

MARGARET
FEINBERG

The
ORGANIC
GOD

FALL IN LOVE WITH JESUS ALL OVER AGAIN

Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

Any Internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers in this book are offered as a resource. Author does not vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

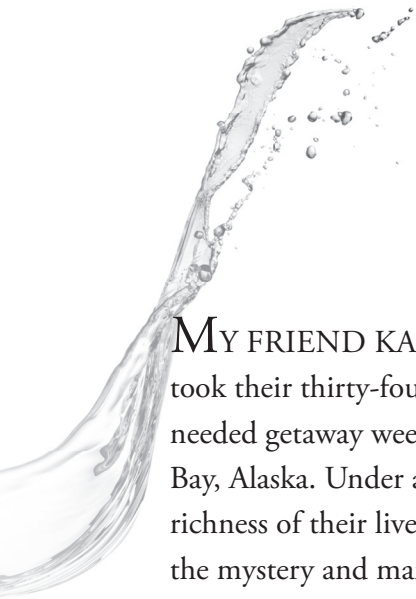
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other, without the prior permission of the author.

Contents

.000 Luminescence	1
.001 An Organic Appetite	5
.002 Big-Hearted	19
.003 Amazingly Wise	35
.004 Surprisingly Talkative	57
.005 Wildly Infallible	73
.006 Generously Giving	89
.007 Unbelievably Stubborn	105
.008 Abundantly Kind	121
.009 Deeply Mysterious	135
The Organic God Sound Track	153
Rainy Day Reflections	155
Illumination—The Bonus Track	157
Props	167
Community	169

.000 Luminescence





MY FRIEND KACY AND HER HUSBAND, Toby, recently took their thirty-four-foot, baby blue Tolleycraft out for a much-needed getaway weekend. They anchored in a quiet cove near Auke Bay, Alaska. Under a star-filled sky, they ate, laughed and shared the richness of their lives. The Northern Lights danced above with all the mystery and marvel of midnight rainbows in the sky. Sitting on the back deck of their boat, Kacy looked into the sea and began to notice tiny, mysterious sparkles of luminescence. This magical light is known as bioluminescence, whereby marine organisms produce light as a result of a chemical reaction involving the oxidation of a substrate molecule luciferin by a catalyst luciferase; the energy is released as sparkling blue-green light. ¹

Like many of us who respond to natural wonders, Kacy wasn't interested in a science lesson. She didn't even care what it was called. She was too caught up in the beauty of the moment.

Kacy grabbed a broom handle resting in the corner of the boat and began stirring up the water and watched with glee as the sea came to life in all its secret shimmering beauty. *How could you have not told me?* she asked her husband with a blend of contempt and disbelief. Raised in Michigan, she had been living in the waterfront town of

Juneau, Alaska, for more than four years and had missed experiencing this luminous wonder until now.

A week after the getaway, Kacy was still in awe of her find. As she recounted the story, she asked, *Did you know? Have you heard?* I smiled, recalling a similar glee I had felt when swirling the waters off the shores of south Florida as a child. I remember staring into the darkness of the water at the fireflies of the sea. I shared my first encounter with luminescence with my mom as she tenderly explained that the lights were actually alive. She described them as miniature animals of the sea that glowed. At that moment something inside of me came alive that can't quite be explained. Years later, I still carry the same sense of wonder.

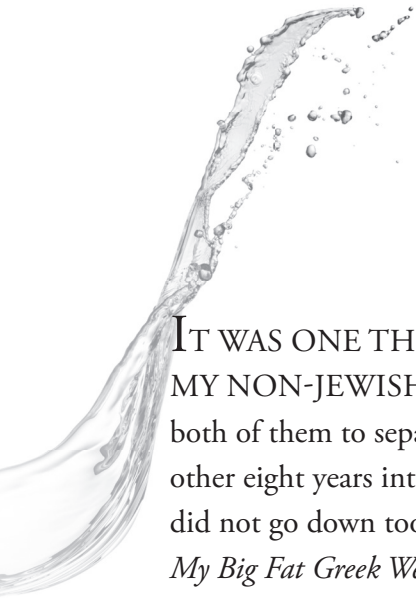
I cannot help but wonder how many other things in our world should make me stand back in childlike awe. When I encounter something new that represents everything that is good and true and beautiful, something awakens inside of me. Maybe it's the heart cry of our Creator. Such encounters remind me that there is so much more to do and grow and experience and know—not just about my world but about my God.

