ‘blocks’—things they just can’t do.”

“But when it’s your father.”

“I’m sure that when you’re young it’s hard. But when we get older we can make distinctions. We can distinguish between our human father and our—I hope you don’t mind me saying this—our heavenly Father.”

“I don’t mind.”

“It’s our heavenly Father who knows the truth, right? And we know the truth about Him—He loves us, with all His heart, for who He made us.”

“It sounds good but...” This sentence was not cut off; it just ended.

“I know that sometimes ‘God loves you’ sounds like a slogan. ‘God loves you’; that’s nice; but God loves everyone, good for God. But it really isn’t that simple. First of all, nobody, not even God, can love what isn’t lovable. Even God can’t fall in love with a chair. You can only love what inspires love. That means that when we hear that God loves us, it means the soul He’s looking at is beautiful in His eyes. And when we hear that God loves us with *all His heart*—and we know it’s true because God can’t do anything half-way—it’s because He has put all He has into making us, into the depth and potential of our soul, and the planning of our life, so that when our work on earth is over, and we are the seed of the person we were always meant to be, He can change us and make us into someone He wants with Him forever. And please notice this: God is infinite; He can put *all He has* into the making of each of us; and that means absolutely no less into the making of any of us—whether or not the world, and your father, can see this now.”

“Well, that was quite a speech.” This was said smiling. “But it would still be nice to get a little support from your father.”

“Of course. But please notice this: Real happiness in this world starts with being happy with yourself, and being happy with yourself has to come *from* yourself—from your own decision to believe in you for who God made you. At some point in your life you have to do it on your own. This is true whether you come from a loving family, or, maybe, a family that was..., a little less loving. And, you know, it’s not necessarily easier to do it if you come from a loving family. After all, if all your life you always had all kinds of support, you probably got used to it—to believe in yourself *through other people*. Sometimes people get SO used to it, it becomes a need they can’t let go of. In the case of people who *didn’t* get much support..., they did NOT get used to it, they have probably been picking themselves up for years, and they have the extra incentive of having no choice!”

“You do make a good speech.” Again said smiling.

“I’ve done it before. My name is Terry, by the way.”

“Fran. Nice to meet you..., and thank you.”

# The Guy Who Kept Looking Straight Ahead

Jack wanted to go, and he felt guilty about feeling that way.

He was waiting at the airport, at Gate 22, for a flight that would take him far away. He had time on his hands, but there was no way he could concentrate on anything else besides his thoughts.

He had to get back home, this much was true, but he was leaving his brother James, who was dying, and Jack knew that he was not going to be able to come back before things happened.

He had come to say “good-bye” but couldn’t even say it. Instead he said something like “talk to you soon.”

Perhaps they would talk again soon, but it’s not like they talked often. They were brothers and there was love but they were not especially close.

Nonetheless, James was his brother and he was dying and Jack knew he would never see him again. This was almost more than his mind could bear.

James was dying and when he died..., what would this mean?

Their family was not especially religious. Heaven, maybe, but it was nothing you lived for.

Surprisingly, or maybe not, James had started talking about God. Maybe this was normal when you know you are dying; but there was something un-desperate about the way James talked about God. It was like he really, for the first time in his life, really knew Him.

According to James, he had gone to a church feeling desperate, and the father there laid out the facts of (eternal) life to him. According to James, the father said he could use his situation—the fact

that he was constantly thinking about himself, and looking at his-self, as a way to experience God. “It’s easiest to see the hand of God in the thing you know best.” After that, he said, it all follows. If there’s a God there’s no way we were made for death. And that’s why nothing here ever satisfies people for more than two minutes. “And anyway,” James said, “if our hope isn’t life with our Maker, what hope do we have? What does it matter what we do here?”

Jack was smart enough not to ask whether all this God talk was “just because you’re dying.” But, maybe, James had *started* thinking about God because he was dying, but it did not seem he was believing things just because he was afraid. He seemed to know what he was talking about; he seemed strangely, really peaceful; and he did not appear afraid.

“And anyway,” James had said, “if our hope isn’t life with our Maker, what hope do we have? What does it matter what we do here?”

More than anything else, this is what stuck with Jack. His instinct was to dismiss this kind of talk as just what you say when you have no other hope. But, then, what was *another* hope? I mean, Who isn’t facing death? I mean, death isn’t something we’re making up.

Jack began to think that the thing “we’re making up,” the thing we are kidding ourselves with, is the idea that life *here* lasts forever. Nobody says this, of course; and everybody will say they know better if you ask them; but how, really, do people live?

In his mind, Jack began to look at “life *here*” and to notice that just about “everything we give importance to” exists in the illusion that things don’t end.

“I guess we need to think we have a long, long time,” thought Jack, “because we also live in the illusion that real happiness is *coming*..., when finally I get that, when finally I get there, when finally something else..., then we will do, then we will go, then we will be....

But really...

Getting the big promotion, thinking I am a big deal, then what?

Making the big bucks, money is no object, then what?

Sitting in my big house, looking at my great view, how long can I do that? After the first half-hour, then what?

I mean, once I have it ‘all,’ the next thing that will happen is that I will lose it when I—if I’m “lucky”—get old, and then sick, and then die.”

Jack wasn’t too happy about these thoughts, not one bit.

“I mean, I thought this was about James dying,” he thought, “James dying, my brother dying, maybe too young. It’s always about *somebody else* dying. That’s how we see it. It’s always about somebody else dying; it’s never about life; it’s never about me; it’s never about how I should look at life, and keep looking at it long after the latest funeral is over.

But this is too morbid,” now thought Jack. “This can’t be a good way to live. Live while you can. That’s what we should do. Appreciate life while you have it. That’s living.” This sounded good but did not feel right.

“Yeah but when we are ‘appreciating’ things aren’t we usually just killing time? I mean, it’s OK when it’s happening; it distracts you OK; but isn’t that all that’s happening? That’s all that’s really happening when you’re watching a game. Eating is OK but mostly when you’re chewing. I mean, does anything we do make us really, deeply happy?

“Aren’t we really happiest when we are looking forward to something? Isn’t that when life is really satisfying and exciting... even though the things we are looking forward to never deliver what we were dreaming about? They never did before!”

Now Jack was really conflicted. On one hand, he was feeling really honest with himself, honest with himself about how he really felt and honest with himself about what he really saw when he looked out at life. On the other hand, he was also feeling shook up and scared, scared about the truth, scared about death, and confused about what to do.

Life, suddenly, made no sense. You look at what you want..., it is clear that you can’t have it. And yet you don’t want to *not* live. What the hell is going on? And what should you think about hell?

Back to religion? Is this right? Jack thought more about what James had said. James, after all, was actually facing death NOW. And somehow he was OK. What did he say? He said that he used the fact he was constantly thinking about himself, and looking at his-self, as a way to experience God. After that, he said, it got easy. If there’s a God there’s no way we were made for death.

And he had said more: He said that once you see God inside yourself... What did he say? ... now everything else makes sense. Now we know why nothing here was ever really enough. Now we know what our struggles in life are really all about.

Being honest with yourself, is that what it's all about? Not living by being busy? No more illusions about the future? No more illusions that things are "important"?

Does accepting death really let you see that your real life is not here?

Can we really live better by facing death sooner?

This was a lot for Jack to consider. He knew it was right—to at least consider these things. But he did not know whether he would have the..., what else can you call it? ...guts to do it.

# A Couple of Business Guys

Herb and Steve were happy enough with their trip. They got the deal done. The trip out was no problem. And, even if they had a while to wait, their flight from Gate 22 was listed “On Time.”

As usual, they had a good time together. (This was not their first business trip together.) And by now both considered the other a friend.

As usual, on finding a couple of seats away from the few others who were also waiting, the talk focused on their flight. “We’re listed on time and the weather is OK,” said Herb.

“And there is our plane,” said Steve.

Having reassured themselves that they were actually going home, the conversation turned to the deal and what they would say to their boss tomorrow morning. They wanted to get their story straight, and to make sure they would remember to tell their boss that they had looked at all the details they were supposed to check, and had promised nothing that they could not deliver.

They talked also about the two games they missed, and how their home team lost them both. Someone said, “they stink.”

There was more on the sports page to check, a couple more armchair comments, and then after a few moments of quiet, Steve volunteered that he was looking forward to seeing Jeanie, his wife.

“Of course,” said Herb.

More quiet.

“Well, aren’t you looking forward to seeing Sally?” asked Steve.

“Sure,” said Herb.

More quiet. Steve thought that he had picked up on something. After a bit more time had passed he asked, “everything OK?”

“Sure,” said Herb.

Steve didn’t exactly like the sound of it, but he thought better of asking again.

He didn’t ask again but he continued to notice that Herb just did not seem “right.” He had gotten real quiet now. He didn’t turn his back to Steve but he was looking far away and seemed too still. He stayed that way for a couple of minutes more. Finally,

“I got a problem,” he said.

Steve thought it wise to act a bit surprised. “What’s up?” he asked.

“I’ve done something stupid.”

“We’ve all done something stupid.” Steve thought that this was smart.

“Not this stupid.”

“What’s happening, Herb?”

