

LIFENOTES

about your life



selections from our book

LOVE – In Search of a Reason for Living

What is this book? It is an essay about life, a book about *you*. Its purpose is to send you on a journey through your heart, mind, and soul. If you take the journey you will find in yourself the reason for living. If you care at all about life and people and yourself, you will take the journey.

If you are a humanist, a skeptic, simply do not know what to believe, or are just looking for a reason to live, please read our book, it represents an objective, rational, reasoned, search for a reason for living.

We begin our journey.

WHO AM I?

The day you were born you began a learning process that will continue for the rest of your life. You were, from the beginning, molded by your surroundings, parents, relatives, playmates, by all the general attitudes, ideas, and beliefs you came in contact with. Each new year of life added to your past, changing the way you viewed every new day, influencing how you reacted to everything from the simplest daily routines to complex events touching you, your family, and the world you lived in.

As you grew older you interacted with people from different backgrounds with differing ideas about life. Faced with new ideas, you may have defended your beliefs, or you may have completely abandoned your past. However, like most people, you probably belong to that vast river of humanity which lives each moment in the easiest, most pleasant way possible. If so, you were and are more or less able to blend ideas, feelings, philosophies, desires, and realities to justify what you want to do.

Along with the majority of people, you were and are good at sending questions and ideas about the meaning of life and death, as well as thoughts and feelings about what is good and right, deep into the cloudy regions of your mind. Whether we realize it or not, most of us are voluntary prisoners of our minds, unwilling to question who we are and what we believe, happy to simply roll along through life. Most of us will live from birth to death in a world we have fashioned from our past to suit our present. Few of us will ever stand free from our present beliefs and daily lives to ask what is life about? Who am I? What should I do? What will I do? If there is meaning to life, and a reason for living, these questions must be answered.

If there is a true meaning to life, nothing that you do, say, or think will change that truth. What good is it to live your life believing what you are doing is right if your beliefs are false and what you are doing is wrong? It is an understanding of life that we seek, a search for something in life worth living for.

If you are to find the meaning of life you must be willing to recognize it if and when you see it. To do so requires you to open your mind and accept whatever you discover, even if it is totally opposite to your experiences, beliefs, and wishes. Since our discussion deals with the purpose of life, if what we are saying is true, your willingness to understand is a willingness to grasp the very reason for your living. If the answers you find are different from those you have molded for yourself, you must decide whether to continue on the path you are on, or go another way on a new path toward a new destination.

If You Are Who You Are, Then Who Are You?

Each of us is born, we live lives of various lengths, and then we die. We have a separate nature which is our own and which sets us apart from every other person who lives or has ever lived. We share similar characteristics, but each of us is unique. You are you.

What makes us unique is the fact that we perpetually make choices between alternatives. Our choices seem to be far more than mechanical selections based on some complex biological decision making scheme. Rather, your choice seems to be based not only on what you believe will happen if you make a certain choice, but also on what you "want" to happen. You engage in what we will call "rational thought", whereby you think about many things, including the concepts of right and wrong. You eventually reach a point where that certain quality of being which is unique to you takes over, and you make your choices.

Even though human beings have instinctive feelings for self-preservation, self-satisfaction, etc., you can choose to do the opposite, to go against what your instincts, personality, and emotions tell you to do. You can think about what you are going to do, and can choose to do what you believe is right and good even if it places you in grave danger. Similarly, you can choose to do what you believe is wrong and evil even if you would instinctively do otherwise. Your decision is your decision, a product of your singular existence and being. Able to engage in rational thought, and to choose freely among various courses of action based on those thoughts, you are in a very real sense what you choose to be.

Who Will You Be When You No Longer Are?

[Warning! There is a risk that as you read our notes you may think that we are suggesting that there is no "reason to live". That is not what we are saying at all! In fact we are saying the opposite, we have abundant hope that if you search your heart, mind, and soul, you will find in yourself the reason for living. If you are discouraged or depressed, please finish reading all the notes. Anyone who is, or becomes, seriously depressed should always seek immediate medical help. See Distress & Depression at the end of our notes.]

If in fact you do exercise meaningful freedom of choice, what good is it to be a unique human being if at your death you cease to exist? If you do not continue to exist in some form after death, what good are all the experiences, decisions, triumphs, defeats, all the moments of your life? If you do not survive the grave, if you return to the state of being that preceded your birth, then I suggest to you that nothing in fact does matter. While over the ages men and women have sought to perpetuate themselves through their children, their place in history, their role in society, and through intricate philosophical webs of existentialism and other essays on physical man's importance, the fact of physical death remains. If each generation's death means the end of those individuals, then we are all faced with an endless cycle of creation and destruction, the meaning of which, if any, is beyond comprehension.

If there is anything in life we can count on occurring without fail, it is physical death. The successful bank president, the champion athlete, the housewife, the famous, the unknown, every human being, you, die. While all acknowledge the certainty of their eventual demise, few think about death until they are faced with it. The very nature of human life denies death and shrouds it in the cloak of future events, events that are not yet real and do not need to be dealt with in the present. Living is too important and time consuming to be concerned with mortality. The fact that you are moving steadily toward your death is most likely, and literally, to be the last thing on your mind.

Observing the inevitable death of every creature that inhabits the earth, we may have a recurrent feeling that death is the end. On the other hand, it is virtually inconceivable to us that all we are, all we have been, all we will be, will be rendered void in that moment of death. It goes against human nature to visualize the effective destruction of our past, present, and future, which accompanies death without existence beyond death. Yet if each human being does cease to exist, then all human beings are, or in the case of generations yet unborn will be, waiting their turn to cease existing. If each and every human being ceases to be, then the feeling

of continuity that pervades the human race is false (please remember we do not believe that life is in fact destroyed by physical death).

In their arguments for humanism, existentialism, etc., philosophers have spent lifetimes trying to construct a difference between the apparent continuity of humankind, and the periodic death of individual humans. Most of us think of our ancestors as a link to the past, and our children as a link to the future, yet if we do not survive the grave each generation dies an isolated death that mocks any assertion that humankind has a continuing existence apart from its individual members. If each person's death results in their no longer existing, then no manner of historical recording, social progression, or other remembrance in the minds of those whose time to die is yet to come, can in any way affect, preserve, or make any difference whatsoever to those who no longer are. No one will survive to remember. If each of us ceases to be, then your life has no meaning and your choices make no difference.

This is a very difficult conclusion to accept, it goes against our intuitive feelings about human life, and against our assumptions that individual physical lives have meaning and value. Yet if we are little more than doomed animals, our intuitive feeling of meaning and value would not be surprising. From the very beginning, to assure survival of any species, evolution would certainly have instilled in living creatures the feeling that there is a reason for them to exist, a reason for them to crawl out of the ocean and build cities. If there is no life after death, and our lives are in fact consumed by "nothing", it is no wonder that our genetic heritage argues so strongly against that possibility.

Think about it for awhile. If each person's consciousness is the product of their physical brain, then individual physical consciousness exists only during that person's physical life on earth. If each of our physical lives proceeds from birth to death, then the consequence of each person's death necessarily follows their death. Who can be affected by that death? Certainly those who survive may be affected, but here is the "problem", the death cannot be of any consequence to the purely physical human being who no longer exists. The moment before the death of a human being it can be said that their impending death affects them, but the very moment after the person dies, he or she is no longer around to be affected!

Cause and effect, action and consequence, occur in a fixed order, the former always "preceding" the latter. Let us assume, for example, that a comet hits the Earth and all life is annihilated. It is very hard to accept, but if consciousness, our mind, is nothing more than a physical phenomena, if there is no non-physical life after death, the most logical conclusion is that the complete annihilation of humankind is of absolutely no consequence to humankind! While the words may sound bizarre

and counter intuitive, in fact they are not. The moment after the total destruction of humankind there is no humankind left to be affected. Indeed, there is no humankind around that is conscious of the fact that the comet struck the earth!

The same logic applies to the history of individuals not visited by a catastrophic event. If you believe that each human being is nothing more than an individual physical entity, and therefore that there is no life after death, then at the time of their death each human being experiences the identical individual annihilation that all humankind would experience together if the earth was "destroyed" by a comet. If a human being named Bill dies at 12:00 noon, and there is no life after death, at 12:01 Bill is not "around" to be affected by his death. After 12:00 noon you could search the entire universe for Bill and you would not find him. If there is no life after death, the very moment after the event known as Bill's death, Bill no longer exists, and Bill cannot be affected by anything, including his death.

The logic goes even further. If you do not believe that human consciousness continues to exist after physical death, then death not only annihilates each individual's present and future, but also annihilates their past. Most people would agree that for an object to have a present and a future the object must exist. Yet many would make the distinction that while an object cannot have a present and a future if it does not exist, it somehow can have a past. It is clear that the present and future of an object are bound to the existence of the object, but so to is the object's past.

The problem lies in the use of the words past, present, and future both to describe that which is part of an object (a "past" that belongs to the object, like a person's memories that "belong" to the living individual from birth to death), and to describe the existence of the person from a third party's view (a "past" which is a chronological description of a life, like a photo album containing pictures of an individual who has died).

It is a misconception to equate the fact that there is a "history" of all beings or objects that is set in the "past", with the statement that a being or object that no longer exists has a "past". The first idea simply says that the being or object existed over a finite period that is apparent to those who currently exist. The second idea is different, there is a "history" set in the past that is the sum of all lifetimes, but a person who no longer exists has no "past" that is unique to and dependent on their existence. A person who has died has no physical past, present, or future for the simple reason that the person no longer exists.

Admittedly, our conclusions about physical death are totally opposite to our "common sense" understanding of life. There are many arguments that purport to

counter this logic, including assertions that a person's life before physical death has “existential” meaning in and of itself. Yet all of the humanistic arguments are based on the biophysics of existence before physical death. They are set in the time before death, within the causal sequence of events that precede death. We believe that none of the arguments adequately address the period after death (perhaps with the possible exception suggested by modern physics that is discussed below), and therefore none answer the question of how a person who no longer exists can have a present, or a future, or a past?

If death is the end of your existence, should you be frightened by the certainty of your destruction? If indeed you cease to exist, you need not fear death, for after your death you will feel neither pain, nor pleasure, nor peace, nor torment. "You" will no longer exist, therefore "you" will feel nothing. The resulting void is just that, a complete and total void. There is nothing to fear, for there will be no one to experience anything negative. There is nothing to look forward to, for there will be no one to experience anything positive. The only way you can visualize what is usually called a "nihilistic" death is to picture yourself after death as being in the same state you were in before birth (of course you were not really in any state at all). Such a fate would leave nothing to be feared.

Philosophers often speak of the void that would follow physical death without life after death as the abyss, the unknown, the approaching void, etc. All of these suggest that we are on a journey to a "place" which lies at the end of our physical lifetimes. If on our death we cease to exist, this idea that we are traveling to our ultimate destiny is false. We are not traveling to an abyss, the void, or the unknown, for these words suggest that we are moving toward something. I recognize the seeming absurdity of the language, yet if on our death we cease to exist, then "nothing" totally consumes us.

This is the heart of the problem, we cannot in any way whatsoever understand or visualize "nothing". When we think about “nothing”, we turn it into “something” that can be thought about. The moment we attempt to comprehend or visualize "nothing", we interject something into "nothing", preventing us from reaching our goal. The only way we can answer the question "what is nothing?" is to answer it by not asking it, for if we ask the question we destroy the answer.

What about the fact that modern physics suggests that the physical existence of each human being somehow persists in space-time in the form of an individual's "worldline". Worldlines contain every sequential event in a human being's life from birth to death. Classical interpretations often say that a human being is his or her entire worldline, but they do not really explain what is meant by this. They almost universally conclude that each event in a human being's life exists as an event in

space-time, so that if we could observe the point on a worldline that is the tenth birthday of someone who is now eleven years old, we would see that person experiencing their tenth birthday. We would not see a "copy", or a "repeat", of the particular day, we would see the person's tenth birthday as it is occurring, period!

The interpretations tell us that each individual exists as discrete human consciousness in the billions of events located at every point along that individual's worldline. We might want to say that I am the "sum" of all the points, yet the assertion that a human being is his or her entire worldline, from birth to death, does not appear to be consistent with the general consensus that every event along a worldline has a singular existence that cannot be preferred over any other event on that worldline.