This book is designed to take you on a journey and illuminate the beauty of God in your life. It asks you to open your eyes to some of the things God has been doing all along that you may have missed or no one has ever told you about before. My hope and prayer is that through *The Organic God* you'll fall in love with God again for the first time, and a part of you will come truly alive as you dance in all the brilliance of his design.

—Margaret Feinberg

.001 An Organic Appetite





IT WAS ONE THING FOR MY JEWISH FATHER TO MARRY MY NON-JEWISH MOTHER. It was a completely other thing for both of them to separately become Christians within a month of each other eight years into their marriage. Let's just say that the decision did not go down too well with the Jewish side of the family. (Think *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* without the happy ending.) A month later I was conceived. Less than a year after my parents became Christians, I was welcomed into a world of religious tension. I didn't know it at the time, but I became the bundle of glue that held the family together, because as upset as my Jewish grandmother was at my father, she wasn't going to give up access to her only grandchild.

As a result, I was raised in a Christian home with hues of Judaism. Think Matza ball soup at Christmas time. I never knew how many gifts my Jewish grandmother was going to give—whether I would hit the jackpot with the stack-o-gifts that accompany Hanukah or the one big present that inadvertently acknowledged Christmas though it was still wrapped in Hanukah paper. The confusion ended when Grandma began giving the gift that embraced the fullness of my Jewish heritage: a check. Throughout the years, I managed to learn a few random words in Yiddish, develop a quirky Jewish sense of

humor, and inherit an undeniable sense ofchutzpah. I developed a desire to know how these worlds—which seemed so opposed in my childhood—could ever get along.

I developed a hunger to know God. It wasn't anything I conjured up but rather seemed to be part of the me-package, like a strand of DNA. I began reading the Bible at a young age, not out of longing but rather desperation. I was having terrible nightmares—the kind you can't forget even when you're an adult.

On a sunny, breeze-softened afternoon I was fishing alongside a creek in a forest affluent with maple and oak trees. Sitting on the moss carpeted shore, I held a thin, wooden homemade fishing pole. I felt a slight tug on the line and an unmistakable surge of excitement. I began pulling back on the pole. It arched at the weight of the catch. Without warning, a huge shark with beady eyes and enormous yellow razor-sharp teeth came out of the water and toward my face. I awoke. Breathless. Heart pounding. Body covered in sweat. I knew sharks didn't jump out creeks and eat people, but now I wasn't so sure. I didn't want to fall back asleep ever again. Would the next nightmare be worse?

These night terrors continued for months. My parents held me. Prayed for me. Comforted me when they heard my screams. But the dreams didn't stop until I made a personal discovery. Somehow as an eight-year-old I figured out that if I read the Bible before I went to bed I would sleep soundly. It's a strange equation:

Bible before bed = No nightmares

The concept made perfect sense when I was eight. I couldn't explain why it worked. I just knew that it did. And when you're facing man-eating sharks, you'll do whatever it takes. Some two-plus decades later

it's tempting to shrug it off as an oddity or merely chance, except for the fact that those evening readings made God all the more real and personal. My heart melts when I think that God would embrace a child so tenderly and intimately in simple faith, but then again, God has an unmistakable penchant for children.

Somewhere along the way, reading the Bible actually became enjoyable and not just a cure for nightmares. The stories of kings and queens and prophets and pilgrims came alive, and of course, the Jesus-man not only captured my heart but also my imagination. What did he look like? What did his voice sound like? What did his hands feel like? I wanted to know.

Now for a few years, I didn't really care to know. You see, I tried to run away from God. It was a failed attempt. I engaged in an extracurricular activity better known as partying like a rock star. I kissed too many boys and drank too much beer and enjoyed a thoroughly hollow good time. I'll never forget the words of my college roommate, *I hate all the friends that I have when I'm drunk*. We had both discovered what I like to call the Cheers Principle: When you're under the influence everyone is your best friend, but come sober Monday everyone returns to their true selves. I knew it wasn't the life for me. I returned to the routine I had learned at eight years old. I began reading my Bible.