“You know that...” Herb started to say; “...it’s doesn’t matter who. Anyway, there’s this girl, and she’s been flirting with me for a while. And I didn’t really think too much about it. She’s good-looking anyway. And I thought we were just having a little fun. And then there was this..., time. And she says, ‘it’s early, how about a drink?’ And I knew right away that this was not smart. But, you know, the only thing I could think of saying was the truth—‘I’m married; I don’t think I would be comfortable.’ But that sounded too..., what do you call it? ...like I’m some kind of a baby or something. And she is really good-looking and I didn’t want her looking at me like some kind of loser; and so...”

“Oh boy,” said Steve.

“I mess up the very first time I go out for a drink,” said Herb, whose eyes were now moist. “But it didn’t stop there. I felt like garbage—but I also felt..., other stuff. Her place made it easy; her

husband is often traveling. And she was easy. And I kept saying to myself, ‘What are you doing?’ but I couldn’t say no.”

“Is this still going on, Herb?”

“No. I finally found enough guts—or maybe I just got enough scared—to say, ‘I love my wife. I can’t do this any more.’ And, you know, she was pretty good about it, and that’s been it, for a while now.”

“Do you, Herb?”

“What?”

“Love your wife.”

“Yup. And that’s what’s been killing me. I think about it every day. I never did anything like this before. I never even thought about it. I never even thought I *could* do it. Now, I look in the mirror.... Actually I try not to look in the mirror; but when I do, what do I see? Who do I see? What am I supposed to do now? What do I do about Sally? What is this going to do to her?”

“Are these real questions, Herb?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, are they questions meant for me? Are you OK if I tell you what I think?”

“Yes. You can start by telling me I’m an ass.”

“Nope. Don’t want to do that, Herb. But if it’s OK, and you won’t think I’m preaching to you..., without a license..., I’d like to tell you what I think I would hear if I confessed in church what you just confessed to me.”

“Go ahead.”

“First off, You’re not an ass. I think you’re a human being, like the rest of us.

We all make mistakes. But if we learn from our mistakes...

And, really, is there any *other* way we learn?

When things go right you take it for granted. You don't think about it. You don't learn.

You learn when things go wrong. But if you learn, now you're smarter than you were before. You're a better person than you were before, not worse because of what happened.

That's one of the principles of forgiveness: When we learn, we turn something bad that we did into something good that we now know. We are better, not worse because what we've done."

"How can it be that easy," asked Herb.

"Is it easy, Herb?" responded Steve. "Have the last couple of..., is it months..., been easy?"

"No."

Steve went on: "But if you have learned..., about how much you really love Sally, about why we have rules for marriage, about what situations never to put yourself in, about what matters and what doesn't, how are you not *better* because of what happened?"

Steve went on: "But I happen to know, if you confessed at church what you confessed to me, that you would be told one more thing."

"What?"

"One thing that God wants in exchange for forgiving you?"

"What?"

"Compassion."

"Explain it."

"You now know that bad things can happen to good people. You now know that anyone can mess up if you put him in the wrong situation. And I hope you now know that people can learn

from their life's experiences and turn bad that they've done into something good.”

“I think so.”

“So, your job now is to practice compassion—to not judge so quickly when you see people who haven't yet learned what *you* didn't always know. Your job, maybe, is to show compassion to someone else who may someday confess to you.”

“Is that what you're doing?”

“Maybe.”

Herb, it turns out, wasn't quite convinced. “Are you sure God forgives me?”

“I think, Herb, you already understand that God forgives you. I bet the real issue for you is: Do you forgive yourself? In other words, do you accept that you had to learn about all this the hard way? Do you accept that you were not as smart or strong as you thought you were? Do you accept that you are human like the rest of us?”

Herb was still listening.

Steve continued with his point: “But, of course, accepting that you're human is accepting you're not God. It's actually the most basic form of repentance that there is.”

Herb was still listening.

Steve continued: “But there's a lot to be gained if you can do it. It's hard to be God. It's easier to be who you really are—as long as you are trying to do your best and to keep getting better.”

“I feel better,” said Herb. “But as long as you have so much to say...” (Herb was smiling) ...do I have to tell Sally?”

“I'm not a judge of these things, Herb. But I think that if I asked the same question at my church they would tell me..., or maybe better they would ask me, ‘if Sally's not asking, and nothing is happening NOW that she could not live with, what good will it do to tell her?’ I think this is right—as long as the faithfulness you are going to be showing her is real.”

“Thank you for talking to me,” said Herb.

“Thank you for trusting me,” said Steve.

# Somebody With a Bible and Somebody Else

This was a scene that Gate 22 has seen many times before—somebody with a bible and somebody else.

The decisive move was from somebody else. He thought it was an innocent attempt to be human and nice. “It’s nice to see you reading your bible,” said Jerry.

“All the time,” said Ray, “all the time. Do you read the Bible?”

“I hear the bible read a lot,” said Jerry, “and I think about its teachings all the time.”

“So, you believe in the Bible,” said Ray with a certain satisfaction.

“Certainly,” replied Jerry, “as long as you use it the right way.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well,” replied Jerry, “I do notice that, sometimes, I hear people talk about the bible, or quote the bible, as though that’s *it*. It’s *true*, just as it’s written, just because it’s written.”

“Well,” responded Ray, “it’s the Word of God, isn’t it?”

“I think of it as the Word of God, too,” said Jerry, “but I don’t think it’s especially obvious what that means.”

“What do you mean?”

“It *is* obvious that the bible is a collection of ancient writings; and I know that Christians have treasured it almost from the beginning; but it’s not obvious that these writings are from God in any

special way. Actually, at first glance, it's looks like they're not?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, every religion has its writings. And every religion says its writings come from God. But we look at other people's holy books and we say, 'nice story, nice ideas,' but they still look like ancient writings to us. The miracle stories and such are just the kind of stuff that ancient writers would use to justify their religion. To us today it's all just too amazing to take seriously. But how, really, are our writings any different?"

"So, you don't believe in Jesus?"

"What I believe about Jesus is besides the point. The point, the question is: Why do I believe that the writings in the bible are special, and what does that tell me about how to use them?"

"It's the Bible!"

"I'm sorry, I didn't get your name."

"Ray."

"I'm Jerry."

"Nice to meet you."

"OK, Ray, I understand that the bible seems real special if it's the only "Good Book" you've ever known; but it isn't the only "Good Book" that people believe in. And it isn't a holy book to most people in the world.

Ray had no comment.

Jerry continued: "The Hindu books are older. The Moslem book *is* a book, it's a single book and we know who wrote it, and where, and when, and it comes with a story that says it's inspired. That's more than we can say for our book.

It isn't a single book. We don't know where most of it is from, exactly. Most of it is not about Jesus. The New Testament is only about a quarter of the whole thing, you know. It wasn't a book

until the Church put it together about 200 years after Jesus. And when the Church put it together, it decided not to include lots of writings that called themselves ‘gospels,’ ‘letters of Paul’ to various places, writings by the apostles, ‘acts,’ all kinds of stuff. The Church realized that there was a lot of nonsense out there in the name of ‘apostles.’”

Ray didn’t know what to say.

Jerry asked him, “if I’m disturbing you, we can drop it.”

“It sounds to me that you’re just not a believer.”

“I think we have a problem, Ray, if it’s OK if somebody says, ‘I’m a believer, don’t talk to me about the facts.’”

“Your facts.”

“Not my facts, Ray. That bible there, in your hand, it comes from somewhere. The words were written down by someone at a certain place, at a certain time, in a certain language—and the language was not English.”

Ray knew that.

Jerry went on: “For these writings to have survived from when they were written until today, they had to be copied over and over. Do you know where the oldest copies we have are, and how UN-old they are?”

Ray didn’t know.

“The *oldest* copies date from 300 years *after* Jesus.” Jerry let there be a pause. “But that’s not so important. What is important is that these are ancient writings that look like many other ancient people’s writings and if we are going to say they are different we have to be able to say ‘why.’”

“It sounds,” said Ray, “that you just don’t have faith.”

“I think I have faith, Ray; but I know that faith can’t just be believing what you were told, or believing what you want. We need to be able to say ‘why’ we believe.”

“Why? Why do we have to explain it if it’s faith?”

“Because God gave us minds. He wants us to use our minds, all the time—to know what to think and what not to think. To know what to think when people tell us stuff. And besides this, if we can’t explain ‘why’ we believe things, for reasons that make sense, what do we say to someone who believes something else *and calls that his faith!*?”

Ray stayed quiet.

Jerry decided he was still welcome to speak: “I can tell you a little bit about *my* faith, Ray. I believe, I believe deeply, that God wants all His children to be one family, one family in faith. I think all Christians understand this; all of us want to share our faith; all of us want everyone to agree with us. Well, how can that happen if it’s OK to declare something ‘my faith’ and now I don’t have to explain why, and I don’t have to answer questions, and I don’t have to explain why your faith is not mine.”

“So, what is your faith?”

“Thanks for asking,” said Jerry. “My faith is my experience that God is behind everything. My faith is that He made us, and made us for life with Him forever, and that we are here now so that He could give us *more*, to be people *we* made *us* to be—or more correctly, people that we helped Him make us. And I also believe—actually, I would say I ‘see’—that God works with us, through everything He sends into our lives, knowing how we will respond, so we will turn out to be people *He* wants with Him in heaven. And from this faith I just summarized quickly for you, I get to believe in myself for who God has made me so far; I feel His love for who He has made me so far; this helps me love other people so I will grow in His image for a richer life with Him forever; and, of course, all this gives me joy when I think about what is coming.”