Some physicists describe the physical reality of multiple events along a single worldline by saying that there are many "now's", others say there are billions of approximate "isomorphs" of "me", many claim there are billions of other worlds in which various versions of "me" coexist, etc. It seems reasonable to conclude that modern physics tells us that literally billions of discrete, very real, versions of each of us occupy space-time. We might seek comfort in the existence of what appear to be permanent physical worldlines, yet all of the theories seem to lead us to the same metaphysical conclusion. If you do not have a single physical existence located somewhere on your worldline, your life has no meaning and your choices make no difference to "you", simply because there is no single physical "you" that exists after physical death.

While we believe that Einstein and Minkowski's theorems about spacetime are right, we do not believe that the current interpretations of the theories explain what the math actually tells us about our physical consciousness. We believe that Einstein's relativity accommodates our intuitive feelings that we can't go backward or forward in time by requiring human beings to pass through, to sequentially experience, each event on their worldlines. We think that modern relativistic and quantum physics provide a mechanism whereby human beings do not exist, exist, do not exist at each point on their worldline. From what we know, whether there is no single "you" in spacetime, or there is a single "you" that moves along your worldline from past to present, we conclude that science offers us little or no hope of a permanent physical consciousness.

There is another possibility, that the intuitive feeling human beings have that their physical past cannot change or be lost is based on some real, yet unknown, physical model of our universe. For example, virtually everyone is certain that if they are eleven years old now they have already experienced their tenth year of life, and nothing can take from them the past experience of being ten years old.

The intuitive feeling is very strong that our physical life makes a positive or negative contribution to human existence, and that our physical life is a permanent part of the physical universe. Perhaps there is some single physical consciousness that incorporates all of the events along our worldline, and that preserves our physical past, present, and future. We cannot rule out this possibility, if for no other reason than the fact that it is theoretically impossible to prove a negative.

The possibility that we have a permanent physical consciousness seems to require the existence of a physical consciousness that is not bound to events on a worldline. Yet it seems intuitively true that if consciousness of past events can be lost when memories fade in old age or are damaged when we suffer brain injuries or strokes, then physical consciousness has not incorporated those past events into a permanent singular “me”. In fact, every night between dreams we lose touch with our memories as we sleep. Einstein only briefly addressed physical (not non-physical) existence when he said “An individual who should survive his physical death is also beyond my comprehension,”

I can visualize and accept a “non-physical consciousness” that survives physical death, yet I am unable to have any confidence in the existence of a singular “physical consciousness” that survives the physical death of a human being. I may be wrong, yet I can say that after many years of thought I am convinced that any attempt to construct a model of permanent physical consciousness does far more damage to the centuries of accumulated scientific knowledge, than does the acceptance of the possibility that a permanent non-physical consciousness may exist.

A moment's comment on those who believe they may be able to physically perpetuate themselves through cryogenics, cloning, etc. Our universe will eventually return to a state of uniformly high entropy, so that the cosmos will become a hostile environment in which physical life cannot be sustained. While a physical end to all biologic creatures may seem absurdly far away, your great, great, great (to the 100th. power), grand-clone would find it frightfully real when the time came for their physical demise, a distant time from now which like all imaginable time is but a second in eternity.

What should our response be to all of this? We strongly believe that there is absolutely no reason not to live for the possibility that life has meaning and value. We think we are right about the transitory nature of physical consciousness, but we may be wrong. If our conclusions are wrong, perhaps we do in fact have a physical consciousness that survives physical death. If we are wrong, we may have a perpetual physical existence that gives meaning and value to our physical lives,

even if there is no non-physical life after death. We will not pursue this possibility, yet you should recognize that it exists.

If we are right, if our physical consciousness does not survive physical death, our death may mark the end of our existence. Yet if our physical consciousness dies, it is still quite possible that we will not face a "nihilistic" death. Perhaps we have a non-physical consciousness that survives physical death, and that gives meaning and value to our lives. We will consider this possibility in more detail as we continue our search for a reason for living.

Beyond the human desire for meaning in life, we would suggest that the logical consequences of what philosophers call a nihilistic death, "require" the search for alternatives to nihilism. Those who believe that the nihilistic void is approaching are, by the very nature of their humanity, required to search for something to believe in other than the void. While it appears to be impossible to scientifically prove that life has meaning and value, it is equally impossible to prove that life has no meaning and value. No matter what the person who believes that life is meaningless may believe to be true at any particular time in their life, the possibility always exists that he or she may eventually find true meaning and value in their life.

There is no reason to be a "nihilist", no reason to believe that life ends at death. If nihilism is correct, if life does end at death, it makes no difference whatsoever if we believe it is correct, or not. If we believe nihilism is correct, and it is correct, that does not alter the void that would follow death. If we believe nihilism is not correct, and it is correct, that does not alter the void that would follow death. If we do not believe anything at all about nihilism, and it is correct, that does not alter the void that would follow death. Yet if nihilism is not correct, belief and/or faith in that which offers a reason for living may well be essential to our existence. If because we believe nihilism is correct we accept the void, and we are wrong, then we have doomed ourselves. If we recognize that the humanistic belief that there is no life after death leads to the nihilistic conclusion that the "void" will consume past, present, and future, then to escape the quicksand of nihilistic time we must search for alternatives that provide a reason for living.

It is very important to recognize that nihilism can never lead to suicide, for nihilism tells us that if we do in fact live in a nihilistic world, nothing that happens in our lives, no matter how "badly" we may feel about it at the time, has any "real" consequence at all. It tells us that what we perceive to be the very worst events in our lives are no better, or worse, than any other events. I am absolutely convinced that the philosophical neutrality that nihilism demands, means that nihilism never suggests or supports suicide as an option for any human being.

Furthermore, since it is absolutely clear that we may not live in a nihilistic world, and that nihilism may be wrong, there can never be any reason to terminate our life, risk the negative consequences, and abandon the possible positive consequences of living a meaningful life. We are a small part of the whole. Unless the answer is revealed to us by the whole, we can never know during our physical lives what really happens when our physical life ends. Life may have physical or non-physical meaning and value that we do not, and perhaps cannot until our physical death, recognize and understand.

There is no reason at all to reject the possibility that each of us has some kind of permanent physical or non-physical consciousness. There is absolutely no logical reason whatsoever to reject the possibility that nihilism may be false! There is no reason whatsoever not to search for an alternative to nihilism, to explore the possibility of a permanent physical or non-physical consciousness, to search for a reason for living. There is absolutely no reason whatsoever not to live for the possibility, however remote you may believe it to be, that life has meaning and value. [Again, if you find yourself distressed or depressed by our conclusions please read the Note – Distress & Depression.]

Is That All There Is?

If it is true that your total existence ends with physical death, does that mean that your life is meaningless? As we have said, the answer is probably (but not “certainly”) yes. Therefore, is it true that your life has no meaning? The answer is no. If we are somehow more than our physical bodies, if we can exist beyond and apart from those bodies, then perhaps each of us survives physical death and continues to exist, in some manner and form, beyond the grave. If you are, or you become through living, a unique individual who possesses the ability to engage in rational thought and exercise freedom of choice, perhaps you have an existence beyond your physical mind and body.

Since the dawn of recorded history people have thought and written about existence beyond physical death. Some have suggested that extra sensory perception, premonitions, unexplained knowledge of past events, etc., are part of the world beyond death. Perhaps the unique being which each of us is, the present existence that makes your choices and your life yours alone, exists now and after your death in a realm beyond the physical. Perhaps each of us continues to exist in a manner and fashion infinitely beyond our ability to imagine, let alone comprehend, perhaps not.

A great number of people have spent vast amounts of time and effort studying all manner of phenomena outside everyday experiences. Many, most, or even all “inexplicable” events may be explained by future generations of scientists. Yet I have little difficulty accepting that there are events which are in fact controlled by forces beyond our present knowledge. If they are true phenomena, and not products of the mind, their very existence strongly suggests that there is a world which is quite real lying somewhere beyond normal human perception.

There is no present answer to the questions posed by what many perceive to be “metaphysical” events. Our discussion deals with what the meaning and purpose of life is. As we continue you will see that whether or not anyone has witnessed supernatural phenomena originating from a world beyond the grave is not an essential, or perhaps even an important, one. You will see that even if no one ever had any contact in this world with a world beyond the grave, it would not mean that such a world does not exist. You will see that we don't need to look for metaphysical events in our lives to understand what life is all about. At this point we ask that you keep an open mind about life after death. For now, please accept the possibility, however remote you may feel it is, that in some manner and fashion we continue to exist after our physical death.

The Search For Truth

If a scientist, philosopher, or anyone else tells you something is true, and in fact it is not true, it is not true. To say something is true does not make it true. Even though you are told something is true, if it is not true it is simply not true. On the other hand, if something is true it is true, even if you are told or believe that it is not.

If something is true or false, it is true or false whether we believe it to be true or false, or have not thought about its truth at all. If we believe a lamp is on a table, whether we have any evidence it is or not, and it is in fact on the table, then what we believe to be true is true. If we cannot determine whether or not the lamp is on the table that does not change the actual position of the lamp. Even though without evidence we cannot prove a lamp is on a table, if it is on the table it is there and our belief is true.

Just because we cannot prove something is true does not in any way mean it is not true. Because we cannot prove, or disprove, we continue to exist after the death of our bodies does not mean that we do not continue to exist, or that we do. If we continue to exist after our physical death, then we continue to exist, and if we do not, then we do not.

Science is based on observation, formulation of theories, and more observation. To observe necessarily requires the ability to perceive - to sense, feel, smell, touch, taste, see, hear. Early humans used all their senses to explore the world around them. When human senses proved inadequate, they devised better and better tools and instruments to extend their range. Microscopes and telescopes to expand vision, stethoscopes and amplifiers to increase hearing, plus thousands of other sensitive devices to enhance the senses.

The catalog of devices used to expand our human senses is enormous and growing by the minute, yet all the instruments of humankind can do no more than extend the reach of humans into the universe of which they and their instruments are a part. We know of three spatial dimensions, height, width, depth, and a fourth dimension, time. Is there a fifth, a sixth, a seventh, an eighth dimension? No one knows, for if they exist they appear to be separate and beyond human ability to sense, measure, and thus scientifically prove.

Does that mean those dimensions do not exist, the answer is no. If a fifth dimension exists, it exists. If a fifth dimension does not exist, it does not exist. This is true regardless whether we can, or never can, observe that dimension and, of course, is true for any sixth dimension, seventh dimension, eighth dimension, etc.

It is important to realize that no matter how many dimensions are eventually observed, one or more additional dimensions may or may not exist beyond human ability to observe.

Many of you are saying to yourselves it is one thing to say that a dimension beyond human ability to observe may exist, but an entirely different thing to say that one probably does. You are right. Most of you will go on to say it is highly improbable, maybe less than one chance in a trillion, that even one more dimension exists beyond the observable number of dimensions, however many that may eventually prove to be. If you think that, you are wrong. To be able to statistically predict the likelihood of an event happening we must first observe to see how often the event occurs during a given period of time. If we cannot observe the event when it occurs, we cannot determine how often it happens (or does not happen) and we cannot predict the likelihood of the event.

One problem with recognizing the limitations of statistical analysis and science is understanding the difference between not observing an event where the event watched for can be observed, and not observing an event where the event cannot be observed because it is beyond human ability to sense. The first, not observing an event which could be seen, leads to the valid conclusion that the event is unlikely to occur. The second, not observing an event which is beyond human ability to perceive, cannot lead to any conclusion at all about the reality of that event. Yet it appears to be human nature to assume that things which have never been observed do not exist, or at best are highly unlikely to exist.

If something exists beyond human perception it will never be observed during our physical lifetimes. If you cannot measure something because it is beyond human perception you cannot prove it exists, on the other hand you cannot prove that it does not exist. More importantly, you cannot say that it is likely or unlikely that it exists! You simply cannot say anything objective at all about that which is beyond human ability to observe.

It is very, very important to realize that it is absolutely impossible to say that it is either likely or unlikely something exists beyond human observation. We simply cannot determine in any way the probability that something exists, or does not exist, beyond our observable universe. To understand the significance of this often overlooked statement is to understand that we have no idea what, if anything, lies beyond our human boundaries.

Because we cannot know what lies beyond our perception or how it might affect our physical reality, we can never prove that anything is absolutely "true", or absolutely "false". A moments thought should bring the realization that this

absolute limit of statistics and science renders all "scientific proof", as well as subjective feelings, that nothing exists beyond our perception into "philosophic arguments". Despite what science might claim to have "proven", and despite what we might "feel", about what lies beyond our ability to observe, we cannot say anything objective about that which is beyond human perception. No one, not you nor I nor the smartest person on earth can say that it is likely, or not likely, that a "world" or "worlds" exist beyond the physical world in which we live. From an objective standpoint anything, or nothing, may exist beyond human cognition.