More than a decade later, deep down inside, I still want to know God. The desire hasn't cooled. At times I have allowed myself to be overpowered by other desires. Busyness. Lesser loves. Laziness. And the temptation to let someone else do all the hard work of digging into the rich reservoirs of Scripture has gotten the best of me.

But the hunger lives on.



Somewhere in the depths of my being, I have a hunger for God. I have a hunch that the desire was originally placed there by God through the Holy Spirit. Consider it an insignia if you will—a sign that he’s been there, still doing that, a sign of ownership, a reminder that we are created for something beyond ourselves. But all too often I find myself tempted to live a distracted life. You know the kind. The one where within the busyness of life you still manage to perform the stand up, sit down, clap, clap, clap of regular church attendance, drop a pittance in the offering plate (*Is a mere 10 percent really that much?*), hope for a new nugget of knowledge, understanding, or insight in the weekly sermon, and check off a random, albeit short, list of acts of kindness to others. Somehow I’m supposed to feel like I’m living the Jesus-driven life.

I don’t.

That’s when the hunger appears in my belly and overtakes my soul grumbling that there must be more. Even in the mundane, I find myself wanting more of God. Surely I’m not the only person who lays in bed at night wondering, *Is this all there is?* I can’t be the only one who looks at the seemingly rich buffet of everything this world has to offer and loses my appetite, because even with countless provisions, friends, and activities—many of which are not only good but also could be classified as “Godly” by Urban Dictionary.com or at least one local spiritual leader—I can’t shake this sense that there’s more.

The hunger growls that there’s more of God to not only uncover but discover.

The hunger cries out that there’s more of this God-infused life to live.

The hunger reminds me that there's more.

I want to go there. But how do I find the way?

When I reflect on my life map so far, I recognize that spiritual hunger, the kind infused with the Holy Spirit, is one of God's greatest gifts. Now I don't think everyone has this hunger for God all the time, but when we find ourselves spiritually hungry we should respond. When God grants us a whim or a whiff of a desire to know him, we should act—and fast—because those windows of opportunity may pass, and we may once again become satisfied with the smorgasbord of this world, rather than the one to come.

In fact, I'm so convinced that spiritual hunger is critical to my faith journey that I actually pray for it. There. I said it. I actually ask for my soul to be smitten. It's a terrible prayer, because once you begin asking for hunger you can't really stop. In fact, praying for hunger is far worse than praying for patience. Most people I know who have prayed for patience only last a few weeks, a month tops. By the end, they've had enough delays and disruptions that they're ready to settle back into a normal routine. A prayer for hunger feeds on itself until you're simply starving to know more of God. It's consuming. You begin banking your life on the promise of Jesus that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will not only be blessed, they will be filled. You become hungrier and hungrier until you're tempted to gnaw on your own arm for just one more discovery about God and his ways. Worst, or best of all, (depending on your perspective), God can't help but transform us when he answers that prayer. When you ask for hunger, you're asking for a greater God-capacity in your life. You're asking that the heights and depths and width of your knowledge of the fullness of God be expanded. You're

asking to be transformed from the inside out by a desire for God that outweighs all else.

To make matters worse, you'll sometimes encounter other people who have prayed the same dangerous prayer, and their desire has overcome them to the point that they don't look like, sound or even smell like other people who claim to follow Jesus. They are different.

Take, for example, Grant, a family friend who I recently ran into in the Seattle airport. Grant lives in a Norwegian-flavored seaside town known of Petersburg, Alaska, an area where the big events are fishing, an annual Viking festival, and the richness of community among those who live there. Grant has tapped into the God-life. He is an unassuming pillar member of the community. He and his wife are heavily involved in their church and his work, commercial fishing and running a bed and breakfast. He is tapped into God. The hunger has overcome him to the point that it not only feeds his soul but also the souls of those he encounters.