“How is that not the faith of the Bible?”

“It *is* the faith of the bible, Ray, at least as far as I can see it. But the reasons I see things this way... it’s not just because something is written. I believe for reasons written into me, reasons that, as far as I can see, were written into us all, things that you, too, can check out in your own reflections and look at the world for yourself, right now, any day, every day.”

Ray was willing to listen to more.

“These reasons, Ray, also tell me that God wants all His children to be one family. They tell me that this meant He had to send someone to speak in His name. For lots of reasons I can see that this was Jesus; and the New Testament is our most important record of what he said and did. BUT, the New Testament still reads like an ancient writing in many places. My experience of God does NOT show me the truth of everything it says ‘just as it says it.’ But this is not upsetting to me. Actually, it makes sense! After all, if it’s true that we are here to become God’s family, actually, to grow up *as* God’s family, a process that has obviously taken centuries so far, I would expect that the first Christians would have a more ancient understanding of Jesus’ teachings than we do today—after 2000 years of thinking about these teachings, and living them, and all kinds of progress. So the idea is: We use what we know now..., we use our experience of God today, to look back at the bible and that’s how we know what’s true and what has to be understood differently. That’s what I meant about using the bible the right way.”

Ray was not so much critical but inquiring when he said: “Seems like it’s *you* who can just believe what you want to.”

“That would be true, Ray, if I just say ‘that’s it’ because I say so. But that’s not what we are talking about. We are talking about explaining things so that other people can see it, too. We are talking about the idea that this is the way they, too, will grow; and we as God’s people can grow together. And do notice, Ray, I don’t claim that I have explained the reasons I have the faith I am talking about—not right now in the last couple of minutes. But I do believe, and it is my experience, that if I can explain things calmly, almost anyone will see the truth of it. And if this means that they have to give up some stuff that they used to believe..., because it’s in the bible or because they thought it was the only way to go if we are to stick with faith in Jesus..., they will see that there is a deeper idea that gives them so much more than, maybe, they are being asked to give up—like hell!”

“No hell?”

“Want to read about it?”

“Why not?”

“Try this, go to [www.thefaithkit.org](http://www.thefaithkit.org), click on “Panorama,” and then click on “Kirk.”

“Can you write that down? asked Ray.

# The Guy With Many Papers

Andy didn't mind his long wait at Gate 22. He brought work and he had plenty to do.

"I'm getting an awful lot done," he said to himself. "This will impress them." (Andy was not aware that his bosses were impressed mostly by how they could use him so they would look better with less work for themselves.)

"CL-7 is doing great." (Andy did not avert to the fact that CL-7 was an overpriced reading light endorsed by some celebrity who really didn't read much.)

A pretty girl in tight pants walked by. Andy had inarticulate but definite thoughts about the matter. (It did not occur to him that if this girl could read his thoughts she would have laughed.)

Back to work. "Man, the 'restock' numbers are way off." Andy started getting angry. "What am I going to do with these people?" He was getting madder and madder. "How am I going to fix this?" Still more upset. "The G-D world is against me." (Andy did not relate this last statement to the fact that the actual problem was a one day delay in restocking the celebrity lamps.)

Another somewhat good-looking woman walked by. This time Andy was too angry to think about it much.

"I'm going to have to talk to them on Monday," he decided. (He did not know that whenever he talked to them and walked away, they invoked their nickname for him which was "Chuckles.")

Andy continued working and feeling important for it. He perceived that the other people around him were impressed. (Most were thinking other things.)

After a time, and after going over the same numbers a couple or three times, Andy allowed his mind to wander. He started by thinking about his favorite thing—the promotion he expected, and an office of his own, and his own secretary. He imagined that she would be plenty in awe of him.

(This was not likely.)

He thought of looking out that office window and feeling just great. (He did not realize that, even if it happened, looking out that window, he would be imagining being somewhere else.)

He thought about a bigger house. He thought about that high-end car. He thought about how cool he would look arriving anywhere in that. (He did not remember that he felt this way the last time he bought a new car, and the feeling hadn't lasted for more than two weeks.)

Another pretty girl walked by. Andy conjured up a quick fantasy. (He did not think about the fact that he was already married.)

Going back to the house in his mind, Andy imagined a big-screen TV. (This was not the first time he had imagined a big-screen TV. Once again, he was imagining himself showing it to someone, and changing quickly from among many channels. He did not think about how many hours of the rest of his life might he end up sitting in front of that screen. And he had never looked at the face of someone else looking at TV.)

Now an older man walked by. He was walking very slowly. "Man, these old people are always in the way." (Andy did not consider the question, How will you be different if you are still traveling when you are their age?)

Now a "doofy" guy walked by, thought Andy. (He had no idea how he had looked walking by, with his papers and his electronic thing, and pulling the other thing that was mounted on wheels.)

Now a cleaning lady walked by. "How does she stand her life?" wondered Andy. (He did not know that she was praying at that very moment, and, conscious of God's love, eager to see Him, at peace in her heart, in love with her family, she was actually the happiest person who had ever crossed his path.)

Back to work. It seemed as though the people around him expected this. (They did not.)

Andy went over the numbers once again. (They had not changed.)

He again envisioned himself putting those guys in shipping straight. (Again he did not hear them call him "Chuckles.")

The cleaning lady came back walking the other way. This time seeing her made him feel important, powerful, cool.

It was time to look at the newspaper he picked up at the stand for free. (He was not conscious of the fact that he didn't really want a paper, but there it was for free.)

He saw some headlines, mostly about politics. "This guy is an ass," he said, not remembering that he voted for the ass.

"You can't do that," he said, with regard to some policy decision he read about, at least as far as the first paragraph. (It did not occur to him that if someone had asked him, "why not," he would not have known what to say.)

He took a good long look at the stock page. (He didn't actually have stock but, not quite consciously, he figured that the people around him expected him to have stock.)

Another *real* pretty girl walked by. She was with some guy. (Not quite consciously, Andy felt a twinge of despair.)

It was time to check out the sports. (This was one case where what Andy wanted to do and what Andy thought was expected coincided.)

"They lost again," he discovered. "They stink." (Andy had never noticed that he always said "they" lose but "we" win.)

Now Andy began to imagine himself a star in some sport, any sport, every sport. (He never thought about the fact that there had never been the slightest possibility of him being a star in some sport. Nonetheless, he often imagined himself in front of lots of people cheering, the game on the line. He never thought about the fact that the actual life of a star was constant traveling, and countless hours of watching television and playing cards.)

Now Andy focused on the bad performance of one particular player. "He stinks." (Andy did not think about what the players always think but never say when people criticize them: "Hey, man, it's only a game. You never played the game. I get paid, a fortune, anyway. Get a life.")

Andy liked stats. In today's paper there were a couple of charts of "all-time" stats. Andy had an opinion of the relative "greatness" of the first, second, and third on the list. (He had no opinion of

the actual “greatness” of people in the eyes of God or what that might mean.)

Andy took a breath and started to focus on the weekend. “It will be great,” he thought. (But he had said the same thing last week, and the weekend wasn’t so great.)

Finally, he began to anticipate seeing his wife. It was hard not to feel a little uneasy about this. Things had not been great for a while..., first they got boring, and then a little nasty. But lately, something extra seemed to be wrong. Nonetheless, thought Andy, “she should be happy to see me. And she will want me to make her feel good.” Andy had seen too many pretty girls in the airport; he was definitely expecting to have sex when he got home. (Andy did not know that his wife was thinking something else. She was thinking about a guy from work named Herb.)

# The Guys With No Hats

There were four of them who arrived at Gate 22; or maybe there were five; they were moving around so much, it was kind of hard to count.

They were excited.

From a look at their stuff they were going on some sort of trip, and maybe into the wild.

Except for one of them, who was a bit of a slob, you could see that they had put their packs together carefully, and it did appear that they knew what they were doing.

You could tell it was not their first trip, not their first trip together and not their first trip far away from the comforts of home.

What was not obvious from the equipment was the philosophy of life that had inspired them to venture out, again.

It started as it always does.

Boys are born. Boys learn to walk. At some point, somebody gives them a ball. The idea is that they throw it. Later, the idea is that they catch it. In time, somebody teaches them, or they watch and figure out, the rules for some games.

Of course, by now they were also watching the big guys on television, and they had their favorite teams, and they imagined one day that they would play for their team.

In the meantime, nowadays, they wanted and expected to play for their school or league; and this way they would get a coach and a uniform; and people would watch.

Mixed with sports was interest in adventure.

Once upon a time, it started with stories, the stories of family members and other visitors who had been somewhere and done something. Nowadays, interest mostly originated on television, with dramas and documentaries, about the wild, the water, and faraway lands.

“Some day,” many kids thought, “I’m gonna do that. I’m gonna go there. Maybe even fight in a war.

For those who did, it was mostly organized by some one else. (That was especially true in the case of a war!) A school club offered an experience or a trip; you signed up, paid up, and somebody who knew what he or she was doing was in charge.

The guys with no hats were different—and always had been.

It started with sports.

There were adult-organized teams, it was true, but, there was another option. It was a throwback to times gone by. Lay out your field, pick sides, and play.

