

A  
LITTLE  
BOOK *of*  
LIGHT

*sparks of hope,  
moments of prayer*

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# INTRODUCTION

**S**tory is home. Our stories are where we live and move and have our being. We come to know who we are in the context of where we've been, whom we've loved, and what's happened to us so far. Wherever we go, we take our stories with us. And wherever our stories go, we go along for the ride.

The 21st century has been a tough ride for many of us. I carry a happy verse from Isaiah in a ready mental pocket. It helps me through the rougher moments: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:1). Like so many others, and perhaps like you, I've known the darkness intimately. I also trust the great light with all my heart and soul. And, every once in a while, I find myself suddenly immersed in such radiant hours that my whole being is swallowed up in gratitude. The time spent traveling through the dark turns out not to be wasted. The hope in the unseen light proves to be more than just a dream.

Riding shotgun with Isaiah for so many years has taught me the importance of shared stories. Our sacred stories from Scripture have been passed along for two thousand years and more, reminding us all that the darkness we endure is temporary. The great light is still ahead, and we can get there from here—wherever *here* happens to be for you.

This book is an attempt to pass a candle of light along a little farther. It's divided into three sections of meditations that involve receiving the light, learning to trust it, and, finally, preparing to share it with others

who could use some illumination. It's not the sort of book you have to read all at once. You can pick it up when needed and put it down when it's time for personal reflection. You can decide each day whether receiving, trusting, or sharing light is the task you're presently engaged in.

This is meant to be a comfortable, generous, and forgiving book! There are no "have to"s contained in these pages. You can look up the fuller Scripture passage connected to the citation if it's helpful. If you feel like praying, a starting line is offered. If you're a pragmatic person, a step to take is suggested. When the book has served its purpose for you, you might want to pass this candle of light to someone else.

Story is home. Our sacred stories are a home prepared to welcome us at any time we stop by. I hope you find a welcome in these pages and a place to call home. I'm leaving this light on for you.

# RECEIVE *the* LIGHT

## Comedies of Salvation

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*“Are these all the sons you have?” Jesse replied, “There is still the youngest, but he is tending the sheep.”* **1 SAMUEL 16:11**

We’ve done our best to separate religion from anything remotely fun. It can be tough to consider the Bible in terms of comedy. But this story is meant to tickle the funny bone. So, take a risk and smile at the scene being enacted here. Here’s Samuel, an important prophet with a horn full of sacred oil, on a sacred mission to anoint a king. He comes to Jesse, who’s flattered to host the prophet on such an errand. Jesse presents his seven sons, strong and tall and handsome. He’s about to become the proud papa of Israel’s king! What a great day for him and Mrs. Jesse.

Until Samuel rejects all seven and asks if there are more. More! Not many men can present seven sons. Luckily, Jesse has a spare kid in the back. He drags the smelly little boy out of the sheep pen. Thus, David’s glorious reign begins.

*Raise up for us, O Lord, leaders who are no strangers to the margins of society.*

**PAUSE AND CONSIDER:** Do you know other stories of little people who became great leaders? How can you be a leader right where you are?

## That Buzzing Sound

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*“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will give you light.”* **EPHESIANS 5:14**

Here’s a comedy that is no joke. You and I are invited to fullness of life, happiness, and peace, the richness of God’s bounty, for all eternity! This is our faith. Yet most of us slumber on, oblivious to the offer. You can hear the snoring from where you’re sitting.

And maybe, just maybe, the snoring is coming from us. We spend many waking hours like sleepwalkers, moving through routines with eyes closed to the possibilities for greater, deeper life being held out in every moment. We could be serving the needs of the poor. We might love someone who needs to know that love is real. We’re summoned this hour to kindness. Our forgiveness is required. *Zzzzzz.*

How will I live fully if I refuse to look, listen, feel, and act? How will I ever know if I don’t stop what I’m doing, for just a moment, and let the silence of God penetrate me?

*Wake me up, Lord of the dawn,  
before I dream my life away on fantasies.*

**PAUSE AND CONSIDER:** What methods do I use to anesthetize myself against fullness of life: food and drink, entertainment, crowds, remaining a moving target, avoiding solitude?

## Fully Alive

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*“Why this commotion and weeping?*

*The child is not dead but asleep.”* MARK 5:39

“Resurrection” is a word that usually points in one direction: to the Easter mystery. But three additional stories of restored life appear in the gospels. The most dramatic concerns Lazarus, who answers the summons to come out of his tomb four days after he died. Yet he returns to the living without the slightest hint of the odor of decay clinging to him. It’s as if death knew it wasn’t his time. Another story of restored life involves the son of a widow in Nain. The widow’s journey to the grave with her son’s body is interrupted with the arrival of Jesus. Then death itself is interrupted. The final story concerns a twelve-year-old girl. On the cusp of fertility, she succumbs to a fatal illness. Then the promise of youth is returned to her. In each episode, Jesus insists that death is not God’s will for us. God intends for us to be strikingly, stunningly alive.

*Lord of life, thank you for the gift of time,  
and relationships, and resources.*

**PAUSE AND CONSIDER:** Which aspects of your life seem “in the tomb” at this time? How might you be called from this grave?