Before leaving our discussion of truth, we should note the apparently absolute limit where the question "how" becomes the question "why". Let's jump ahead 10,000 years, and assume that a "theory of everything" has been found that describes the behavior of all forces and elements according to a set of fairly simple laws. If and when such a theory is "proved" we may in fact have succeeded in explaining the past, present, and future behavior of all observed matter and energy. However the ultimate questions will remain. Why were the unified forces that control energy and matter created? Why do they exist? Who or what is the source of such primordial forces if they are the most fundamental of forces? These questions will still be unanswered, and it is not hard to see, will remain unanswerable.

Science will have succeeded in fully describing the forces seen in nature, and their effects on matter and energy. The question "how" nature works will, for the most part, have been answered. But an explanation of the creation, the existence, the source of the forces, the answer to "why" such forces exist, will be missing. The ultimate question "Why?" most clearly defines the limit of science and human beings.

This leads us to one more unanswered question. At the time this note was written it was generally accepted that all of space-time was created at or near a point in time popularly known as the "big bang". Scientists tell us that everything in the universe was created out of a tiny speck of matter.

Here is the problem. Entropy is a measure of disorder. If you pour cream into your coffee, the cream will never remove itself to make the coffee black again. This is because the entropy (disorder) of the system (the coffee with cream) tends to increase over time. As a rule, systems tend to become more disordered over time.

The universe we live in is a place of amazingly low entropy, if that was not true we would not be alive. Every star, planet, rock, tree, living creature, every human being, everything in the universe that is more ordered than the diffuse interstellar gas clouds that surround us, is an example of a system with low entropy. For our

universe to have the extremely low entropy it has, required at the "starting point" of the big bang the selection of a single low entropy universe from a virtually infinite number of possible high entropy universes.

Roger Penrose, a noted British mathematician who along with Stephen Hawking established how singularities form in black holes, concludes that: "There is a certain sense in which I would say the universe has a purpose. It's not there just somehow by chance. Some people take the view that the universe is simply there and it runs along... and we happen by accident to find ourselves in this thing. I don't think that's a very fruitful or helpful way of looking at the universe, I think that there is something much deeper about it, about its existence, which we have very little inkling of at the moment."

To be more exact, in his book "The Emperor's New Mind", Penrose calculated that the universe we live in required the selection of one out of 10 raised to the 10 th power raised to the 123 rd power of all possible universes! This is a deceptively large number, which in fact cannot be written. If you tried to write it out by writing the number "1" on a piece of paper, you would have to write a 0 on every single atom in the universe just to approach the number of zeros that follow the one, even then you would not be close to writing out the entire number. If this interpretation of modern cosmology is as solid as it seems, it means that the chance that our universe was created at random is as close to impossible as we can get!

Many find comfort in believing that even if science has not yet discovered them, every physical event from creation onward evolved according to a set of absolute physical laws. The mathematically precise physical structure of the universe, the tiny place we have in the incredible vastness of space, the biologic characteristics we share with animals, etc., all may be interpreted as evidence of a purely mechanistic process that governs our lives. Yet if we consider the complexity of that which we observe, and if we are honest with ourselves, we cannot escape the intuitive feeling that there is an "order" in the chaos that cannot be explained by science.

Even if the odds against the random selection of our low entropy universe out of all possible universes are not quite as impossible as they seem, we simply cannot ignore the intuitive feeling that the odds are almost infinitely against the random creation and existence of everything around us. Think about this for awhile. No matter how strongly we may feel that life is the result of physical processes only, if we are objective we must admit that it intuitively seems impossible that a random physical process could create the almost infinitely complex, yet extremely well ordered, low entropy, universe in which we live. Anyone who takes the time to try

to visualize billions of stars bursting out of a pinhead faces a mystery which, at the very least, leaves us with the possibility that the observable physical universe is not "all there is".

What all this tells us is that we have no real idea at all what the true nature of our life is, or what the possibilities are for our continued existence after death.

Truth, Belief, & Faith

We have discussed the fact that we can never be certain anything is true. We have considered the limitations on human understanding which make all human assertions of fact simply statements of belief. Does all this mean that what we believe to be true but cannot prove is any less true? Again, the answer is no. If something is true it is true whether or not you prove, believe in, or have even thought about, its truth.

Literally billions of ideas and beliefs can be suggested to be true. We can propose assumptions which will send us off in any direction we might wish to go. Every day we see people who are certain of the absolute truth of their beliefs, never realizing they have talked themselves into accepting as absolutely true that which is, and must be, based on their assumptions. We can argue that we are descendants of Martians, that inanimate objects talk to each other, etc., etc., etc. Since we cannot know whether or not something or someone exists beyond our perception, we cannot know if the wildest of ideas may in fact be true somewhere outside our current existence. Yet even though "anything" may be true, we must not allow ourselves to apply logical arguments to first "prove", and then "disprove", fundamental beliefs about the nature and meaning of life. What we want is for you to put aside your assumptions and beliefs; take a journey into your heart, mind, and soul; and then decide what you want to believe is true.

What is true is true. What then is the difference in believing something to be true, and proving something is true, if indeed the belief is true? The difference is not in the truth of the matter, for the belief itself is either true or not regardless of any belief as to its truth. Rather the difference lies in the realization that what appears absolutely true may not be true. That realization, and the humility that should accompany it, emphasizes the importance of reviewing your beliefs. If we cannot prove anything, how do we determine what is true? If the best we can do is believe something is true, what good is that? The answer lies in what we just said, if what we believe to be true is true, then proof is not necessary for that truth.

We have been talking as though we start with the belief that everything we seek to prove is untrue, and then go from there. The fact is that we have built into our existence a set of assumptions that certain things are true, assumptions we base our strongest beliefs on. For example, though nothing can be proven beyond doubt, few would argue the world they live in does not actually exist, or a ball thrown into the air will not fall back to earth, or people do not grow older. Few doubt or question the solid reality of any of the events that make up everyday life, from the proposition the sun will rise to the reality of everyday tasks associated with living.

All you are, all you have been, everything about your life contributes to your belief in the truth of millions upon millions of things. Your life, and your perception of it, is an incredibly intricate web of observations, feelings, and experiences, all parts of your existence, none divisible, all making you, you. Perhaps humans have some inexplicable intuition that gives them insight into what is actually true, perhaps not. The fact is that all anyone can do is to use all the abilities they have to determine what is true. All you can do is to think, and analyze, and test, and rethink, until you believe something is true.

In many cases the scientific method serves us well when we search for the "truth". This is particularly so when we sort through results of objective tests to analyze which drug is most effective, what car is best, etc. In other cases logic proves inadequate and "feelings" seem to be a better guide. Philosophy and religion are not suited to scientific inquiry. Because they deal with that which is beyond human perception, philosophical and religious beliefs must come from within each individual, and must be based on all that makes an individual a unique human being. Such beliefs grow when experiences of life combine with that illusive quality that makes each of us the singular person we are.

How much, if any, of the process of determining fundamental beliefs is guided by insight, and how much is a product of heredity and environment, is a question without answer. I have seen many people paralyzed by the fear that what they believed to be true might be false. Over the years I have come to believe that if anyone puts a sincere effort into determining what is true, and what is good, they will succeed. Even though they will never be able to "prove" anything, what they find themselves believing to be true and good will be, perhaps even if not perfectly correct, what actually is true and good. There is, of course, no proof for such a belief, yet for me it is fundamentally true.

I am not suggesting that someone who has determined his or her answer to a question before searching for it will ever find the true answer. Those who want to prove their point, even if it is only to themselves, will inevitably mold everything to fit their answer. With varying degrees of discomfort, they will reach their previous conclusion every time. What I am saying is that I am convinced that those who search their hearts, minds, and souls to understand life will find themselves believing certain things to be true and right. Perhaps these more or less inherent beliefs are simply products of human existence and thought. Perhaps, however, they are insights into profound fundamental truths.

What about the times when you feel strongly that something is or might be true, but are uncertain of those feelings because, to some degree, your beliefs lie outside human perception or experience? Beyond mere "belief" is something called "faith".

When our beliefs are strong we may choose to have faith in their truth. What then is "faith"? In part faith is having an intense conviction what you believe to be true is in fact true, but it is more than that. Real faith in the truth of something is a product of your total being. It is not only what you believe to be true, but what you want to be true. Faith is a total commitment by you to believe that what you think should be true is true, that what you think should be right and good is in fact right and good.

You cannot have faith in something or someone simply because there is nothing better to believe in. Faith cannot be based on negative choices, but must be based on a real, strong, sometimes total, desire that what you believe should be true actually is true. You must want what you have faith in to be true. Since nothing can be fully proved or disproved, unless truth has been somehow revealed, that which people have faith in is, for them, that which is true.

The End May Be Just The Beginning

What is worth having faith in? Earlier we said if your existence ends with the death of your body it is virtually inconceivable that life has any meaning at all. We believe that your existence has meaning only if you continue to exist in some form or fashion after the death of your body. So it seems if there is to be any reason and purpose to your life that you must prove or believe or have faith in an existence beyond the grave. Since it looks like no one can prove they continue to exist after death, the question is whether or not you choose to believe you do. Yet existence beyond the grave lies so far beyond human perception and observation, beyond human comprehension and understanding, that human feelings about such existence are inadequate to base fundamental beliefs on.

Then is this a matter you should have faith in? Your answer to that question, if it is to be more than a casual one which will not last, must be based on what you believe life is "all about", not only after death but also right now. If you are to have faith in a life after death you need to believe people are more than biologic creatures. To be worth having faith in, to be worth wanting, life beyond the grave must be more than just existing through time. It must offer a hope of something worth living for, of "goodness", perhaps of joy.

We can imagine many different things about life beyond the grave. We may believe in a metaphysical extension of life, somehow self-perpetuating and dependent only on a communion of some sort of mental energy unique to human beings. We may believe in reincarnation, whereby forms change but human beings never die. There is no limit to what we may believe life after death will be like. As we have said, no one can prove us wrong, or right.

Speculation about the "physical" nature of life after death can be nothing more than guesses, and offers little help in making a decision whether or not we would want to live in such a world. If we are more than our physical selves it would seem that there must be more to look forward to in a life after death than the "physical" aspects of that life. We need to find out if there is something beyond the physical that every human can have faith in if they want to be more than worthless travelers in time.

If we survive the grave does it not seem intuitively likely that the most positive aspects of our life on earth will also be positive features of the world after death? In looking for a reason to believe in an extension of life beyond the grave that is worth living for, and thus worth having faith in, you must look at this world and this life. Life on earth is the only basis we have on which to project what a world beyond the grave might be like. You must find the most positive aspects of this life, you must

find in this life a reason to believe life has meaning and purpose. Perhaps you will find “good” in this world that gives you a reason to believe, or have faith, there is a life after death filled with "joy". To help you choose what to believe about life, now and beyond the grave, we need to explore our present lives. In the rest of these notes, we will be considering whether there is "good" in this life that makes it worth having faith in a life after death.

If we do continue to exist after our physical deaths, then each moment of our lives, both before and after death, may have meaning and purpose. If we survive death then each of us has been, is, and will continue to be a unique being. What then is the meaning and purpose of life? What should, or must, you do? What choices do you have right now?

Many philosophers, psychiatrists, and others, argue persuasively that self-satisfaction is the most important human goal. A society made up of individuals who maximize their own well being is a society at its best. They conclude that when each of us reaches our own point of maximum pleasure, all of us benefit. What constitutes the maximization of pleasure is a hotly debated question, answered in countless, totally different ways. Ideas range from doing anything that makes you feel "good", to espousing intense dedication to such diverse things as political causes, meditation, or simply the pursuit of pleasure.

Many suggest the free market works well in selecting what is worthwhile in life, with various methods of providing pleasure coming and going as demand identifies, supplies, and satisfies needs. Others argue the best society is made up of family groups that seek to maximize the family's happiness. Some extend the group to include friends and even strangers, but often exclude those outside the group's geographic and social spheres. Volume after volume after volume has been written describing what various people believe life is all about. Multitudes of people have dedicated large parts of their lives to convincing others of the truth of their ideas and the wisdom of following their examples.

Instead of closely examining and eliminating one at a time what I believe to be the fallacies and follies of humankind, I will suggest to you what many believe life is all about. If you choose to know and understand what is said, I believe you will discover what is true and gives meaning and purpose to life. We are about to look for something in life worth living for, something to have faith in.

What many suggest is worth living for is love. Not what we often call love, but that which is the most profound of human experiences.