This seemed a better way to go. There were no adults to tell you what to do. No adults who did not pick you or play you; and if they played you they yelled at you. Play yourself and you play more. You score more points. You make more “stops.” You make up your own plays; and that was fun, too. If you were bad at something you try to get better on your own.

Oh, maybe your mother wasn’t watching. But wasn’t that better?

Maybe it would have been nice to have umps and refs and to argue less over too many calls. But, really, you didn’t argue over so many calls.

Uniforms are cool. But were they really worth the surrender of yourself to get them? For the guys with no hats, the answer was no.

They felt the same way about adventure.

In their time there was no war; and nobody remembered hearing about any clubs to take you climbing or sailing or into a cave; and so if you needed to have adventures—to get up there and out there, and to see if you were strong and brave—you had to do it yourself.

In the beginning, all you needed was a bicycle. You didn't get far, but as far as you were concerned, you were already exploring, and getting into and out of trouble. You got much farther with a driver's license. That could mean days away, and a whole continent to explore.

And this is what the guys with no hats did. Nobody told them where to go or what to do. They mostly stumbled onto a couple of leads and a little research did the rest. Nobody told them how to plan, or prepare, but a little imagination took them a long way—and, sometimes, it took them *the* long way, the wrong way.

But this was the adventure. Planning with little help and no supervision. Going with maps which did NOT show most of the things they would see on the way. Following the route—until they lost it and got lost. Making it to the top by your own steps, that you yourself chose, using such skills that you yourself learned.

Making it to the top—the second time they tried. Learning how to do it—by many dumb mistakes. Getting into situations where no one else could get you out. This was how they liked it—once they did get out!

From the beginning the truth became obvious. The best stories came from the things that went wrong, the bad situations, the bad weather, the times they were trapped or just scared. This was adventure.

And with a little more experience and a little more money, even more was possible. You could leave your country, to go to see really famous things, to go to where your language wouldn't help you, to really faraway places, where life is really different, and almost no one ever goes.

These weren't the kind of places you could go with a club. Most were not places you could go with a tour. And even if you could, a tour was planned by someone else; a tour was lead by someone else; a tour threw you together with people you had not chosen. (And if a tour was interesting it was also expensive.)

No, the guys with no hats were interested in more than that. The world was getting smaller; we'd better go before it's paved.

So, here they were again, another adventure, again leaving from an airport. Once again, everyone was excited. Because of this particular trip, the talk was different, but really it was the

same.

As always, much of the talk was going over things that everybody already knew.

“Our flight should leave on time. This means we’ll be getting there in the morning.”

“Try to get some sleep. After they feed us. Are you going to watch the movie?”

“I never complain about airline food. Who should expect great food when they’re flying you over an ocean, taking you in a few hours where it used to take a month?”

“Remember, when we get there you go for the..., and you to the..., and you check the..., and you watch the bags.”

“By noon we’ll be seeing (something) for the very first time. By night we’ll have already crossed the (something else).”

“Remember about the people. They’ll understand if you don’t (this); but they’ll get mad if you do (that).”

“Remember, before we cross the (it), we have to get the (thing).”

Often, all this talk about the future generated even more animated talk about the past.

“Remember when we crossed the (some place else)? I thought we’d never make it?”

“Remember when he went for (some other thing)? He thought he’d never get back.”

“That was the tireddest, sorest, most scaredest, I think I ever was.”

Some of the stories *had* to be retold. But they weren’t retold too often; and so they never got too old.

It was great to relive the great adventures. Reliving them by retelling them was much less scary than living them the first time. It was a tradition to relive the great adventures. They were part of their identity now.

And there was one more tradition that, here at Gate 22, had to be repeated. The guys with no hats needed to have something to drink. One of them needed to make this toast: “So, here we are, about to leave for (there) to do (this and that). We will be gone for the next (so many days). During this time things will happen that we will never forget. And we have absolutely no idea what these will be.”

“Salut.”

# A Family Circus

Jeff had been watching the guys with no hats.

Initially, his instinct was to be critical. After all, a bunch of guys usually acts like a bunch of bums. Jeff was even a little concerned about it. After all, he was here with his family, his wife Doris and their two little girls. He did not want them to hear crude talk, not words, not topics, not anything.

But this was not happening. Oh, these guys were a little loud, but not much louder than you have to be in a group, and they didn't appear to be rude to anyone around them. A couple of them were even talking to the people around them. The people were interested in where they were going.

Jeff was not talking too much to his family. They had already had a long day; and Doris was reading; and the kids were looking at little screens.

Jeff could have occupied himself with something, too. Instead, he found himself interested in the guys with no hats—and no tattoos nor earrings, either—who didn't seem crude and did seem friendly and were obviously going on some kind of trip especially for guys.

He was interested but conflicted. Something warned him he might not want to listen. He was not quite able to be honest about it with himself, but he knew that something inside him said, “don't pay attention.”

He went back and forth within himself for a while. He had time; they had gotten to Gate 22 early; and the flight—it was just announced—was going to leave late.

The guys with no hats reacted to that. They didn't seem too bothered. And Jeff clearly heard someone say, “it's not going to be a problem; they can easily make it up—as long as we actually leave.”

Jeff was listening now, picking up sentences and parts of sentences.

“This doesn’t change anything. You still have (this) and you still have (that); and you still go (there); and you still watch the bags.”

The guys with no hats laughed. Jeff got the idea that it was always the same guy with the job of watching the bags. In any case, it was pretty clear that the guys with no hats were pretty used to teamwork. Jeff kept listening.

“Try to remember the first time you see it.”

“If we start on time we’ll be OK.”

“Remember the last time we left before dawn?” This provoked more laughing.

Jeff tried to hear what happened the last time they left before dawn. Apparently they went the wrong way and didn’t realize it until, finally, they saw something and somebody said, “Ah oh, that shouldn’t be there.” This brought about more laughing.

The guys with no hats just kept talking. Jeff was not clear on where they were going, only that they would be out of touch with the world for a while, and that was neither bad nor good.

He could tell—more or less he heard—that this was hardly the first time they had been “out there.” He started hearing names of places—places that sounded Spanish, and African, and Asian. Trouble with police here and there and somewhere else. A night in the cold, a day without food. Now such a thing made everyone laugh.

Jeff, however, was not laughing. In truth, the more he listened, the more unease he felt. It was almost sadness and, at first, it was not quite conscious enough to analyze. Only slowly—because this lousy flight was going to leave late—did the truth creep clearly into his mind.

He was bothered because he was not going.

He was bothered because he had never gone.

It’s not that he had had a lot of ambition—not for this sort of thing. Oh sure, there was some. He had had friends. They talked about going here or there, maybe even doing this or that. But

nothing ever worked out and life led them (all) to other things.

Life led Jeff to school and then to work, a good job that justified what his family spent on school. He met Doris in the normal way; they starting going out, doing the normal things; and now here they were with there two little girls. They were going on “vacation.”

“Vacation.” The word itself was a little embarrassing thought Jeff. Vacation, a safe vacation, pre-paid, all planned, they got a good deal. They were going to see a (show), ride in an apparatus designed to move tourists, and stand in line for other things.

This was not an adventure, and Jeff, in fact, had never had one.

Instead, what he now had was a family, and a mortgage, and a lawn, some place he had to be a 8:30 A.M., five days a week.

Now this was not the first time Jeff had thought about such things. The truth is he had felt “unfree” for quite some time. It was not a good feeling but, then again, what else does one do?

Unfortunately, here, there appeared to be guys whose life was different. For sure these were guys who were doing stuff that Jeff had only imagined and now it was too late.

This was sad; no it was scary; and now a jab of desperation hit Jeff. Suddenly there was a lot more going on within him than could possibly appear to anyone just looking. No one in his family looked up. (And everyone else was looking at the guys with no hats.) Yet, within Jeff thoughts and feelings were flying around and some were reaching his stomach.

“This is my \_\_\_\_ life,” he said to himself, or perhaps more precisely, he screamed to himself. “I’m trapped. What do I do? How did this happen?” It did not occur to Jeff he was thinking things backwards.

At this point, Jeff was no longer paying attention to the guys with no hats. At this point, he was lost within himself. “Truly lost,” he almost thought explicitly. Jeff felt trapped; he felt cowardly, he felt stupid. He began to wonder how he was going to get through this vacation. “It was already awful,” he thought. And the riot of bad emotions continued to rage within him.

Finally, something good happened, a good coincidence. He was in the very process of asking himself, What the \_\_\_\_ is life for? when one of his little girls needed something. Actually, bored

with her little screen, what she needed was attention. Jeff was not so tortured that he could not respond. He let his little girl sit on his lap and almost immediately the storm within him began to subside. “Speaking of life,” he was almost conscious of thinking, “here’s a life that needs me.”

Being a good guy, who did things right, Jeff was not a stranger to faith-based thoughts. He had heard the phrase many times, “the purpose of life,” and he knew that it implied a question that had to be worth answering.

He knew more than a little about faith’s observations:

“Life can’t be all about fun because fun doesn’t last, and even if it did fun is all about you.”

“Life can’t be all about you because... because it can’t. When people try, their life ends up empty and they become ugly.”

“We are here because God wasn’t selfish. Did He make us so *we* could be selfish?”