As Grant and I sat catching up for a few brief moments in the airport, I found God highlighted, alluded to, or mentioned in almost every sentence the man spoke. God was not vaguely a part of Grant's life. Rather, he permeated his very soul, bone, and spirit. If you spend five minutes with Grant, there's no question where this man lives, moves, and finds his being.

The residue of my conversation with Grant has still not worn off. This morning in my own time with God I couldn't help but think, *Why I am not more transparent about my relationship with God? and Why do I tend to tuck away my greatest treasure?*

Sometimes I live pretending that I'm not really hungry for God and on a fair number of days, I'm not. God hasn't misplaced me, but

rather I misplace him in those places where I choose to invest my time, focus, and attention. For many days, though, he is the center—the desire I wake up to in the morning. He’s the focus of my worship, my prayer, my thoughts—I hunger to discover just one more piece of him, one more insight into his ways, his truth, his very being. I cannot stop.

The hunger becomes a fuel that propels me toward God. When I long for him, lesser loves fall to the wayside. The fullness of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—take center stage. This God-infused hunger helps keep me moving forward in a relationship with him.

A few minutes with Grant make me hungry. I continue to pray.

As my prayers funnel toward heaven, I can’t help but wonder how much of God I really know and how much of God I simply take other people’s word for or dismiss altogether? If God is big-hearted, then why I am tempted to live with a closed hand? If God is surprisingly talkative, then why don’t I take more time to listen? If God is deeply mysterious, then why do I sometimes lose the intrigue?

In the quietness of my own soul, I can’t help but wonder, *How much of God do I really know?*

Dare I ask it, but if we met on the street would I even recognize him?

In the humility of honesty and a soul laid bare: I do not know.

Such realizations shake the core of who I am. It’s like the day that I discovered that technically I am not half-Jewish. Now that was a bombshell. I was in a conversation with an older woman I barely knew when she randomly asked me about my last name. She recognized Feinberg as a classic Jewish name alongside Goldbergs and

Horowitzes (both of whom are family friends). Then she asked the penetrating question: *Is your mother Jewish?*

No, it's my father, I explained.

Well, then you're not Jewish, she replied. *To be Jewish, your mom must be Jewish.*

I was taken aback. I had a Jewish father, a Jewish grandmother who escaped Poland at the onset of World War II, and I knew how to make a mean bowl of matza ball soup. Even my best friend was Jewish. What more did you have to do to be a half-Jew?

It turned out that nosy woman was right. Orthodox Judaism embraces matrilineal descent or the belief that a child's Jewish identity is passed down through the mother. Only recently has the reformed movement within Judaism embraced patrilineal descent. Regardless, they still require that the child is raised Jewish—which I was not.

The incident left me feeling like a spiritual bastard child. Once the paralyzing effect of the conversation wore off and my mom assured me that I was my father's daughter, I grew an even deeper desire to understand how these two worlds—that of Jewish descent and Christian upbringing—intersect. It also left me hungrier for God. I knew he was the only one who could offer any resolve.

Maybe that's why deep down inside I hunger for a true, pure relationship with The Organic God. Who is the Organic God? He is the One True God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In him is found the mysterious wonder of the Trinity, He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one luminous essence in whom there is no shadow of change, stirred by the eternal and dynamic relationship of

the three persons who live and love completely free of any need or self-interest. It is this life without additives into which the Scriptures invite us, it is this God who I describe as the Organic God to evoke a hunger in your heart for him.

Why describe God as Organic? Because more and more I realize that my own understanding of God is largely polluted. I have preconceived notions, thoughts, and biases when it comes to God. I tend to favor certain portions of Scripture over others. I have a bad habit of reading some stories with a been-there-done-that attitude, knowing the end of the story before it begins and in the process denying God's ability to speak to me through it once again. If that weren't enough, more often than not, I find myself compartmentalizing God. He is more welcome in some areas of my life than others. Worse, I lose the holy expectation of those rare moments of transcendence in my religious day-to-day practices. Prayer, Bible study, memorization, journaling, and other practices become like a to-do list to be checked off, and eventually crumpled up and thrown away rather than savored and reflected upon. The result is that my understanding and perception of God is clouded much like the dingy haze of pollution that hangs over most major cities. The person in the middle of a city looking up at the sky doesn't always realize just how much their view and perceptions are altered by the smog. Without symptoms such as burning of the eyes or an official warning of scientists or media, no one may even notice just how bad the pollution has gotten.