LOVE

The love we are talking about is far more, incredibly more, than that which we normally call love. Love is the most positive of human experiences. It is the deepest, most profound, of human relationships. It is the giving of all you have to give to someone else.

What is love? Love is beyond definition, it cannot be described in words. No effort to describe love can in any way answer what love is. Love is beyond human ability to analyze and evaluate. Yet each of us has, as a part of our very being, an understanding of love. The love we are talking about is basic, profound, a fundamental part of our existence. In each and every one of our hearts and minds, and I believe souls, we know and understand what love is.

Love is so deeply a part of human beings, so far beyond definition and description, so elusive to those who halfheartedly seek it, that you will know and understand love only if you engage in a very personal search of heart and mind and soul which leads to the very essence of your being. To understand life it is necessary to understand love. No one can make you understand love, you alone must be willing to take the inward journey. I will repeatedly urge you to do so, for nothing can take the place of that understanding.

Most of us think we already know what love is, when in fact few do. Sometime during our lives the majority of us will believe we have found true love, even though we have not. Many of us will go to our graves believing we have loved, when we never loved at all.

For most people, their understanding of love is hidden deep within. Each time they glimpse love and feel it trying to surface, they push it back to its resting place. Few are willing to search for the love that may be found inside them, few are willing to let their knowledge of love surface. I believe each and every person who truly wants to know and understand love, and who is willing to search and search and search their heart, mind, and soul, will know and understand love.

The search is difficult, it is perhaps the most difficult task you will ever face. If you search your heart, mind, and soul you will find yourself surrounded by multitudes of conflicting feelings, questions, doubts, etc. These will draw your attention away from your search, and may make it seem futile and worthless. If you try to deal with each distraction as it appears, you will end up floundering from side to side, without direction, your goal appearing on the horizon yet never getting closer.

Before answering the many questions love poses, before satisfying your doubts, you should complete your search. Search your heart, mind, and soul, your being, to know and understand love. Set aside all questions, doubts, and fears, put all your energy and thought into your search. First understand love, then ask and answer questions about it.

It is very hard to stay on track. Your search will take you through and among daily experiences and deep memories filled with the emptiness, cruelty, and physical pleasures of a world where love is seldom seen. The cold glance of strangers on the street, the reality of poverty in the shadow of enormous wealth, watching people get sick and die a seemingly final death. Thoughts of food, drink, luxury, sex, all the physical pleasures you could be enjoying. All these pull at your attention and cause your mind to drift. Your focus is blurred as first one thing and then another interrupts your search.

Even when you think you have broken through the fog and are running toward your goal, a tiny diversion, a moment's pause, and you are flung back into that strange and cloudy state of doubts, not knowing where, if anywhere, you are. Back in the haze, you may find yourself believing you reached your goal when you did not. This feeling of success can be strong, and the rush of living may make it seem even more real since little time is available to stop and think about who you are, where you have been, and where you are going. What can happen is that you can make yourself believe you understand love, when in fact all you have seen is false illusions of love. You may wrongly conclude that love is really not that special at all.

To allow yourself to stop short of your goal, to allow yourself to believe you understand love when you do not, is to condemn yourself to the deep darkness shared by all who live without love. A darkness few recognize, a blackness the depth of which can be appreciated only by those who find love. Only those who finish their search will know and understand love.

Completing the search requires a willingness to start. It is far easier to live your life following whatever sort of daily routine you have, over the years, consciously and subconsciously constructed for yourself, a routine designed to make you feel good about your life. For most of us this means mixing with our daily activities that bring us self-satisfaction and physical pleasure, just enough "good" deeds to give us the illusory feeling that we are "good" people. For better or worse you nurture an image of yourself you have been developing since childhood. An image that dictates what is expected of you and rules how you act, making your life a repeating cycle of yesterdays.

Even if you do not feel good about your life, you are usually more comfortable not straying too far from the familiar. It is easier to live a "normal" life than to question and search and change. Yet if you want to know and understand love you must give the search your all, without fear of, or resistance to, the changes it may bring in your life. You need to search and search until you know what it means to love, what it would be like to live in a world where each and every person loves every other person.

This is more than a mental exercise. If after your search you believe love is what all people should give each other, then you have perhaps not only found what gives life meaning and purpose right now, but also found that which makes it worth having faith in life beyond the grave. At this point I am not suggesting that you embrace without question the ideas of eternity and the goodness of love. I am saying you will find it virtually, or perhaps totally, impossible to decide whether or not to believe that love is worth living for, if you do not know and understand what love is. Only when you are willing to search your heart, mind, soul, your very being, to know love, will you understand the decision to love or not to love. Only then can you make your choice.

In the remaining pages of this book we will give some examples of love, discuss what those who love do, and talk in general about love. Yet nothing we say will bring you an understanding of love, only your search can do that. Your search will begin whenever you want it to, and will end whenever you want it to. This book is useful only if you take the hours, days, months, or years, whatever it takes, to complete your search. If you stop when you find that half-hearted, fleeting, shallow thing most people call "love", your efforts will have been futile and worthless. You will have failed to find what love really is.

It is very easy to stop short of understanding love. The idea of pure, real love, is so alien to our experiences, so foreign to the world we live in, we subconsciously, and even consciously, reject it as a non-existent fantasy. Yet it does exist. Because we seldom, if ever, witness such love does not mean it is less than real. Because the experiences of our past and the realities of our daily existence attack love does not mean it is a fantasy. Our doubts and fears, desires and temptations, weaknesses and longing to "live", cannot change the fact that pure, true, real, love exists, and that people can love one another.

If you love someone who is hungry, you will give them food; someone who is thirsty, you will give them water; someone who is cold, you will give them your coat. If you love someone who is sick, you will care for them until they are well; someone who is in prison, you will visit them; someone without a home, you will take them home with you. These are all acts and deeds those who love do for the people they love.

Yet love is far more than the doing of any particular act or deed. While those who love people will do the things we just mentioned, simply doing "good deeds" is not the same as loving. Many who do not love do "good deeds". Many who say they love, and perhaps even believe they love, if they love at all, do so only halfheartedly and from moment to moment.

It is hard to say that someone who feeds a person when they are hungry and then leaves them to find their own shelter really loves that person. It is hard to call love the giving of money to an orphanage, when children's cries for attention and companionship go unanswered. It is difficult to understand how someone can say they love a person when they make that person feel they need to applaud their donor for every gift they receive. Love is far more than acts, deeds, words, or feelings. To love someone, really love someone, is to give them all you have to give, true, deep, pure, indefinable, indescribable love. It is giving to others the love that you will find and understand if you complete your search of heart, mind, and soul.

We said we seldom, maybe never, see true love. You may have witnessed, or been part of, one of those rare occasions when people truly love other people. When a mother gently hugs her baby and love flows between them, when two people's eyes meet and they exchange soft smiles that flow from the love in their hearts, when someone gives all they have to help someone in need. These are moments of true love, moments we choose to give one another. What we are talking about is love - true, pure, real, love.

If you love, you will help a stranger who needs help, even if it puts you in danger. If you love, you will think first about the needs of those you love, and only then think about your own needs. If you love, you will do what you can, all you can, for everyone you meet.

Those who really understand love know in their heart, mind, and soul that love is the greatest thing in life one human being can give another. If you truly love someone you are giving them your very best. We have reached an awkward point in trying to use language to describe a state of being which affects the totality of human existence. How can we adequately describe how a person who truly loves thinks, feels, and acts? We can't. Only you can search within yourself to know and understand love. Unless you have completed your search of your heart, mind, and soul and know and understand love, you will not understand what I am saying, or what anyone else is saying, when we tell you about the love we find in our heart, mind, and soul. So how can you understand what we are saying when we say love is the best part of human life?

Regardless of human inability to describe love, you and I and everyone else can look inward to know and understand love. And when you, or I, or anyone else, completes their search and knows and understands love, we know and understand that love is indeed the most positive element of human existence. We know that the very best each of us can do is to love. We may find it difficult to talk about love with someone who has not yet finished their search, however once a person understands love they join all others who have completed their search in a communion of knowledge which makes communication of ideas about love easy, and makes what is said clear.

If you have trouble visualizing love, it may be helpful for you to travel in your mind to a world where pure love is freely given by every human being to every other human being. Do not let the fact that such a world does not exist around you discourage you. We may never choose to fill our world with pure love. Yet because each of us can choose love, such a world is possible! Let yourself feel in your heart, mind, and soul the love such a world would be filled with.

Visualize in your heart, mind, and soul a place where you love every person, and where every person loves you. Feel the joy of love flowing from you to every person, and from every person to you. No war, or even anger, no prisons. No loneliness, no hunger, no poverty. Instead that world would be an incredible place filled with peaceful joys of love not only shared by, but in fact chosen by, all who live there.

It may take minutes, or it may take years, for you to enter that world in your imagination and feel the glowing warmth and peace. Now is the time to start your trip. If visions of a place filled with love do not come to you today, try again tomorrow, or next week. Keep letting your heart, mind, and soul drift off to a world of pure love. Love every person you meet in that world and let them love you in return.

At this point you should sit back and think about what is being said, for in these few pages we have jumped from looking for something worth living for, to the suggestion that you search yourself for an understanding of love, to the idea that all people should love one another. If you have not searched your heart, mind, soul, your very being, and do not yet understand love, what we are saying may seem interesting but not profound. I wish I could think of words and logical arguments that would make true, pure, real, love, crystal clear to you, but I can't. We are simply not talking about the kind of understanding that comes from reasoned analysis. I could fill these pages with elegant prose and poetry describing love, yet not one word would have the power or effect that even a fleeting inward glimpse of love has.

Your Best Is Good Enough

The following will be very difficult to read and accept if you have not completed your search of your heart, mind, and soul. As you read please do not reject what is said. Complete your search, know and understand true, pure, real, love, before you make your choices. Take all the time you need, days, weeks, months, to search your heart, mind, and soul to know and understand love. Search your very being, until you know and understand what it means to love everyone with true, pure, real, love.

If you understand love you know loving does not require you to mechanically follow a set pattern of "right" actions. You know instead that if you love you will do the best you can in every situation, even if you cannot determine what the real solution is. If you love you do your best, and doing your best is something you can always do. Doing your best simply requires that which you are capable of, no more.

This does not mean loving is any easier because you do not have to know what the "correct" answer is. On the contrary, to say love requires you to do your best is to say that love requires of you all you have to give. Love requires everything you can give, your total effort. By requiring only that which you are capable of giving, it is always your choice whether you love or don't love. If you understand love you know it is your choice and your choice alone, to love or not to love. It is a profound responsibility to be able, every moment of your life, to love or not to love.

If you love another human being you are giving that human being your very best. If you love every human being you are doing the very best you can do for each of them. Similarly, if they love you they are doing the very best they can for you. It is not hard to see that a world where each and every person loves each and every other person would be the best possible world. Since each of us can love if and when we want to love, a world filled with love is very much a possibility. Pure love is so rare a quantity in daily life it may seem almost impossible that, if they are willing to, people can love all other people. Yet they can. We can bring about a world filled with love, a world that is worth living for.

Few of us seriously expect to see a day on earth when all people love one another. There are too many people for whom physical pleasure is more desirable than love. Only the most optimistic hold hope for a world filled with love. So what is the next best world? If you understand love you know you can love people even if they do not love you. You can always choose to love, and if love is the best you can do, does it not seem true that you should love even if you are not loved? Does it not seem true that you should always choose love?

If life ends with physical death, perhaps the proper response to hate would not be love, but would be some form of resistance to hate that minimizes its influence on others. Yet that cannot be, for we have already said if existence ends with physical death nothing we do really matters at all, so any response, or no response, would be equally acceptable. But what if life continues after death, would it matter what we do when faced with hate?

If life exists beyond the grave, and if love is the best part of life in this world, does it not seem intuitively likely that if life after death is to be good it will be an existence filled with love? Of course we are dealing with questions beyond human ability to answer, we are in fact in the murky area where intellect, insight, and intuition blend with belief and faith. There is no way at all we can say anything concrete about what life after death may or may not be like. Yet there exists a "feeling" that at least a portion of whatever lies beyond the grave, if anything, possesses the positive characteristics of life in this world. If we come to believe the most positive aspect of life is love, then it somehow seems intuitively true that if those who choose to love on earth enter a life after death, it will be a life that is filled with love.