## Bear with Me

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*Preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.* EPHESIANS 4:3

I still remember Susan. She came to our parish programs and wasn’t an easy person to love. Defiance defined her persistently balled fists, her lifted chin, and her dispute of every teaching she heard. Sometimes she decried our “spineless” orthodoxy; at other times, our “offensive”

pastoral generosity. It seemed she came only to fight. One day, Susan asked to speak with me after the session. I'd rather have been mauled by bears and thought of calling for backup. *Just love her*, I told myself. Predictably, she started yelling, while I stood with her and let her yell, keeping my heart and face soft. It went on for a small eternity. When she'd said it all and was quite empty, she started weeping. I caught and held her in my arms. After that day she never came back, but I think she got what she came for.

*Lord, teach me how to love people  
who are hardest for me to love.*

**PAUSE AND CONSIDER:** Have you ever tried to do what Paul says: bear with others in humility, gentleness, patience, and love, no matter what they do?

## Where There's a Will, There's a Way

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*By endurance and by the encouragement  
of the scriptures we might have hope. ROMANS 15:4*

By scientific estimates, humans have had hundreds of thousands of years on this planet. That's long enough to louse things up, but also time enough to get wise. Wisdom is available to anyone who seeks it. But it's not enough to buy a book of wisdom. You have to read it and take it to heart.

For believers, the Bible is such a book. It contains the inspired testimonies of people who learned (often the hard way) what it costs to walk in the way of truth. Yet for all the reverence paid to Scripture, few churchgoers actually read it. We may be intimidated, as we are of the arcane car owner's manual. Think again: the Bible is more familiar than that. It's the story of folks like us taking a journey toward home, family,



community, and wholeness. If we want to know who we are, why we're here, where we're going, the Bible's one sure way to find out.

*Guide me, Lord, to the intersection between my story and your Sacred Story.*

**PAUSE AND CONSIDER:** Make an easy commitment to reading the Bible. Find a translation that attracts you and is easy to understand. Start with a verse a day. Highlight the ones that speak powerfully to you.

## And They All Lived Happily

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*"Because this widow keeps bothering me I shall deliver a just decision for her." LUKE 18:5*

In fairy tales, the weak are pitted against the strong. Yet the weak win. Red Riding Hood outsmarts the wolf. The lost children, Hansel and Gretel, defeat the witch. Against all odds, innocence overcomes malice. This makes for the classic happy ending. Unfortunately, it happens more in fairy tales than in real life.

Jesus goes beyond fairy tales in the story of the widow and the unjust judge. The judge doesn't reverse his verdict because it's the right thing to do, any more than the wolf decides Riding Hood and her grandmother are decent souls who shouldn't be molested. What defeats the judge is fear of retribution: he has nightmares about the widow coming after him with an Uzi! He resolves to escape the hassle and harm of dealing with her further. If a Big Bad Judge can be intimidated into justice, imagine dealing with God, who desires justice more than we do! No wonder we can anticipate a very happy ending.

*Author of justice, strengthen our courage as we work to defend the weak and voiceless.*

**PAUSE AND CONSIDER:** Who plays the role of the unjust judge in our society, and who plays the widow? How do you participate in the defense of those suffering from injustice?

## Make Time for Wonder

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*“You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”* MATTHEW 24:44

I most surely did not expect to encounter Jesus that morning in front of the bookstore. I was in a hurry; the man in the wheelchair was blocking my way, waving a little plastic shopping bag and refusing to move out of the way until I looked inside it. Whatever he was selling, I knew I didn't want it. Whoever he was, I knew I didn't want an encounter with him!

But because he was persistent, I finally agreed to look into his shabby little sack. And there I found it: the full wonder of God. The bag contained reprints of some of the most amazing paintings I've ever seen. The man before me was an artist, half paralyzed and nearly speechless from stroke, forced to sell his art by sheer force of will. Who would have guessed that heaven was waiting in that crummy plastic bag? And I almost missed it.

*God of Surprises, continue to confound me with your unexpected grace.*

**PAUSE AND CONSIDER:** Make time where time is lacking. Take care where hearts are fragile. Seek beauty and expect miracles.

# Behold the Mystery

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*I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except  
Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 1 CORINTHIANS 2:2*

Take a moment to catch your breath here, and witness a rare moment when Saint Paul is being humble! Paul is well educated for his times. His letters demonstrate great learning and deep thought. He wears the multiple hats of founder and theologian, preacher and teacher, arbiter and traffic cop. Yet with the Corinthians, who consider themselves cosmopolitan and sophisticated, Paul surrenders fancy rhetoric and sticks with the most basic theme of Christianity: Jesus and the cross.

This is the mystery Paul comes to reveal. Like any mystery, it remains partly concealed even in its revelation. Shine a light on the cross and it raises as many questions as it answers. The cross looks like the end of hope, the worst thing that could happen. Yet God made it a doorway to the best thing we can imagine. It was as confounding in first-century Corinth as it sounds today. And it's still the only gospel we need.

*I am full of words, and you are the Word.  
Teach me to enter your silent Mystery.*

**PAUSE AND CONSIDER:** Sit before a crucifix. Contemplate the silence of God and the surrender of Jesus. Relinquish the need to understand, and open your heart to the mystery.