These thoughts were coming to Jeff one after the other. He felt that he was thinking right and great things, and he found his spirits lifting. He continued:

“We are here because God gave life. Isn’t that what we are supposed to do, too?”

“Doesn’t giving life cost life? It’s not just one act. It’s following through. It’s having a baby and then the work *begins*. It’s countless sacrifices all day long. Isn’t this the way we can give our life, give *up* our life without dying? Isn’t this the holiest thing that most of us get to do?”

“And if it gives life to somebody else, and makes *us* more like God in the process, well, ...isn’t this the purpose of life on earth?”

“Giving life to get life.”

“And if I’ve got one main thing that I do with my life, didn’t I pick the best one?”

Jeff was ready for his vacation.

# A Young Man Who Looked Sad

Larry was more than sad. The feeling was closer to “sick.”

He had never had a better time visiting Barbara. Her family was great to him. She had made great plans. They had had great times, great talks, and a couple of great dinners. Now he was going home and it would be weeks, maybe more, before he could come back.

The last couple of hours before they left for the airport were just awful. The prospect of saying “good-bye” hung over his head as though it were a knife. They tried to talk normally, but he, at least, he knew, was faking. He tried to make leaving sound less ominous. “I’ll call when I get *there*, and then as soon as I get home. And, of course, I’ll be ‘right back.’” But, of course, this wasn’t really true.

Now he was by himself at Gate 22. He had already called once and knew it would not be smart to call again so soon.

Larry felt sick. “What is going on?” he asked himself.

He thought he knew what it wasn’t. Larry knew himself well enough to know that he was proud of himself for how well he knew himself. All that to say that he knew about insecurity and jealousy and he really didn’t see these working on him.

Lots a guys leaving a pretty girl in another place would be suffering insecurity, for sure. She’ll be there, going to work, getting attention. “I know how guys are.” She’ll get attention and she’ll like it; and, how, really will she resist it?

Somebody will be good at giving attention. “Somebody with no conscience,” this was something that many guys would fear quite clearly.

They would not be so clear about their fear that it might not be somebody with no conscience

but rather a *good* guy, with more money, some kind of title, maybe even somebody famous. (On no conscious level could most guys admit that it might be somebody better looking.)

Larry knew enough about life to consider that this was how he felt, but he was fairly sure that the answer was no. He was not an especially insecure person; and Barbara was never a person to play with his feelings. More than that, he believed, she really did care for him, and she was happy with him, and she was not someone who was needy for every little bit of attention that she could get. Larry was pretty secure about these thoughts.

He even had a little evidence. He knew that she had friends nearby, friends at work, friends from school—guys. He had met some of her friends from work, and they seemed OK, and she never talked about anyone in a way that made him wonder. He was OK. He was fairly sure of that.

He *knew* he was not playing the possessive game with the phone. He knew when to call, and when not to; and this was no problem. He hardly ever called to “check on” things, but almost always for a visit—because he really wanted to talk to her, to tell her about what was going on with him, and important to him....

And wasn't this something special...., he was even interested in listening to her. He found that he cared about her day, her thoughts, her feelings—especially but not exclusively if they involved him—and he just plain loved the sound of her voice.

And he loved to look at her face.

And he was coming to face the fact that he loved her.

“What does it even mean?” he wondered. To love someone, to be “in” love, what does it mean?

Larry knew that it was more than desire. He had felt that before. (Who hadn't?) He had felt that before and you could see the difference. You never really thought about the other person—as a person. You didn't really care about what she thought and felt—unless it would affect how she was with you. Sex was the main thing on your mind. And the first time she said something stupid, did something selfish, or put *you* down, she stopped being so pretty, and the end was in sight.

This was different. There was something about just *being* with her. There was a joy in it. A joy Larry had never experienced before. It was that unique happiness you feel when you are *not* conscious of anything missing. Your heart feels “full” and you are living, maybe for the first time in

your whole adult life, purely in the present.

Sharing your thoughts and experiences is not just fun but necessary. It's "necessary" because when you do it you feel, not just more alive, but that your life is more.

Making yourself known to another person, who wants to know you, who wants to know all about you, and really seems to really care... this someone somehow makes your life, your *self*, bigger, richer, deeper. (Boy this stuff is hard to put into words!)

For Larry things were coming into focus. "But it only works," he thought, "if this other person is really special.

Lots of people can be interested in you. But you yourself are not all that interested in lots of people. And some of the people who might be interested in you are not themselves interesting at all. (Some are even creepy.) Their interest doesn't thrill you all that much.

But, if another person is interesting to you, and impressive, because of her great qualities and abilities, ideas and ideals...

if this person seems "good," and even "clean," so you don't feel stupid for caring about her, and caring about the things she cares about...

and it doesn't hurt if she's really good-looking because, after all, this is what you actually *see*,

and it *really* doesn't hurt if she's good-looking in a way that seems to reflect the beauty of her soul.....

That's it," thought Larry. "Falling in love is seeing a soul.

What do I do now?"

Larry may have come up with a high-minded thought but he was honest enough with himself to face the fact of a low-minded fear.

"It's scary to say 'I love you,'" the most obvious reason being that the other person might not say it back.

“Besides that,” Larry was aware, “now another person has a certain ‘power’ over you.

Now that you admit that you really care, if, at times, it seems that she *doesn't* really care, you're not going to be able to pretend that it's no big deal.

Now you have two sets of problems to worry about, and one of them isn't yours exactly, but still you can't just walk away.”

Now Larry was perplexed. To “need” somebody is a need, is it not? A new need that you didn't have before. But what you get for having love in your life..., it's more life..., and can you really choose to have less life?”

Now Larry started to get angry. He was angry at himself for being perplexed. He was angry at himself for the pain in his heart. He was angry at someone else for having gotten this kind of control over him. He started contemplating all sorts of outcomes. He was getting madder and madder. He turned off his phone lest he get a call at this inopportune time. “There are a million reasons a call wouldn't connect right now,” he thought. “It's good I have a whole flight to think.”

When Larry landed he took some steps.

# An Even Younger Man Who Looked Scared

People had called him “Buster” from before he could remember.

At first, perhaps, it was just a cute baby nickname, but in time it became a personality. Buster was a buster; he was ready to zing anybody. It was never mean-spirited—Buster was never mean—but it was still not wise to mess up in front of Buster.

Buster, as things turned out, thought of himself as something of a tough guy.

But he wasn't feeling too tough right now, here at Gate 22, soon to leave home for the first time for school, a school he said he wanted to get into, but now he wished he had not.

Thank God nobody knew it, thought Buster. Oh, he had let out little hints, little things he couldn't help saying. And he had stopped talking about how great it was going to be, and starting talking about the first time he would come home. No, if people knew, it would be embarrassing, thought Buster.

But this meant that he had to deal with it alone. The trick was figuring out what to deal with.

Feeling sick on leaving home happens, Buster knew. Lots of people, most people, feel “nervous” when, finally, the time comes to leave home. But what, exactly, are they... is he..., afraid of? Was it even fear? Fear of what?

Fear of not being home? That shouldn't be. Buster was hardly attached to his house, was often “out,” and loved trips.

Fear about being alone? Maybe. But he wasn't really going to be alone. He was going to have a roommate. And he already knew some people at school. And he never was a momma's boy.

Fear of the future? Another maybe. But nobody has control of the future. Everybody in his class is in the same boat. He should be able to do at least as well as anyone else at figuring out his next steps.

Analyzing the problem was good for Buster. Somehow it took his mind off how he felt. But when he realized that this is what he was doing, that sick feeling came back and he had to start over.

Eventually he came up with an idea that was helpful. He got it while looking around at the other people sitting with him at Gate 22. Almost all were adults, he noticed; and all of them, he thought, were at one point in their lives his age. Probably at some time or another, all had once left home.

He knew, of course, all kinds of people who had once left home. He had even talked to some of them, lately. The story was always the same: It's hard to walk out the door. There are a couple of lonely meals, and tearful nights, and then you get used to it. It takes..., it depended who you talked to..., some said a couple of months, another a couple of weeks, and one person said a couple of days. (That was hard to picture.)

Buster figured he could accept feeling bad for a couple of weeks. His spirits lifted, just a bit.

But then something else came into his mind. What if he was successful? What if he did what he was hoping to do and successfully left home? "Home," then, would never be the same. His relationship to his family would never be the same. Many things would change "forever."

This was a new and terrible thought, and the last thing that Buster needed at this moment. Nonetheless, there it was. Unless you turn around and go home right now.... And how will I even get home? They couldn't come to the gate and so they were already on the way home.... Unless you turn around and go home right now, the life you grew up with is over.

One might suppose that a new life with new freedom would have seemed a fair exchange. This, however, was far from clear now. New freedom meant taking care of yourself. It meant a chance for failure. It meant the unknown—imagining yourself happy as a grown-up when you had never been a grown-up before.

Worse than that was the loss. Buster didn't remember being a kid in kindergarten was that much fun, but being a big kid certainly was. It was mostly fun, with hardly any work; and school

wasn't so bad; and he had friends, and he played sports; and the house was a great place to hang out.

Suddenly Buster's mind was a slide show of memories. The house at Christmas. Halloween. Hoping for a snow day, and once in a while getting one. When he got that hit. When he got lost. When his family went some place special, and when they got back.