That's why I describe God as Organic. While it's a word that is usually associated with food that has been grown without chemical-based fertilizers or pesticides, *organic* is also used to describe a lifestyle: simple, healthful, and close to nature. Those are all things I desire in my relationship with God. I hunger for the simplicity. I

want to approach God in child-like faith, wonder and awe. I long for more than just spiritual life but spiritual health—whereby my soul is not just renewed and restored but becomes a source of refreshment for others. And I want to be close to nature, not mountain ridges and shorelines as much as having God’s nature working in and through me. Such a God-infused lifestyle requires me to step away from any insta-grow short cuts and inexpensive chemical or formula-based beliefs and dig deep into the soils of spiritual formation only found in God.

Natural. Pure. Essential.

The Organic God isn’t so much the God I thought I knew as much as the God I want to get to know. I want to discover him, again, anew, in a fresh way. I want my love for him to come alive again so that my heart dances at the very thought of him as he delights in me.

And I want a real relationship with him. The kind of relationship that is filled with the laughter, tears, bruises, and stench that only come with being fully human. I want a relationship that isn’t tampered with by perfumes, additives, chemicals, or artificial flavors that promise to make it sweeter, sourer, or tastier than it really is. It’s as if I’ve come to a place in my spiritual diet where I’ve eaten one too many boxes of Wheat Thins or packages of Oreos. I feel slightly nauseas, tired of the food-coma that accompanies an unbalanced diet. I’m hungry for clean spiritual food—those without excess sugars or processing. I want to know a God who in all his fullness would allow me to know him just as he is. I want a relationship that is real, authentic, and life-giving even when it hurts. I want to know God stripped as much as possible of any false perceptions. I want to know him for myself. Such a journey risks exposure, honesty, and even pain without the promise of revelation, but I’m hungry and desperate

enough to go there. Chalk it up to one too many prayers. I want to know The Organic God.

How do I get to know him?

The truth is that you cannot love that which you do not know and experience. That is why I am going to the only roadmap that I have—the Scripture—to try discovering him. One of the greatest desires or hungers that I see of men and women in both the Old and New Testament is to know God. Moses bravely asks God, *If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you* (Exodus 33:13). The Psalmist's heart cry *Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long* (Psalm 25:4–5), reverberates with a desire to know God and his ways.

The primary way that God invites us to know him is through a book. Usually when I give a book to someone it's in an effort to build a relationship—to develop conversation, share ideas, and grow together. It's a tangible effort to take the relationship to a new intensity—to go deeper, richer, or broader than it's ever been before. God has given us a book and he invites us to discover the wonders of Jesus shining in its pages. It's a volume not just to be read but to be savored like an orange, which first must be peeled before its flavors can dance on the taste buds. All the while, a mystery unfolds as the words on the page come alive in our hearts until they transform our actions, attitudes and behavior. Indeed, the book God gives us is like no other. God's printing press is far more concerned with transformation than mere information. If you look real close, you'll notice that scrawled on every page is an invitation to know the author. ¹

In some regards, the journey to know God isn't too different from

a first encounter with someone you've never met. I want to know what God looks like and his interests. I want to know his likes and dislikes. I want to know what makes him tick and also what ticks him off. In my heart of hearts, I want to fall in love all over again. I want to know God.

I have begun the journey by going through the New Testament and books of the Old Testament recording every verse that described a characteristic or attribute of God. As you can imagine, I've filled dozens and dozens of pages. Along the way, I found unimaginably breathtaking aspects of God much like luminescence.

The truth is that God glows. His glory illuminates the heavens. Jesus, by his very nature, is brilliance. The One described as the light of the world does not contain a shadow of darkness. And the Holy Spirit ushers the spiritual dawn into our lives. Like the fireflies of the sea that beckon our imaginations to another world, the truth of God invites us to embrace the fullness of the life we were meant to live. As we look to him we can't help but become more radiant.

The vastness. The beauty. The power. The splendor. The glory.

It looks like the luminescence is already beginning to surface.