So what is our answer? Who should you love? If loving is good, the question really becomes is there anyone you should not love? If you understand love you know you can always love someone even if the person you love hates you. When you hate those who hate you, you are doing the same wrong to them they are doing to you. The natural reaction is to hate those who hate you, but if you understand love you should, after deep thought and consideration, reach the conclusion that since you never have to hate, you should always love (in other writings available on our website we discuss if there are any exceptions).

What if the person who hates you continues to hate you, and does all kinds of evil to you and to others without sign of remorse? Again, if you understand love you know you can always love another person even if that person hates you. If we agree that the best we can do in this life, and in a life after death if one exists, is to love each other, the answer seems clear. If it is your choice to love or not, you should choose to love every moment of your earthly life. That means you should love even if you are not loved, even if you are hated.

If love is worth living for in this life, it is worth living for in whatever life may follow death. If it is possible that we continue to exist after death, it would seem that we should love now with the hope that when we die we will pass into a life where love will not only continue, but will be shared by all who join us there.

Loving someone does not mean you should support the wrongs they do. Many people who love others and try to help them out of problems like gambling, drinking, casual sex, etc., find themselves defending the other person and slipping into their way of life. There is a fine line between being with people and loving and helping them, and, in an attempt to reach them, accepting at least part of their way of life. If at all times you keep in your heart, mind, and soul what it means to truly love, you will have no trouble knowing where that line is.

If you choose to love, you will constantly have to decide what you should do in particular situations. The natural tendency is to take a middle of the road position that seems to be positive toward everyone involved without being too negative toward yourself. You then declare that your decision is based on love, and all seems well. Loving is not that easy, every single decision about love must be made from your heart, mind, and soul.

If you want to love you must search your very being for the answers love requires, and you must be willing to accept without change the answers you find. You are driving home from work, heading for a birthday party your spouse and friends have been planning for you. Traffic is heavy on the freeway. You see a man hitchhiking, he seems unsure of his footing, as you get closer you can tell he is drunk. If you stop you are sure to be late for your party, anyway, there are lots of cars one of which is bound to pick him up, and he doesn't look like he will stagger into the roadway.

You think, "he may be pretending to be drunk so he can rob somebody, a policeman is bound to drive by, I can call one as soon as I get home". Time to decide what to do. You want to drive on by him and not have to decide, but you know you have to stop or not stop. You stop your car, help the man into the passenger seat, he mumbles the town he is going to and then passes out. When you reach the right exit, you get off and try to rouse your passenger. He gets sick and throws up, you stop to let him get some air and to clean out the car.

You're forty minutes late for your party and there isn't a phone in sight. You think about leaving him at a gas station, but you help him back in the car and go on. He sees a bar, yells for you to stop, and curses you when you don't. You arrive in his hometown, but he is too drunk to remember where he lives. You find a motel, get the hitchhiker a room, and pay the desk clerk to look in on him to see he is all right and to bring him breakfast the next morning. You buy him some clean clothes and put them in the room.

You call home and your spouse slams the phone down. Finally you arrive home three hours late, your guests have gone, your spouse and kids are mad, you are

hungry and cold. You think about all the hassle you went through; the party you missed, your party; the drunk hitchhiker cursing you. You think, I hope I never get into another situation like this one, but if I do, I'll do it all over again. If you have not completed your search you may not understand the love given the hitchhiker. If you have, you know that if you choose love you would do the same things the driver did.

If you love someone, whether they are your child or a stranger, you will do the very best you can for them. If you love someone you will do the best you can, every moment of your life, even if it means that you do not have enough to meet your own needs. You will have compassion for every human being who does not have enough to eat, and you will invite them to eat with you. You will care for those who are sick until they get well. If you meet someone who is homeless, you will find shelter for them. You will spend time with those who are lonely, and you will listen to their problems. You will help them not because it makes you feel good, but because you love them. You will give them the love that is in your heart, mind, and soul.

Sit back, and think and think and think about loving people with true, pure, real, love. Take all the time you need to feel and experience the love inside you that you can give to all people. Complete your search of your heart, mind, and soul and know and understand love.

You choose love, that means everything is all right, right? In a very real sense the answer to that question is yes, for you everything is all right. Everything being all right does not, however, mean that your life on earth will be physically better. Probably it will get much worse, for those who choose not to love will be doubly hard on those who do. If you love someone you will not hit them when they strike you. You will give them food, and drink, and shelter even if they hate you and even if you end up not having enough for yourself. If you love them you will help them when they are sick, even if they have cheated you and cursed your stupidity. You will love them no matter what they do to you, with the knowledge that you are doing what all human beings can and should do.

What if the choice comes whether to kill someone, or be killed by them? I cannot see how someone could choose to intentionally kill someone they love. Let me simply say it seems to me that if you continue to exist after death, and if it is true that if you love someone you will never kill them, then you have nothing to fear if because you love you die and enter an existence filled with love.

You never "have" to commit any violent act against another, it is always your choice to do so or not. If love requires rejection of all violence against another

human being, as I believe it does, those who understand love should understand it is worth enduring pain in this life if accepting such pain leads to love, both now and in whatever existence follows death. Death followed by a joyful eternal life of love, day after day, year after year, millions of years after millions of years, forever and ever and ever and ever, seems far superior to a pleasant life followed by a loveless eternity. We need to remember that no matter how hard we try to avoid our inevitable deaths, the fact is that we live lives that are no more than single grains among the infinite sands of time.

If love is right, even one decision not to love is wrong. When you complete your search perhaps you may not agree with us that you will never inflict physical harm on someone you love. The answer you find to this question, and other questions less dramatic but as hard or harder to answer, is to be found in your knowledge and understanding of love. After you have completed your search, and know and understand love, you will have to decide for yourself whether or not our answer to the question about killing, as well as our answers to the many other difficult questions, are based on love, or not. We believe they are, but perhaps they are not.

We believe that after you complete your search of heart, mind, and soul you will know and understand that if anything is true, it is true that every moment of their lives each and every human being can and should love each and every other human being. There is no question in my heart, mind, and soul, that every person should love every other person. Indeed, if every person chose to love every other person as they would have those people love them, if every person chose to love every other person as himself or herself, then each of us would do the very best that we could do for every human being in the world. There would be nothing more that we should do for each other, nothing more that we could do.

One essential warning, when faced with a hard question the normal human response is toward self-interest, with elaborate arguments to justify the answer and make it seem to be the result of love. The answer dictated by love is often (for some people almost always) very, very, hard to accept. Yet I am convinced that if you choose love you will accept the toughest of answers, and will find peace and hope in your decisions. At all times you must be absolutely certain that your answers are based on the knowledge and understanding of love you find in your heart, mind, and soul. You must be certain that you always choose true, pure, real, love.

Each moment of hate is a moment when you could have chosen love. If love is best, what could possibly be better than choosing to love every moment of your earthly life?

We have said you can choose to love any time you want to. This is true no matter what you have done in the past, and only requires that you want to love now. If you decide to love, what can you do about your past? The only thing that can be done is that you can be forgiven for having not loved. If you understand love, you know that if you love someone you will forgive them the wrongs they have done to you. Think carefully about love and forgiveness, and you will understand that if you love someone you will always and repeatedly and truly forgive them for having not loved you. If you love someone you will forgive them for everything they do to you and to other people.

The murderer who admits his wrong and seeks forgiveness is perhaps better off than the cheat who denies he has done anything wrong and rejects any thoughts about needing forgiveness. If we have all done wrong, and if those who love forgive, should we not quit trying to keep score of each person's wrongs and forgive them? If you love people, you will forgive them. No matter how many times they may ask you to forgive them, if they seek your forgiveness and you love them, you will forgive them.

If you have completed your search and know and understand love, you also know and understand that if someone is your enemy and hates you, you can and should love them. If you love those people who hate you, and who do not want forgiveness, you will love them and do good to them, with the hope that they will choose to love you and seek forgiveness. You can and should love both those who love you and seek forgiveness, and those who hate you and do not seek forgiveness. To love those who hate you and who laugh at your forgiveness is perhaps the greatest test of your desire to love.

Men, Women, & Love

If you listen to people talking about love between men and women, you will quickly find that the love they describe may have only a slight, or even no, resemblance to the love you found when you searched your heart, mind, and soul. Many men and women sincerely believe love is a physical attraction between the sexes that somehow magically appears, must be cultivated by keeping the partner interested, and sometimes simply fades away. From the rush of adrenaline and the pounding heart which accompanies puppy love, to the passionate emotions of the "perfect" affair, most of humankind accepts, and in fact welcomes, the pleasant feelings of sexual thoughts and deeds.

All manner of sexual experiences are accepted without question. From the "innocent" enjoyment of a beauty contest, to the pleasures of casual sex, to unbelievable perversions, people enjoy whatever degree of sexual excitement their background and their "morals" will allow. Each of these indulgences is justified by some form of argument about sex being only natural, and feeling good being all right.

Even those whose ideas about love and marriage are more traditional are often lulled into what, for lack of a better description, may be called romantic love. The intense emotions that accompany any relationship, plus the pressures of society, combine to push people into playing stereotypical roles of dating. Men and women do the best they can to be interesting to each other, to make each other have a good time, and particularly not to rock the romantic boat. A general fear of being unpopular, of losing favor with another person, of being an oddball, runs through most people's minds.

When a man and a woman fall into playing "the game of love" they lose their identity as people who can truly love each other. Even though they may think what they are feeling is love for one another, it is more often infatuation with the romantic atmosphere and the idealized images of themselves they have created. The question is asked with increasing frequency, can a man and a woman really love each other for the rest of their lives?

Think a few minutes about the love you found when you searched your heart, mind, and soul. Then think about giving that love to another person, and in return being loved by them. If you truly understand love, you will understand that true love can exist between any two people, and that true love between a man and a woman can exist. The love you find in your heart, mind, and soul is far more than physical attraction, or magical moments. It is the ultimate, joyful relationship between two people, where each person cares as much for the other person as for

himself or herself. If you understand love, you know it is the deepest commitment one human being can give another.

If a man loves a woman, and a woman a man, when they look in each other's eyes they are not filled with lust, they are filled with love for each other. When their hands touch they are not filled with desire, they are filled with deep feelings of love. When they are with each other they know their love will not fade but will truly last their lifetimes. If they decide they want to spend the rest of their lives together as husband and wife, then they may choose to marry, and perhaps have a family.

Some readers will throw their hands up and exclaim what simplistic mishmash this is, life is nowhere near as easy as that, nor are human relationships that simple. Those who understand love know that what I am describing is far from simplistic. If you truly understand love, you will understand that the love I am describing is the basis of the deepest and most profound relationship two people can have. What makes these sentences sound naive and childish is the tendency of all of us to equate the word love with what we have been told love is. Novels, movies, poets, television, rock stars, friends, parents, teachers, have told us love is some sort of fragile entity which comes and goes with adversity and changes in the weather.

To people who only understand love in so limited and weak a form, the idea of deep and permanent love shared by two people seems a romantic absurdity. It is little wonder they find it almost impossible to believe true love can exist between a husband and a wife. What I am saying is that if two people truly love each other, they are not attracted to each other by desire for physical pleasure, they are brought together by love. When they are with each other, they have real, true, deep, love, in their hearts.

What about the intense, "passionate" love we sometimes see between people, which may drive one human being to heady, irrational, and "total" commitment to another human being, even to the point of deeply hurting friends, children, or spouses? I do not suggest the intensity of passionate "love" does not bring to its participants incredible pleasure, pleasure beyond the physical, pleasure which would perhaps be the goal of all humankind were it not for that which must be lost in gaining it. For even though I have tried and tried and tried and tried to imagine the coexistence of what we might call passionate love with that which we have called true love, it seems to me they cannot exist together in one human being. A person who chooses to give passionate love to another person, cannot also choose to give true love to all people. Passionate love overwhelms true love, it demands that people do that which they would not do if they loved all people.

The love you will find when you search your heart, mind, and soul, love every person can give every other person, may not bring with it the emotional high passion offers, yet it is an all consuming love which becomes part of a person's very being. Though it may lack the emotional fever that accompanies passionate romance, the transformation that occurs when a human being chooses to love all people gives that person love which does not appear and disappear, brighten and fade. It is love that is with them and comforts them every moment of their lives. A love that does not focus its energy on one or two people, but rather a love that spreads out from a person and grows and strengthens as it radiates into the world. That love, whether it is called ideal or pure or true, or just called love, is more intense than any love I can imagine.

Indeed, while it is true that the love between two people who love all people is clearly different to the explosive passion of two lovers for whom the rest of the world does not exist, I believe it is in fact far more intense and beautiful and joyous. Only a man or a woman who gives real, pure, true love to all people can give real, pure, true love to each individual person. The person for whom love must be a passionate emotional experience shared by a few does not understand and cannot give to anyone the all-consuming love which lies within them. They have locked fellow human beings out of their hearts, minds, and souls and thus have lost the love that, if it is given to anyone, must be given to all.