It was in the midst of these memories that Buster remembered. He remembered a letter that his father had given him to read "when he had a chance." Buster went for this letter. He was looking to change the subject. What he found did not change the subject.

It wasn't really a letter but a copy of a talk Buster had heard a lifetime ago, when he was graduating grade school. It was a priest who was talking and he said that he got his vocation at his grade school graduation. He said that he had realized "when this ceremony is over, so is my childhood." He said he was upset to be leaving it behind. He began to wonder about life. How do we be happy if things always end?

Buster realized he was experiencing some of the same feelings, and questions, he heard about then. He must have had some of these feelings then or he would not have remembered this talk *years later*.

Now he read it and really heard it:

What "saved" me was to think about my memories not as things "over" but glimpses of my life to come.

Good times give a glimpse of heaven and whatever made them "good" times will be in heaven. The people we have known, for sure. But also the good times themselves. Heaven will "contain" all that—and even more."

So I say to you, don't tell yourself you're just happy to "get out of here." You know it's not that simple. You are going to lose some things. But these things are not really "lost." They go on in your memory—which is the best definition of "you"—and they are the material of what you know about heaven. And, as life goes on, you will only add to these memories, getting more and more glimpses, so that you know more and more about where you're going, and so you'll be more and more excited to get there—where things will NEVER end.

Think of your memory, think of your life, as a “treasury,” a treasury of information about heaven, a treasury that is always being added to and never loses anything.

But don’t think this idea will help you if you’re not sure you believe in God. How will it help you if you’re not sure you believe in God?! Only if you KNOW it’s true will an idea like this work for you.

And the way you get to KNOW it’s true is to keeping thinking about your faith.

Check out what you have learned about why we believe. Do it over and over so you will see better and better that what we believe is true.

If you come up with a question, look into it. Read something. Ask someone. If what they say doesn’t make sense, ask someone else.

Live your faith. If you are convinced that we are here because God made us so He could love us, and our job is to become more like God so we can share His life more richly FOREVER, love. Care about people. Do the right thing. Don’t do the wrong thing. Stay out of trouble. Don’t destroy your life or the life of somebody else.

Don’t destroy your life. Love your life. Be your-self; be your own person.

You know where your hope is. Work for it.

You know where your only hope is. Work for it and watch as your hope grows! You will get surer and surer and surer that you are on the right road.

You’ll make more and more good memories and you will know better and better where that road is taking you.

You will have a great life and a better life in heaven—and things there will never, ever end.

This was a big day in Buster’s life.

# What No One Noticed

An airport is a world whose occupants are always changing, it is true. But not everyone. People work at airports, and often in the same space almost every day.

One such person at Gate 22, actually the whole corridor from Gate 17 to Gate 45, was Maria, of the cleaning crew.

Maria was a pious person, and observant. She was often aware that the people she walked past were going through more than might have been obvious to others.

Those who were excited were easy to spot, and from the look of their bags you could almost always tell why.

Sometimes businessmen were just plain bored.

Sometimes, however, they were worried or sad.

Lots of other people were sad, too, or scared.

Most obviously troubled people were alone. (That itself was worth noting.)

But a lot of couples were upset, sometimes with the airline and sometimes with each other, and sometimes it started with the airline but became a problem with each other.

People with children were often stressed, and single parents (usually mothers) were even more stressed. (One also noticed that families were in better spirits if they appeared to be going on a trip rather than returning.)

Young people often seemed moody.

And Maria prayed for them all.

It wasn't a very big deal to her. It's just that she was observant, noticed people who were experiencing something important (to them, at least) and this inspired from Maria a quick word to God.

“Let them keep their peace,” she might say; or, “help him to know that he'll be alright.”

For Maria, this was a nice way to pass her day. It helped *her* in various ways.

For one thing, though she never told anyone what she was doing, not even in her family, it was fun to figure out what was really happening around her.

For another, it seemed the least she could do. Actually, it was the most she could do. She didn't know any of the people she prayed for—and she hardly ever remembered seeing the same person twice—so it was hardly possible for her to approach people and ask them to talk. No, since that was not possible, she was actually doing the *most* she could for people who might be in trouble, and this made it easy to feel that she was not ignoring other people's pain.

For sure, Maria did not feel that she was saving people with her prayers. She had learned enough about God to know better than that. She knew that God knew what others were going through. (He knew better than she did.) She knew He loved the people for whom she prayed, and did not need convincing to care for them as His own.

But still she thought it was a good idea. Her idea was that God would pay just a bit more attention to these people if He knew that even one more person cared about them.

She wasn't trying to change His plan for them. She knew He had His plan for them and the best thing was going to happen whether or not *they* thought so. But *she* thought that it was His plan for *her* that she practice love for others, even strangers, and that by practicing she would get better.

Besides: Wouldn't the world be a much better place if all of us tried to be more sensitive to others all the time? That was the formula, wasn't it?

Of course, Maria did not limit her love to strangers.

Maria loved her family, and about that they had no doubt.

She loved her church, the place and the people. She was often in church and her ministry was to clean it.

Spiritually, she was where she was by the smoothest path she knew of.

She was from another place, that did not have a big airport, where life was much simpler. She came with her family to this place, got a job, got married (to a good man), and soon enough she became a good mother.

Maria was happy. She was happy *not* because she had so much—actually, she didn't really have too much—she was happy because she didn't expect or need so much. This she learned at home. They had the basics and they had each other. They had faith and they had fun. It all went together.

Faith spoke to Maria's heart. It promised her wonderful things to come. It helped her to understand that happiness was in no-thing here. This made it easy to have fun in a family where everybody appreciated the little things and nobody was really angry or devious (because they were not looking for happiness in all the wrong places).

When Maria came here, she was able to have more things, and they were nice, but they didn't add all that much to life, and so as long as we can keep our house (and keep it clean) and we have enough to eat (and enough for a fiesta every so often)... "What more do I not have?" Maria *didn't* wonder.

Church, of course, held the system together. It was the place where everyone was reminded of what was really important, what lasts and what doesn't, and who you are in the eyes the Him who sees best. It was the place where you learned more, about God and life, and never felt you were standing still. It was the place where you learned how to be quiet, and to think deep thoughts, and to look into heaven at the end of every day.

This was a theme at her church, and it became a part of Maria's life. At the end of the day, when the day's work is done, sit in your chair and look into heaven. Use your memories, use your imagination, anything wonderful you've ever seen, and know that what you are imagining is just a glimpse of what is coming.

Now, Maria's family was not immune from problems, particularly those that were *not* of their own making. But immunity was not expected nor needed. Life was meant to be work. Struggles

made you stronger. One of Maria's favorite images was the idea that the stronger you are spiritually, the more you will be able to hold all that God wants to give you.

Death, of course, was not the end. Death was all the more reason to live for life with God. And the people who went ahead of us told us so, if we ever bothered to ask them.

Actually, in terms of things that can make you happy, Maria had a lot. And she knew it. This was why she thought she ought to think more about others.

And maybe the best thing of all was this: Maria thought that she ought to think more about others even though she knew that many others, including some who passed her in the corridor between Gates 17 and 45, including, maybe, some of the people she prayed for, didn't think much of her.

Maybe they just didn't notice her because, to them, she was unimportant and invisible. Maybe it helped them, they thought, to look down on her so they might themselves feel that they were more important.

Maria was aware of this, sometimes. Sometimes people even said things that were hardly kind. But that was OK, she thought. She knew better than to let someone like that contradict the love of God.

She was unaffected by judgment and didn't herself feel the need to judge. (Even though there were always plenty of characters in the airport who were easy to judge.) No, she was unaffected by judgment and felt no need to judge.

She was always looking outward toward others but not much concerned about how others were looking outward at her.

And she wasn't conscious of any of this. She couldn't have explained if you asked her. All she knew is that God gave her life; He loved her and wanted her to love others. And God gave her the peace and patience that you are going to need if you are going to love, because others almost never make it easy.

As always, Maria went home a little tired. But she was happy it was Friday because she always sat on her little patio on Friday; often visited (or was visited) on Saturday; and was certainly going to church on Sunday.

# Epilogs

# Patrick and Judy

“I’m sorry about the bag.” That line hung out there for what seemed a long time.

Finally there was a nod. Then, after what seemed another long moment, “I’m sorry, too.”

In retrospect, that was the beginning. The conversations didn’t start right then, but something had changed and Patrick and Judy started to talk things out before they arrived home.

They decided they needed help and went back to the church where they were married. They were interviewed separately and they told more or less the same story, if from somewhat different points of view. They were asked if they remembered the doctrine, “we want our feelings to be returned,” and they confessed that they did not. They were asked to get hold of it NOW, and they were also asked to understand how, if you don’t know how sensitive you both are, a bad dynamic starts up and many offenses will follow. “This means it has to be all bets off,” they were urged, “which means that it will be of no use to go back over individual incidents—when he did this, when she said that—because the other person will always be at fault for something that came before. God gives all of us a new start; and so we owe each other a new start, too.

Let’s start again to practice the love we professed,” they were asked; “and in plain terms what does this mean? If I love you I care about you for your sake, and not for what you do for me. If this is true, and no lie, it means—at the very least—that in moments of conflict you will, as honestly as you can, try to see the situation from the other person’s point of view. How would I feel if this had happened to me? What would I have done if *I* was in that position?