What about the millions upon millions of people who most would conclude do not "lust" for each other, but who look at each other as being physically attractive, and who may "flirt" with each other? When the vast majority of people look at each other, at least to some extent they see each other as more or less physically attractive, as having a more or less pleasant personality, as being more or less desirable to be with, etc. Far beyond the question of sexual attraction, most human beings will tell you that they get along better with people who exhibit "compatible" personality traits. Indeed, most people have a group of "friends" they enjoy being with. It seems that people like to be around people who make them "feel good". Is there anything wrong with that?

If when you look at someone you are looking for something in them that makes you feel good, whether that may be "innocent" sexual attractiveness or delightful conversation or something else, you are not giving them the love that is in your heart, mind, and soul. If you love someone, when you look at them you do not have thoughts about their physical appearance. If you love someone, you do not think about what their personality is like. If you love someone, you do not think about whether or not you want to be around them and be their friend. If you love someone, you do not have thoughts about whether or not they make you "feel

good". If you love someone, when you look at them you have love for them in your heart, mind, and soul.

If you give someone true, pure, real, love, you will love them, and you will not think of them as someone you do or do not want to be around. You will love all people, including those who other people consider to be ugly or dull or stupid or inferior. When you look at them you will not see someone who is sexually attractive or vivacious or funny or popular, you will see someone you love. When you look at them you will not see someone who is ugly or dull or stupid or inferior, or anything else, you will see someone you love. If you give to everyone, the true, pure, real, love that is in your heart, mind, and soul, they will be more than your friends, they will be your family who you love.

Forever

If you understand love you know that if anything in life is worth living for, it is for people to love, really and truly love, people. Yet if death is the end, what use is it to love anyone? If death is indeed the end of your existence, then love and hate and you and I and life are all transient puffs of smoke in an ultimately inanimate eternity. Even love will succumb to death, making its apparent beauty no more lasting than a winter's snow.

We really do not know, and will not know, what lies in store for us beyond the grave until the inevitable moment of death arrives. If life and love end at the grave we will never know the answer for we will no longer exist, and the question will die with us. Of course, as we have said, such an end would be the ultimate in painlessness. If you no longer are, you no longer are, period. The void that follows death without a life after death is a complete and total void. There would be no one to experience joy, there would be no one to experience pain.

We have said there is absolutely no way we can prove life continues beyond the grave, but we have also said there is absolutely no way we can prove it does not. We discussed the possibility of life having meaning without life after death. While we cannot be certain we are right, we explained why we believe that life has meaning only if there is a non-physical life after death. We should note that whether we are right or not, we concluded that there is absolutely no reason not to live for the possibility that we may eventually find true meaning and value in our life.

If we are right, we simply cannot know what life after death may or may not be like. Yet, as we have already noted, the "feeling" persists that life beyond the grave should possess the positive aspects of life in this world. If the most positive aspect of life is love, then a life after death that is filled with love seems to be worth believing in. If we continue to exist after death, we may indeed find ourselves in a "world" where people love people.

If love is worth living for, and if the only realistic alternative is nihilistic death, then it seems that you, and I, and everyone else, should love each other and live for the possibility that we will continue to exist after death in an existence filled with love. Yet choosing love because the alternative may be a meaningless death is not a good enough reason. Love must be chosen by those who in their heart, mind, and soul truly want to love, or their choice will be a shallow one that will not last. Those who choose to love must do so because they want to love.

If we want to love, we believe that we must have faith that we continue to exist after our physical death. Can we have faith in a random existence after death that

has no guidance, might there be more? If we are to accept that human beings may continue to exist after the death of their bodies we need to consider what, if any, external force or presence may "guide" or "control" such existence. We are way past the limits of human comprehension, at the point where belief must turn into faith. The more modern science has discovered, the more it seems that some form of "logical", "rational", process occurs in nature, replacing random events with "planned" sequences.

Such "logical" progression of nature may be the result of an incredible computer like property whereby nature is equipped with some sort of "artificial intelligence", perhaps so, perhaps not. Yet we have already said that the odds that the universe was created at random appear to be as close to zero as can possibly be imagined. Perhaps the universe is not "controlled" or "guided" by some deterministic process. Perhaps the universe is "controlled" or "guided" by someone. [Please read the next section in its entirety before reaching conclusions about what it says.]

GOD

Throughout human history there has existed in the majority of people a belief in some power, existence, a logical presence beyond human existence, a God (or gods). During at least the past few thousand years there has appeared in many cultures a belief in a God who is good, a God who wants human beings to do that which is good. Those who have completed their search of their heart, mind, and soul, know and understand love. Those who have completed their search know and understand in their heart, mind, and soul that it is good for people to love each other. Many believe that a God exists who gave us the love that is in our heart, mind, and souls. Many believe that a God exists who wants people to do that which is good, to love each other.

This belief in a God who wants people to love each other has its roots in intuitive feelings of humankind, in messages of prophets, and for those who believe in Jesus, in the word of God. There will always be arguments that the messages are messages made up by the messengers, yet from all that we have discussed, from all that those who have completed their search know and understand about love, it seems that if God does exist the message from him would be for us to love one another, precisely what many tell us it is.

There is, I believe, in most of us a feeling that God does exist. That feeling may be insight, or it may be the result of a collective deep seeded desperation in human beings to be more than doomed animals. We will not know until our death, the definitive answer forever prohibited us by the limits imposed by our being no more than a part of that which we seek to explore. We are left at the point where faith must take over if we are to believe in the existence of God.

Perhaps the "logical" selections that appear to take place in nature cannot be explained by physical processes, but rather represent actions taken by some indescribable presence, God, perhaps not. If our intuitive feelings and the calculations that support them are correct, then the complex low entropy universe in which we live cannot be the result of random chance. If we are honest with ourselves, the only answer we can construct from objective observations based on current scientific knowledge is that our universe was designed and created to be as it is. If a Creator does not exist then the logical conclusion is that the low entropy universe in which we live would not exist, and we could not exist.

Some people who believe that God does not exist, believe that human beings can do good even in a universe where there is no God. Is it possible that they are right? If human beings want to do good, can they do good if God does not exist?

We concluded that no scientific theory provides us with a singular physical consciousness which continues to exist after physical death, so that a single physical "me" continues to exist after my death. We said that if we do not have a singular physical or non-physical consciousness that continues to exist after physical death, then those who believe in nihilism are probably correct, and some type of "nihilistic" void awaits all of us. It may be a true void, like the void that preceded our birth, or it may be a very strange void where billions of "me" merely co-exist. Whatever physical form it might take, it would seem to be a "meaningless" void.

If physical death annihilates our physical past, present, and future, then our life has meaning and purpose and value only if after our physical death our consciousness continues to exist in a non-physical life. We cannot prove that we continue, or do not continue, to exist after our physical death. Indeed there may be no life after death, and your life may have no meaning and value. Yet if there is a life after death, then you will continue to experience a non-physical existence after your physical death, and your life does in fact have meaning and value.

If God exists and gives each of us a non-physical life after death, then our life both before and after physical death has meaning and value. If God, in some manner beyond human comprehension, grants existence to human beings, even after the death of our bodies, then and only then life becomes more than a brief, isolated event. Then, and only then, life and love have meaning and purpose, we can do that which is good, and life is worth living. Without God, the "good" we do would be meaningless.

If God exists, it is God who gives us love. If God exists, it is God who gives meaning to love and to good. If God exists, God is good.

Is it possible that even if God does not exist, there may be a non-physical "life" after death which gives meaning and value to our life? The intuitive answer seems to be no. I cannot imagine a human spirit that survives death if there is no presence beyond life other than human spirits, if there is no Spirit greater than the human soul. I do not believe that the only non-physical presence in the universe can be the human soul. I intuitively believe that if there is no Spirit greater than the human spirit, then there is no human soul, and we do in fact cease to exist on our death.

If there is no non-physical Spirit greater than the human soul, if there is no God, it makes no sense to conclude that a physical being born into our physical world has at birth, or somehow develops, a non-physical soul. I can see no possible way that a physical human being, who is a tiny part of an unimaginably huge universe, can survive physical death if there is no Spirit, no God, to grant that "physical being",

in some manner and fashion beyond our understanding, a non-physical soul and life. It somehow seems intuitively true that without God there would be no reason to believe that we possess a "consciousness" that continues to exist beyond the death of our bodies, no reason to have hope that after our death we may live forever in a non-physical world. Even though it cannot be proven, it seems intuitively clear that if God does not exist then there is no life after death.

Similarly, it seems intuitively clear that if God does not exist there is no "heaven" where there is a life after death that is good. It is intuitively impossible for me to imagine the existence of a life after death in a heaven where there is no Spirit greater than the human soul, where God is not present. I cannot imagine a heaven filled with perfect love that is "created" or "sustained" by imperfect human souls, who during their physical lives repeatedly fail to choose love. I cannot imagine a heaven filled with real, true, pure, love without the presence in heaven of One who loves with perfect love, without the presence of One who is good. It would seem that only God, the One who is good, could forgive human sins so that heaven would be filled with love. Without the presence of God who loves with perfect love, I cannot envision a heaven where human beings share real, true, pure, love. I cannot "prove" anything to be true, yet it seems intuitively clear that if God does not exist, there is no heaven.

I simply do not believe that there is a life after death in a heaven filled with love if God, the One who is good, the One who loves with perfect love, does not exist. It would seem that without God each of us ceases to exist on the day of our death, annihilating our past, present, and future. It somehow seems intuitively true that without God, good and love and life are empty ideas that live and die with each human being.

We may "believe" that God exists, yet rather than belief, is the existence of God something we should have "faith in"? As we have said, having faith something is true is far more than believing it is true. We can say that those who have faith accept as true what they choose to believe is true, at least until proven beyond doubt to be untrue. Yet if you realize what it means to say that nothing can be totally proved or disproved, then what you choose to have faith in is in fact what you choose to accept as true for the rest of your life. What you have faith in is not simply what you believe to be true, but rather what you choose to believe is true because in your heart, mind, and soul, you want it to be true. You decide what you will have faith in, what you want to be true if anything at all is true. Having faith that something is true does not make it true, if it is not true, it is not true. Yet if what you have faith in is in fact true, it is true, period.

Why should you have faith God exists? If the message we conveyed to you about God was that he wants wars or sacrifices or other manner of destruction, then there would be little reason to have faith in him. But the message was and is that God who gave us love wants every human being to do that which is good. The message was and is that God wants every human being to love every other human being.

In our heart, mind, and soul we know and understand love. In our heart, mind, and soul we know and understand that it is "good" for each of us to love each other. If you have not completed your search of your heart, mind, and soul, if you do not yet understand that it is good to love each other, if you do not yet understand that we can and should do that which is good, then you will find it very difficult to find a reason to have faith in the existence of God. But if you have searched your heart, mind, soul, your very being, and know and understand love, you should find it worth having faith that a God exists who wants all people to do that which is good, a God who wants all people to love each other. For if God exists he exists, period.

Perhaps God has "revealed" to all or some of us that he exists. Yet even if God has not "revealed" this to you, he has given you the choice to have faith or not to have faith that he exists. Why should you have faith that God exists? Should we have faith that God exists because if God exists, God is good? I believe the answer to that question is that if we want good to exist and have meaning, if we want to do that which is good, we should have faith that the Supreme Being, God, exists.

If love among people is good and meaningful and has purpose, it is good and meaningful and has purpose only if God exists and only because of God. It should be clear to all who want to do that which is good that they should have faith that God exists, and that they should love God, the One who is good. If God makes it good for us to love each other in this life and in a world after death, and thus makes life worth living, then his existence alone gives us hope.

It is right to have faith in God and to love God, the One who is good. It is right to have faith in God and to love God, for without him love would be no more than one of many emotions that die with those who embrace them. Without God each of us would cease to exist, making all the love we gave and received during our lifetimes empty and totally useless. Without God love would be destroyed by physical death and life would have absolutely no meaning or purpose. Without God there would be no reason for living.

You should love God with the greatest love you can give. You should love God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, all your strength, for God alone makes it meaningful and right and good for us to love him and to love each other. You

should love God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, all your strength, for God alone gives us hope that if we love him and love each other we will live forever in a joyous communion of love. If you love God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, all your strength, you have chosen to do that which you can do, you can do no more, you should do no less. If you love God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, all your strength, you will do what God wants you to do, you will love your neighbor as yourself.