When you speak to the person, speak gently, and NOT with a voice that would make anyone feel attacked and therefore defensive. Start, please start by recognizing the truth you see in the other person’s point of view. There is always something.

There is always something..., if it doesn’t involve the specific situation, it might involve life, and what we’re going through right now and how this would affect anybody.

Then, after you acknowledge the truth you see in the other person's point of view, you explain yours—in terms of how you feel or what you thought, NOT in terms of how wrong the other person was, or how bad the other person is! If both of you try... and try to be first, you will be amazed at what will come from it.”

Patrick and Judy listened. They even caught on to the idea that listening is half the battle; and the very first really unselfish thing they did was to acknowledge this to each other.

Now that they knew what to do they started to try. They practiced the love they professed, and practice made them better at it.

Love made life better. At first this meant many fewer fights and sleepless nights. In time, it came to mean good times, great talks *not* about problems, fun times out, trying new things, and trips that did *not* go badly.

The more they talked *not* about problems, the more they came to see what they suspected the first time someone had said “I love you.” Getting to know each other better, they did indeed come to love each other more, and to express it better, and to enjoy that, and be conscious of it, and to talk about it; and love made life better.

Of course, there were moments. We are talking about human beings here. But Patrick and Judy had learned enough to recognize the signs, the signs of selfishness and other failures to love, and they came to trust that a good move would be responded to with goodness.

They were quite solid by the time they became a family. (This was good because, with all the sacrifice it requires and the tiredness it inspires, having a baby makes a good relationship better but it makes a bad relationship worse.)

They taught their children what they had learned, mostly by showing it.

And they themselves kept growing, and were a positive presence in the lives of many others.

What was supposed to happen did. And heaven was forever richer for it.

# Terry and Fran

Terry and Fran never saw each other again. There was to be no attempt to stay in touch. This would not have been consistent with the rules in their marriages.

Terry did go on to recommend something called a mini-book which was called “Loving Yourself for the Right Reason.” It was downloadable free at [www.thefaithkit.org/panorama](http://www.thefaithkit.org/panorama).

Fran pulled it down, and ended up reading it many times. By the second time through it, it began to become clear that to love yourself for the right reason was right, and it was, in fact, the only way to go if one was hoping for happiness.

Terry grew for the opportunity to share these ideas. It would not be the last time this would happen.

# Jack

Jack was back at Gate 22 sooner than he expected. He was going to James’ funeral.

He had talked to James until almost the end, and he saw clearly that James’ new faith had sustained him in peace right until the end.

This helped Jack in a couple of ways.

Of course, James’ peace made it much easier to talk to him. In fact, more than *easier*, it became appealing, something that Jack began to look forward to. Plainly, James was seeing *something*. He talked about life with God as though he had been there already and was eager to go back.

At first, Jack didn’t know how to respond to such talk. His instinct was to ask (again), How do

you know? but that didn't seem to be the right thing to ask someone who was using such faith in order to die well. As the conversations continued, however, he just couldn't help himself. "How do you know?"

James gave the same basic answer that he had from the beginning. To look at your spirit, to look at your *self* really closely is to recognize that it could not have come from nothing. Stay with it and you begin to understand that what gives you this "feeling" is that you are looking at God Himself. And there's no way God has given you life in order to take away. More than that, the more you look at God, the more you notice that *when you're looking* you've never felt more alive. You see where you're going and the more you see, the more you want to go. "It's like seeing from a distance a house on a hill, a big house with big windows that must have a great view."

All of this helped Jack contemplate his own life, and death.

He knew for sure that he could not be sure like James, not right away.

But one thing he did see, for sure, is that modern life, and his life, too, is based on an illusion—NOT thinking about death.

It is better to face the truth, thought Jack.

Better yet, he thought, maybe, now we will feel "forced" to look for God, and, maybe, we will find Him.

Of course, this raised the question of why we should need to be "forced" to look for God, but Jack figured (correctly) that people have to be forced to look for God because to do so is work; it calls for letting go; it is a big step in one's spirit; and such a thing could not be easy.

And even before you get there, realized Jack, you will no longer carry on about things here—politics, sports, the things that you can get with money—as though they were very, very important.

Of course, you still have to live, to keep your job and keep food on the table; but, apart from certain manageable things you just have to do, you have no reason to pay attention to anything that does not inspire you, and for the rest of your life, whenever you hear people talking about worldly stuff as a very big deal, you can spot the illusion and turn them off.

For better or for worse, Jack found that it was no more killing time 'til time kills you. Like his

brother before him, he started to look at his spirit..., his experience of life..., as closely as he could. He thought things out as honestly as he could. He came to some conclusions, made some decisions, made some changes in his life.

When the end of his life came, he was ready.

## Herb and Sally

This story is really just about Herb.

Herb didn't find it so easy to forgive himself as, maybe, he hoped.

He had thought he was better than his behavior, and he hated the idea that what he had done was "on his record."

He looked for another opportunity to talk to Steve.

"You don't have a record, Herb," said Steve. "God does not keep score. He looks at you for who you *are*, not how you got there.

And what He wants *now*, I think, is that you accept His plan for your life—the fact that He needed you to go through certain things in order to learn some important lessons you wouldn't have learned otherwise.

And, maybe, he also wanted to inspire in you a little humility—which is obviously a good thing."

This made Herb smile.

"But the biggest thing," said Steve, "is this: Do you accept God's plan for your life, or did it have to be *your* plan—your idea of your life story?

Do you understand that, into His plan for you, God has put all the attention and love He's

got—and that means no less than He has put into anyone else—so that you can end up with the absolutely special place in heaven that He’s got for you?

Do you trust God, Herb, for what He is doing with you?

And don’t you see that trusting Him shows more..., I guess we should call it ‘faith’..., more faith than you ever had before?

Herb understood but he still found it hard to accept what he had done. Finally, he realized that the very fact that it was hard showed him that it was a very great thing to do.

It was still not easy to let go of *his* idea of himself. But, he realized, he had *already* let go of his idea of himself by what he had done.

He accepted God’s love for who he actually was and this helped him to feel that he never had to be anyone other than who he actually was.

He also accepted God’s mercy and never did tell Sally what he had done.

Beyond this, his experience of something cheap taught him to prize what he had in his marriage. Thinking about how he might have hurt her, he came to care for Sally more.

He became kinder to her and more attentive—hardly perfect but kinder, more attentive, and more grateful.

They made it.

## Steve

Steve learned the truth of the adage: The best way to learn something is to teach it.

His faith had been stretched by talking to Herb, not stretched in the sense that he wasn’t sure what to say, but rather in the feeling that he now had the obligation to practice himself what he

was preaching to others.

Steve *was* a compassionate guy—when asked to be. But it was easy to be compassionate when somebody is confessing to you, and showing their vulnerability and weakness, and making you feel great about yourself.

It was not so easy to be compassionate to people who were causing you trouble, and *not* asking for forgiveness, but who were still, so far, doing the best they could with what they were given.

Compassion was even more lacking in Steve's judgments of people he had no reason to judge—people who just happened to come around him and whose story wasn't known to Steve at all.

Steve even began to recognize that he probably ought to have a bit more compassion for himself—to be more accepting of the life God gave *him*.

He knew the theory, of course. God's plan for everything is also God's plan for you. Because it's God, He has put all He's got into making you, and therefore no less than He has put into making anyone else. And if you really believe that you are no less, you don't need to feel that you are more.

But it was one thing to think it, and even to say it, but it was another to live it—to avoid comparing yourself to others, to feel twinges of envy, to put others down thinking (not quite consciously) that this will lift you up.

This is a sin, of course, and the punishment is now. If I can lift me up by putting someone down, then comparison *does* count. Then there really are lots and lots of people who have more reason to love their lives than I do. I am not special. I am, at best, one of the pack.

Steve figured all this out and he became less judgmental. He became better at forgiving himself on those occasions when he messed up in his own way, through his own fault.

## Jerry

Jerry enjoyed his “discussion” with Ray. He experienced the truth of the adage: The best way to

learn something is to teach it. This made him want to learn more.

He was especially interested in learning more about “Apologetics.” He had not used that word when speaking with Ray but, from reading “Kirk,” he had learned that this was the science of explaining things so that people could see it for themselves.

Also from “Kirk” he had learned about the stages our minds go through on the way from being a baby who knows nothing to being a person who can’t *not* see the hand of God whenever he looks at anything.

But he wanted to know more. He saw the stages of human knowing in himself but he wanted to know how to respond if someone says “prove it.” What do we say to someone who says that there are no several stages but just a person who grows into reason and should just stick to it?!

How do we know that what our mind does with things is real—that we see things as they really are?

If God knew what we were going to do in response to His plan, why do we actually have to do it? Wouldn’t He just know who we were going to make ourselves to be, and then why couldn’t He just make us who we were going to make ourselves to be and spare us from the pain in the process?

And back to the bible: If we are rightfully skeptical about miracle stories to prove things, what about the resurrection? Isn’t this the most made-up sounding story of all? Did it really happen? What really happened? How do we know?

And what if Ray had wanted to talk about moral things? Most people care more about moral things. Jerry wondered whether he really understood the “controversial” moral things well enough to explain them to someone who was biased against them. Could he answer questions—could he answer fair sounding questions?