Some two thousand years before the writing of these notes, a man named Jesus said to all who would listen that God gave these commandments to all people, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these."

When asked who is my "neighbor", Jesus replied, "A man was on his way from Jerusalem down to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down by the same road; but when he saw him, he went past on the other side. So too a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him he went past on the other side. But a Samaritan who was making the journey came upon him, and when he saw him he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, bathing them with oil and wine. Then he lifted him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him there. The next day he took out two silver pieces and gave them to the innkeeper, and said, take care of him; and if you spend any more, I will repay you on my way back. Which of these three do you think was neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The questioner answered, "the one who showed him kindness." Jesus said, "go and do likewise."

Who is your neighbor? With the possible exception of those who have totally rejected God (discussed in Appendix C to the complete version of LifeNotes), every person who loves you, every person who hates you, every enemy, every stranger, people of every continent, people of every race, every single human being in the entire world, everyone, is your neighbor. Jesus said that all who "keep the commandments" will live forever, continuing to exist after physical death in a state of never-ending joy.

Who was, and/or is, Jesus? Many people differ in who they believe Jesus to be. Many believe Jesus is the Son of God. There are many, many different beliefs as to what it means to say Jesus is God's son. Some believe Jesus was God incarnate. Other people believe Jesus was a prophet, given knowledge by God of the nature and meaning of life. Still others believe Jesus was a wise man with great insight into human existence.

Many people believe that Jesus and God are One, and that you must accept Jesus as God before you can know God and love God. In the Christian Bible in the Gospel of John we are told that Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. . ."; Luke says that Jesus said "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."; Matthew tells us that Jesus said "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven."; and John tells us Jesus said; "The Father and I are One."

I believe that even if you have not decided who you believe Jesus is, you can and should love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself, and that out of that love you will choose to believe, and have faith in, what your heart, mind, and soul leads you to believe or have faith about Jesus. You must answer for yourself the question of who Jesus was, and is. You may choose to believe, and have faith in, what your heart, mind, and soul leads you to believe about Jesus.

Whoever you have faith or believe Jesus to have been, and to be, his message about life remains the same: "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets", "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.", "You shall love your neighbor as yourself.", "There is no other commandment greater than these.", "... do this, and you will live." There is nothing else that we can and should do. It is your choice to love as God would have you love, or not, period.

When you complete your search it will be clear to you what God means when he tells you that you can and should love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. When you complete your search it will also be clear to you what God means when he tells you that you can and should love your neighbor "as yourself". To say that you can and should love your neighbor "as yourself" is not the same as saying that you can and should love your neighbor "as you love yourself". To say that you should love your neighbor "as yourself" does not mean that you should "love yourself". If you love your neighbor "as yourself", and both you and your neighbor are thirsty, you will not drink the only cup of water that you have because you "love yourself". Rather, you will give the cup of water to your neighbor because you love your neighbor "as yourself".

When you complete your search and know and understand the love that God has given you, you will know and understand that you can and should love your neighbor "as yourself", as if he or she was in your place, as if he or she was "you".

You will know and understand that you should give your neighbor the food that you would give yourself, the water that you would drink, the shelter that you would provide for yourself, the clothing that you would wear, etc. You should care for your neighbor when they are sick as you would care for yourself.

You should do to your neighbor what you would have them do to you. You should give your neighbor the food, water, shelter, and clothing that you would have them give to you. You should care for them when they are sick as you would have them care for you if you were sick. You should visit them when they are in prison as you would have them visit you if you were in prison. You should give your neighbor real, true, pure, love. You should give your neighbor the love that God has given us. You should love your neighbor "as yourself".

What about traditional religious beliefs, Christian theology and doctrine, baptism, sainthood, communion, all the beliefs and observances generations have cherished. What role do they play in our discussion of love? If you understand love, the answer is clear that if you love God and your neighbor you will in every instance do the best you can to do what is right. That is all you can do.

Certainly loving God means you will help your neighbors when they are in need of help. Perhaps you will decide loving God requires you to make many changes in your religious beliefs, perhaps not. When you choose to love God and your neighbor, every choice you make will be made out of love. It is the choice to love God as he would have you love him, and out of that love to love people as he would have you love them, that is the one important choice, all other choices will be governed by that one profound decision. To love God and our neighbor as God would have us love is the complete answer to all our questions.

Even though many believe that God has already spoken to us, and that we have not listened, why does God not speak directly to each and every one of us and tell us that he exists? Perhaps God has not revealed to us that he exists in a manner that no one could question, and has instead caused the observable physical universe to appear to follow deterministic laws, because he does not want us to know with absolute certainty that he does exist. Perhaps if we knew for an absolute fact that God exists, we would not choose to do God's will because we choose to love God and our neighbors, rather we would choose to do God's will to avoid loveless punishment. Perhaps God has not revealed to us that he exists so that we may have the free will choice to have faith that God exists, and the free will choice to love God and our neighbors, or not.

Why does God give us a choice to love or not to love? Why would God not create all of us in such a way that we must love as God would have us love? Perhaps the answer is that if evil did not exist, then not only would human beings not have a

choice to do that which is bad, they would not have a choice to do that which is good. Perhaps if during our life on earth we did not have the free will choice to do that which is good or not, then we simply could not choose to love. Perhaps to do good during our physical lives we must have the choice, because it is our choice to do that which is good or do that which is evil which is our choice to love or not to love.

We have completed a full circle back to the question, what is the meaning and purpose of life, yet it has become the question, should we believe God exists and have faith in him and love him? We have suggested that the reason we should have faith in and love God is because if God exists, God is good, he gives meaning and purpose to life and love, and he wants us to love him and to love each other. A "why not" argument can be made that if God does not exist nihilists are probably right and death is the end, but since God might exist we should do what he would want us to do or we might end up tortured in some form of eternal loveless punishment. That play it safe logic sounds good in theory, yet it leaves us with a feeling that those who love to avoid punishment don't really love at all. If we are to have faith in God, and love as he would have us love, we must choose to love him because we want to love as he would have us love, not because we want to avoid the consequences of not loving.

After you have searched your heart, mind, and soul and know and understand love, you must choose whether or not to believe that there is nothing in the world better than people loving other people. If you agree love is worth living for, and if love has meaning only if God exists, then you must choose whether or not to live for the one hope for human beings, that God exists. You should not have faith in God because you want to avoid a loveless, eternal punishment. You should have faith in God and love God, because God is good. You should have faith in God and love God because you want to do that which is good, you want to love God and your neighbor.

If we love as God would have us love, what will happen to us after our physical death? Think about the real, true, pure, love you found when you searched your heart, mind, and soul, and you will know and understand what love in heaven would be like. I have absolute faith that if God exists, and if there is a heaven, then if we choose to do God's will, we will live forever in heaven in the presence of God, the One alone who is good. After one moment in heaven, we will know that every single moment of our existence, our entire being, will be filled with real, true, pure love, forever. All the illness, pain, and sorrow we experienced during our life on earth will vanish completely. In an instant, memories of even the worst that happened to us before our death will be overwhelmed by the love that surrounds

us, and will "disappear" forever. We will exist in the presence of real, true, pure, perfect love, forever. We will exist in the presence of God.

After many, many years of thought and discussion, I believe that there are many difficult questions which have answers that are unclear, uncertain, or unknown; that there are many thoughts and ideas that language cannot adequately express; that there is knowledge beyond human ability to know; that we cannot "prove" anything unless truth is revealed to us; etc. After completing my search of my heart, my mind, and my soul, I believe that we do not need to answer all the difficult questions, express in words all that we intuitively feel, know what we cannot know, "prove" what is beyond human ability to prove, etc.

I have faith that I can and should "love the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, with all my strength" and "love my neighbor as myself". I have faith that if I choose to love as God would have me love, I will make the best choices I am capable of making. I have faith that if each moment of each day I love as God would have me love, when I die I will have done all I could do, all I should do, and I will live forever in a heaven filled with joyful love.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. Love your neighbor as yourself.

You will make your choice.

A Fanatic Life or a Normal Life

What will our life be like if we love God and our neighbors as God would have us love? This is a very, very, difficult question. It is clear that if we love God and our neighbors we will give food to a starving child, water to a thirsty stranger, shelter to someone who is homeless and cold. This intuitive truth is strong and basic. Is it always good to give a drink of water to a thirsty neighbor? There may be situations where we must choose to give water to one of two neighbors based on which neighbor must have the water immediately to live. There may be times when we are physically prevented from giving water to a thirsty neighbor, or when there may be other negative consequences of doing so. Yet it is clear that the basic, fundamental, statement "we should give water to a thirsty neighbor" is always true.

So where does all that we have said leave us? Does it leave us with pragmatic, situation ethics, where that which is "good" is determined by individual circumstances? It does not. Perhaps God will forgive us if we love God and our neighbor with a lesser love, yet that does not change the fact that you can and should "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength" and "love your neighbor as yourself", nothing more, nothing less, period.

If I love a neighbor who is hungry and thirsty what will I do? The answer is that I will give them food and water. No matter how hard I have tried to find another answer, if I love my neighbor and my neighbor is hungry and thirsty, I cannot imagine not giving them food and water. If you know and understand the love that God has given us, you know and understand that there is no other answer. This alone tells me that if we love our neighbor as God would have us love, we will not live a "normal life", we will live a "fanatic life".

So what will we do if we live a "fanatic life"? If you love your neighbor as yourself, you will go from neighbor to neighbor, communicating God's word to them by word and deed so that each and every one knows and understands that they can and should choose to do that which is good, that they can and should choose to do God's will. If you love your neighbor as yourself, how can you do anything less than the best you can so that each and every one of your neighbors knows and understands that they can choose to do God's will, and live a joyous life forever in heaven?

Even though you may agree with what we have just said, you need to recognize that it is incredibly difficult to live a "fanatic life". It is relatively easy to accept that living a "normal life" filled with love for our family and friends is far better than living a life filled with selfish physical and emotional pleasure. It is not as

easy to accept that a "normal life" is not the life that we should live, that it is not the "good life". It is extremely difficult to accept that we should live a life filled with "fanatic" and total acceptance of that which God would have us do.

This brings us to a very difficult question, if you "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength" and "love your neighbor as yourself", and you live in a world where some people do not choose to do God's will, will you ever do that which you would not do in a world where every person does God's will?

God has given each and every one of us the choice of giving food to our hungry neighbor or not. God has given each and every one of us the choice of doing physical harm to our neighbor or not. No matter what anyone else may choose to do, each of us has the choice to give food to a hungry neighbor or not, and each of us has the choice to do physical harm to a neighbor or not. I strongly believe that God would never have a neighbor choose not to give food to a hungry neighbor. I strongly believe that God would never have a neighbor choose to do physical harm to another neighbor. I simply do not believe that it is ever God's will that any of us choose not to give food to our hungry neighbor, or that any of us choose to do physical harm to our neighbor.

If your neighbor has plenty to eat yet is thirsty, and your neighbor refuses to share their food, it is not God's will that you say to your neighbor "share your food and then I will give water to you". It is God's will that you love your neighbor as yourself and give them a drink of water if they are thirsty. If your neighbor is doing physical harm to their neighbor, it is not God's will that you say to your neighbor "do not do physical harm to your neighbor and then I will not do physical harm to you". It is God's will that you love your neighbor as yourself and not do physical harm to them.

If we can kill one neighbor and prevent them from killing two other neighbors, it is not God's will that two people be killed, it is not God's will that one person be killed. It is God's will that no one is killed. If we do physical harm to reduce the physical harm done by another person, there is one more person in the world who is doing physical harm, not one less. I am unwilling to conclude that God would have any of us do physical harm to our neighbor when each and every one of us has the choice to do physical harm or not to do physical harm, to kill or not to kill. [If after you finish reading these notes you do not agree with one or more of the conclusions we reach, you may want to read our comments and notes, which discuss some of our views on complex questions and difficult topics, and perhaps read our other versions which contain some additional text]

It is God's will that each and every moment of our lives each and every one of us do God's will, nothing less, nothing more, period. My hope is that if we live a "fanatic life", we will have done God's will on earth, and after our physical death we will live a joyous life in heaven, nothing could be better.

What if I am wrong about God wanting us to live a "fanatic life"? I understand that if I am wrong, the consequences of choosing to live a "fanatic life", where we do no physical harm to protect others, may be horrendous. As the probable consequences of choosing to live a "fanatic life" unfold you may witness horrific events including the torture and death of adults, children, and infants. I strongly believe that we can and should live a "fanatic life", yet I do not believe that during my lifetime on earth I will ever be able to say in good conscience that I am absolutely certain that I am right.

The collective wisdom of generations of human beings who want to do that which is good, is that God would have us live a "normal life". The vast majority of people believe that we should do the best that we can to maximize the positive physical aspects of our lives on earth, while minimizing the negative. Perhaps the hundreds of millions of people, including virtually every theologian and philosopher, who believe that we can and should love God and family and friends with a more complex love are right. Most view life after death as a separate existence from life on earth, where those people who made physical life on earth as "good" as it can be will live a joyous life in heaven.

A "normal life" most would consider to be a "good life" is a life where each individual has strong spiritual beliefs and faith which they gladly share with other people. Such a normal life may include a strong family unit, a loving spouse and kids, and close relationships with relatives. The parents have well paying jobs that provide sufficient income for the family's comfort and that give them plenty of time at home. Family members and extended family enjoy talking, playing games, helping with homework, working around the house, eating out, going to movies, etc. The adults and kids participate in sports and hobbies, and take family vacations each year.

A "good" normal life includes volunteer work at hospitals, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, etc., and generous donations to charitable organizations. The family accepts protection provided by government agencies using social programs, diplomacy, and the minimum force necessary to prevent one person from doing physical harm to another person. People who live such a "normal life" have a pleasant, happy, positive attitude toward all their "neighbors" – including family, friends, and strangers.

This is a “normal life” that most people would call a "good life". Indeed, most people believe that this is the life that God would have us live. It is a life that focuses primary love and attention on family and self, and secondary love and attention on friends, while at the same time providing what each individual considers to be their fair share of love, care, and help to those outside what is commonly known as an extended family.

Is this kind of "normal life" the life God would have us live, or not? I return to the question, if I love a neighbor who is hungry and thirsty what will I do? The answer is that I will give my neighbor food and water. My conclusion remains the same, I strongly believe that God would have us live a “fanatic life”. Yet I may be wrong. You must complete your search of your heart, mind, and soul and find the answers to these difficult questions yourself.

Even though I strongly believe that each and every one of us can and should live a “fanatic life”, I intuitively believe that very, very, very, very, very few will choose to live such a life. Almost everyone who chooses to love God and their neighbor will choose to love God and their neighbor with a “lesser love” than God would have them choose. Almost everyone who chooses to love God and their neighbor will choose to marry and have a family, to have a successful career, to support government use of minimal physical force to minimize physical harm, etc. Almost everyone who chooses to love God and their neighbor will choose to live a life that maximizes the positive physical aspects of their life on earth, without causing what they consider to be unacceptable negative consequences for their neighbors.

We live in a world where people choose to do evil. If we live a fanatic life and do not use minimal physical force to prevent physical harm, then our neighbors will almost certainly suffer injury and death. If we do nothing to physically stop them, there will almost certainly be parents who savagely beat infants, mass murderers who kill innocent children, and brutal political leaders who commit genocide. Almost every human being who wants to love God and their neighbor chooses to love their neighbor with a “lesser love”, and accepts physical violence that they believe will “minimize” physical harm to their neighbors.

You must be absolutely certain that you complete your search of your heart, mind, and soul, and know and understand the true, pure, real, love that God has given us. You must be absolutely certain that you complete your search of your heart, mind, and soul, and know and understand God’s will, what God would have you do. You must decide for yourself what you will do. You will make your choice.

If we do nothing to physically stop them, there will almost certainly be people who inflict excruciating pain and almost unimaginable tortures on our neighbors. If

you, like almost everyone else, are not willing to accept the physical consequences of living a “fanatic life”, live a “normal life” like the “normal life” we described. If you are unwilling to live a “fanatic life”, love God with as much of your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength as you are willing to love him with, and love your neighbors as much as yourself as you are willing to love them, with the hope that God will forgive you.

Appendix - Distress and Depression

We have received comments from readers who tell us that our ideas caused them to be distressed or depressed. If you are one of those readers you need to consider the following. As human beings become anxious they often lose their focus and misinterpret what they are reading. If you understand what we are saying, there is absolutely no reason to be depressed by our ideas.

Why not? First, we may be wrong. What we conclude to be true and correct may not be. Yet beyond the fact that we cannot be sure we are right, the fact is that if we are right, for the vast majority there is nothing to fear or dread. This fact is extremely difficult to accept if you are searching for meaning in your life, you do not believe that there is a life after death, and you are discouraged or depressed before you start reading. When you read our ideas they may touch raw nerves, and you may stop understanding what we are saying.

Either there is a life after death or there is no life after death. If there is no life after death and we are correct when we conclude that physical death annihilates our past, present, and future, then there is absolutely no reason whatsoever to be even the slightest bit distressed or depressed. If physical death annihilates your past, present, and future, then after your physical death you are consumed by a totally peaceful void, with absolutely no pain or sorrow or other negative result. There is no logical or rational way whatsoever to conclude that there is any negative consequence if your ultimate end is a nihilistic death.

If your mind is not receptive and clear, then you may have a violent reaction to our conclusions about death if there is no life after death, a reaction that ignores the fact that there cannot be anything to fear about such a death. It is human nature to attack anything that suggests that our life today may be destroyed by death, yet that reaction can have no rational basis in logic. If your past, present, and future is annihilated by your physical death, after your death you will not suffer pain or sorrow or regrets or anything negative at all, period.

Furthermore, if your past, present, and future is annihilated by your physical death, that fact can have no effect whatsoever on today, on now. If a nihilistic death lies in your future, it cannot affect your present at all. You can live every day, from now to the moment of your death, to the fullest. It is very important to understand that every person who is unwilling to believe that there is a life after physical death can live a positive life for the rest of their life, loving their neighbor, doing that which is good, with the hope that physical life does have meaning and purpose.

There is no reason whatsoever for those who are unwilling to believe that there is a life after physical death to be depressed, there is every reason for them to do that which is good and live the most positive life they are willing to live, with the hope that your life may have meaning and purpose.

Many who are deeply depressed believe that their lives are meaningless, and to escape the pain of living they seek the peace of suicide (if you are suicidal visit www.areason.org). If you are suicidal it may be very difficult for you to accept the fact that if there is no life after death and we are correct when we conclude that physical death annihilates our past, present, and future, there is absolutely no reason whatsoever to commit suicide. If your physical death is a nihilistic death, there is no reason to end your life now because you will experience the same “peaceful” end if you die next year, or twenty years from now. Your mind may be too clouded to understand what we are saying, yet if you are suicidal you must take whatever time it takes to fully understand, and you must seek immediate professional help (see below).

If on your physical death your past, present, and future are annihilated, there is absolutely no reason whatsoever to commit suicide, because all the physical and emotional pain you suffer in your life, now or next week or next year, will be annihilated whenever you die, even if your death does not occur for many, many, years. It is simple logic that if no matter how far in the future a nihilistic death occurs, it causes all pain that you ever suffered to be as if it never happened, then there can be no logical reason whatsoever to commit suicide now to avoid future pain, period.

Committing suicide necessarily eliminates all possibility of finding meaning and purpose in your life. You cannot know if a nihilistic death awaits you or not, so there is no reason whatsoever not to live for the possibility, no matter how remote you may believe it to be, that in the future you will find meaning and purpose, and perhaps happiness, in your life.

No matter what we may think or you may think right now, there is always a possibility that your life has meaning and purpose. If there is a life after death, or if there is no life after death, there is always a possibility that sometime in the future you will find meaning and purpose in your life. If in fact there is a life after death then there is every reason to live for the hope that you will enjoy a peaceful existence after death. If in fact there is no life after death then there is every reason to live for the hope that your physical existence has meaning and purpose. There is no reason whatsoever not to live for the possibility your physical existence has meaning and purpose right now, simply because during your physical life on earth you can never, never, know with any degree of certainty whether your life

has, or does not have, meaning.

If you are depressed and suicidal it is extremely difficult for you to see the absolute fact that there is absolutely no reason not to live every moment of your natural life for the possibility that you may find meaning and purpose and happiness in your life. There can be no reason whatsoever to commit suicide and eliminate the possibility that your life has meaning and purpose. There can be no reason whatsoever to eliminate the possibility that you will eventually find, if not joy and happiness, at the very least peace and contentment in your life.

We have readers who indicate that they are distressed and depressed by the possibility that they may have committed the eternal sin. If God exists and if there is an eternal sin, then God gives us the choice to commit the eternal sin or not to commit the eternal sin, period. It would seem that those who have not committed the eternal sin would be distressed if they believed that they might have committed the eternal sin. It would seem that the very fact that someone is distressed by the belief that they may have committed the eternal sin may suggest that they have in fact not committed the eternal sin.

It seems that physical and mental disease may cause extreme anxiety and depression, and may lead a person to believe that they have committed the eternal sin and that they will live in hell after their death when in fact they have not committed the eternal sin. If you are distressed and depressed by the possibility that you have committed the eternal sin, then you need to talk with those who have not committed the eternal sin, including ministers and religious counselors. If there is any chance at all that you are suffering from physical or mental disease, you also need to consult health professionals. Talk to several people, especially mental health professionals if there is any possibility of mental problems, so that you may better determine what you have and have not done.

It can be very difficult to find qualified professionals, and even when you do find them, it can be very difficult to tell them about your fears. Find qualified professionals and talk to them. You need to overcome any reluctance you may have to talking with those who might help you, and be willing to allow them to help you decide what you really believe is true. Seek professional help now!

If you do not yet understand the fact that there is no reason whatsoever to be disturbed or depressed by our conclusions, including our conclusion that if there is no life after death, then your past, present, and future may be annihilated on your physical death, then you still do not understand what we are saying. Please take as much time as you need to reread and carefully think about what we are saying, until you satisfy yourself that there is in fact absolutely no reason to be depressed

by our conclusions, and absolutely no reason whatsoever for any human being to commit suicide.

DEPRESSION IS A MEDICAL CONDITION, IF YOU ARE DEPRESSED, FOR ANY REASON, YOU MUST SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP NOW!

(from the National Mental Health Association website - <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/suicide>):

Life is full of good times and bad, of happiness and sorrow. But when you are feeling "down" for more than a few weeks or you have difficulty functioning in daily life, you may be suffering from a common, yet serious medical illness - called clinical depression.

You are not alone

Every year more than 19 million American Adults suffer from clinical depression. Young or old, man or woman, regardless of race or income - anyone can experience clinical depression. Depression can cause people to lose the pleasure from daily life. It can complicate other medical conditions - it can be serious enough to lead to suicide. Yet this suffering is unnecessary. Clinical depression is a very treatable medical illness. So why don't many people seek the help they need? Clinical depression often goes untreated because people don't recognize the many symptoms. They may know some symptoms, such as sadness and withdrawal, but they are unaware of others, including anxiety, irritability, and sleeplessness. Some incorrectly believe that only people whose depression lasts for months, or who have completely lost their ability to function, have "real" - or "clinical" - depression. Many people even wrongly think that depression is "normal" for older people, young adults, new mothers, menopausal women, or those with a chronic illness. The truth is, clinical depression is never "normal," no matter what your age or life situation. Also, people need to know that treatment for clinical depression really works - and to learn how to go about finding the treatment they need.

Clinical Depression can be Successfully Treated

Clinical depression is one of the most treatable of all medical illnesses. In fact, more than 80 percent of people with depression can be treated successfully with medication, psychotherapy or a combination of both. Only a qualified health professional can determine if someone has clinical depression. But knowing the symptoms of clinical depression can help you as you talk with your health professional.

As with many illnesses, if treatment if needed, the earlier it begins, the more effective it can be. And, early treatment increases the likelihood of preventing serious recurrences.

You Do Not Have to Cope with Clinical Depression on Your Own

Some people are embarrassed to get help for depression, or they are reluctant to

talk about how they are feeling. Others believe that depression will go away on its own. You can't just "Tough it out!" Help is available.

Talking to friends, family members and clergy can often give people the support needed when going through life's difficult times. For those with clinical depression such support is important, but it is not a substitute for the care of a health professional. Remember, clinical depression is a serious illness that you do not have to treat on your own.

Depression (from the National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml>):

A depressive disorder is an illness that involves the body, mood, and thoughts. It affects the way a person eats and sleeps, the way one feels about oneself, and the way one thinks about things. A depressive disorder is not the same as a passing blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be willed or wished away. People with a depressive illness cannot merely "pull themselves together" and get better. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months, or years. Appropriate treatment, however, can help most people who suffer from depression.

Also see: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/depression.html>

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