Jerry decided to look into it. He decided to go back to the place where he had started, [www.thefaithkit.org](http://www.thefaithkit.org). This time he noticed a link—it was on the “Panorama” page—he had not spotted before. It was called “Panorama 2: Amazing material for those who love the Church.” Jerry tried it. He found plenty.

# Ray

Ray was really bothered by his “lecture” from Jerry.

He was bothered, not by Jerry’s attitude, but more by Jerry’s points.

Ray thought of himself as an open-minded guy. Who doesn’t? More than that, he thought of himself as an honest guy; and an honest guy has to face the truth whether he likes it or not.

Still, it was the *Bible*. That’s where the truth came from, didn’t it?

God had to speak to us somehow, didn’t He?

It was the Bible. It was great to have the truth, to hold it in your hand.

And if this wasn’t the truth—what was? Where’s the truth then? In the air?

On the other hand, being honest, if being able to quote the Bible meant you knew it, OK. But if knowing where it really came from, knowing about the first copies, knowing about very old writings..., if these things mattered, then he didn’t know very much.

What *do* you say to someone with a different holy book?

Isn’t it kind of clear that people do love amazing stories? Ray even knew about a miracle in his town, a story that everyone repeated, that he knew wasn’t really true. And when you see shows on TV about the simple folks from other places, it’s pretty clear that everything they believe is what they made-up. How, really, is our stuff all that different?

And then there was hell. Ray did go to that website that Jerry suggested. He read about a way to believe in Jesus without hell. It sort of made sense. In fact, it seemed a better way to believe in God’s love. Hell, after all, when you thought about it..., people in agony forever..., FOREVER. Hell was a problem.

And the idea that you should be able to see things for yourself..., that made sense, too. Now to Ray it was more obvious than ever that there were many points of view. If you can't see certain basic things for yourself, how can you know?

But if you do see it... Ray liked the idea of "gifts of faith." What was not to like?! Anyone could see it..., to believe in certain basics, because you can see it for yourself, which are sure to change how you see everything, and change it for the better..., how you see life, and what you have and don't have, and your life's story, and what you have to deal with, and who you see when you look in the mirror.

Ray had to think about this more.

Two years later he found himself at something called a conference for "catechists" and there he ran into Jerry.

## Andy

Andy's story did not end well.

And is it not ironic that he was the only person who noticed Maria; and he thought that she was a nobody?

## The Guys With No Hats

The guys, still with no hats, were back at Gate 22 in a couple of weeks. Now they had more stories.

It had, at times, been difficult, but now that it was over, this was something good. This was

what made the stories, although everyone told them differently.

“I thought we were sunk.”

“I knew we would make it, as long as the (this) didn’t (that) and everybody stayed cool.”

“And the (it) was really cool to see, especially during a storm.”

“And now we know what we will never forget.”

There was great satisfaction at Gate 22. And happiness that they were going home. It was another adventure added to everyone’s list. It was hard; it was successful; and it was different.

Their trips had been very varied. There had been mountains. There had been oceans. There had been deserts. There had been really different ways of life. And now there was this.

The guys with no hats were conscious of their good fortune. This, now, was a topic of conversation. They had made the hay of their times.

They had not actually “discovered” any of the places they discovered, but they had been to more exotic places than any of the great explorers, who, in most cases, had been to no more than one. They had made use of modern transportation, but gotten their adventures in before modern communication changed everything.

They had had a fantastic diversity of experiences.

That meant they should be grateful. It meant they should give back. It meant that they might look forward to one more adventure or two, but in the meantime there were other things to think about, other people to care about.

And when, finally, the adventures were over, they (most of them) had years to remember and relive them; and by doing this they came to see that they were actually looking forward not backward; and when the time came for the biggest adventure of all, this is exactly what they found.

# Jeff

Jeff had always loved his family and now he loved them more.

Hearing about the adventures of the guys with no hats had helped him to recognize what was really important, and to realize that what was really important was what he himself already had.

Now that he saw himself giving his life for his family he was more at peace with the sacrifices involved in actually doing it.

He was also more conscious of the results. He looked at his little girls a little differently now, conscious of how they were growing up, and how he could help.

Actually, there came a point where he began to see that he was too conscious of how his girls were growing up, and too quick to help or otherwise supervise and teach.

After a while he struck a balance that seemed to him right.

And he became conscious of the need for other balances as well.

He became conscious of the fact that caring for the girls was not precisely the same as caring for his wife; and she appreciated his renewed attention.

He became conscious of his opportunity to build up his friends, who were also members of the family that all of us are meant to be.

All these thoughts about balance also got him to pay some smart attention to himself, and his need for rest and fun.

It was wise that he did not repudiate what was good in the lives of the guys with no hats. Maybe it was a little late to sail around the world—and he didn't know how to sail anyway—but maybe it was time to start hiking, and reading (history), and maybe something else.

For Jeff, however, the best balance was built on faith.

Time for others, and time for me, which means time for God.

Do your best, and forgive yourself when you need to make a new start.

See sin but don't judge hearts.

Be careful and conscientious, and otherwise trust God.

Live your life, and live for life, the life that lasts, our life with God.

## Larry and Barbara

Larry and Barbara ended up getting married.

But first they went through some pretty tough times.

Nobody told them “we want our feelings to be returned,” and so if you are crazy about someone you need to feel that this other person is crazy about you, and this leaves people really, really sensitive to anything the other person says or does that might be saying something else.

Therefore, that first fight was inevitable; but it was also a shocker. Never having fought before, it was hardly clear what this might mean. Never having reconciled before, they were hardly sure that they could do it.

But they did it.

And they learned. They learned about how to speak to each other, and how to listen. They learned how to practice the love they professed and, in most moments of conflict, to check out the situation from the other person's point of view.

They learned that love is not anything if it does not inspire sacrifice... , real sacrifice of something I really wanted, or wanted to be different, and not “play” sacrifice of something I didn't really care that much about anyway, or for which I expected to be paid back, and soon.

They learned that love for a person lasts after the newness necessarily fades, and that for love of this person, one must often say no to the attentions of someone who is interesting if only because he or she is new.

They learned that to love someone is to know this person really well, and to be changed by what you know. Somehow the other person becomes part of you—almost always on your mind, and absolutely always in your mind when anything of importance happens—and you are happy about it.

They learned when another person's welfare becomes your own you are on the way to becoming one, and that sharing a lifetime of struggles and memories finishes the job.

Best of all they found that, getting to know each other better and better, they fell in love over and over; and every time this happened their companionship got more and more secure.

Together they made many very happy memories, and somehow they were already aware that their memories were merely a preview of what they were going to feel for each other in heaven.

## “Buster”

Buster survived his adjustment to life on his own. It took a little less than a month.

For sure there were some difficult moments. (Buster felt especially bad when he thought his homesickness was over only to have it come back at a time he least expected.) But, even in the beginning, there were also some victories. They might not sound like much in the telling but they meant a lot to Buster.

Buster remembered all these moments. He remembered how the victories began to outnumber the setbacks. His life began to generate stories, and highlights, and other experiences he would never forget.

Of course, there were also people that Buster would never forget. He tried to stay in touch with

some; with most he didn't; and after a while most of his school friends disappeared from his life.

They disappeared from his life but not from his memory.

Buster came to treasure the concept of treasury. The great times of the past were not “over”; they were glimpses of the life that he would have forever. Buster especially treasured his memories of certain magical moments on trips, various moments of victory, several snowstorms, and that one special conversation that lasted until sunrise.

Of course, he most especially treasured his memories of the people he would see again in heaven.

Thanks to the treasury, Buster came to love life.

But, because the treasury became so important to him, Buster needed to be more sure about his faith. (How do we know that what we believe is true? he asked. He found that there were good, frank answers.)

He especially needed to understand the idea of God's plan. (He had good questions but again there were good answers.)

At first, the idea of God's plan mostly served Buster to help him be peaceful when things did not go his way. Then it helped him even more by giving him the best imaginable reason to believe in himself.

More and more, Buster came to see his life as a unique and important spiritual journey, and that God was speaking through it—to him for sure and maybe to others.

In time, it occurred to him that if his story could speak to others, maybe others' stories could speak to him. He developed an unusual avocation. When he would hear of what seemed to be an especially interesting story he would write to the person, whom he almost never knew personally, and ask for an account. He felt that by doing this he could both learn and love at the same time.

By the way, Buster's real name was Theophilus, and his letters are available at [www.thefaithkit.org/panorama](http://www.thefaithkit.org/panorama).

# Maria

Maria kept working at the airport for many more years.

She never stopped praying for people she observed. She never stopped feeling that this was somehow good for someone.

It was certainly good for Maria. Her sensitivity to others, i.e., her love, kept growing, and so did her sense of God's attention to her.

Now this is not to say that everything always went well. Her son gave her some problems, some serious problems; and things never really got better; but Maria loved her son, knew God loved her son, and knew there's a reason for the struggles of us all.

The things that made her happy kept making her happy; and she was especially happy that she did not seek her happiness in things sure to get old.

She got old. But that was fine. "Every day brings me closer to heaven." She said it and she meant it.

And the more she said it the more she meant it! Maria was wise enough to realize that the earlier we start thinking about our next big step, the easier it will be when the time finally comes.

When the time finally came it was easy.