

Essence of the Eternal:

Inspirations for Social Presence:

by Keith Jagger

For the Judeo-Christian world, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it and all who live in it” (*Psalm 24.1*). Yet our headlines fill themselves daily with news of genocide, corruption, rising global temperatures, widespread extinction of species, violence, wasting of resources, and far worse. The world seems to spin out of control. The hands that run the machines of our age seem too strong to oppose. Many resort to violence thinking they are doing right. And as we awake from the slumber of modern excess we realize that we have “missed the memo” on the sanctity of all. With our spiritual and moral guides long buried under the manuals of late modernity, a full-scale search for new foundations has begun— as if we could reinvent ourselves with no influence from our past. Our Western world longs to move past stump-laden jungles into greener and more peaceful times, but most don’t know where yet to begin. Many ask themselves what they, one puny human, can *do* to fix this world, yet most derail from their ambitions and bail from their commitments as they forget to ask the most important question of all: *who* am I becoming?¹ After all, the masses are made of individuals, one interdependent upon the other. And when one heart changes and patterns of behavior follow, there a movement can begin.² Still, for anyone interested in making our world today a better place, we have know why we are doing it. There are a hundred possible but half-selfish inspirations out there, so we would do well to seek wisdom. We must turn to submerged inspirations tested by time, revealed by scripture and the sages that

¹ See Susan Muto and Adrian van Kaam, *Formation of the Christian Heart*, (Pittsburgh: Epiphany Press, 2006), 124: “Most of all, we need to overcome our unwillingness to care for our neighbor – for the elderly person next door or the child who needs a competent babysitter while both parents work.”

² See: Susan Muto and Adrian van Kaam, *Divine Guidance* (Pittsburgh: Epiphany Press, 1994), 67. c.f. Adrian van Kaam, *The Woman at the Well* (Pittsburgh: Epiphany Press, 2004), 100.

came before us. Losing focus on a meaningful and age-tested “why” will most likely lead us a caring person straight to false-compassion fatigue or even worse, full-blown depression.

A lot of people these days are asking about motivations. You hear it especially in our media. All over the world, Christian radio reaches workaday ears. Whether folks are driving to their job, passing the day away in the shop, or enjoying a music-filled sunset on their friend’s porch, religious waves will find them. My daughter calls them “God songs.” Recently, in my part of the world (the American Midwest), a trend of lamentation songs has washed across the stations, all suggesting that we have ignored a portion of our people. “Step out on a crowded street, see a girl and our eyes meet, does her best to smile at me to hide what’s underneath. All these people going somewhere, why have I never cared?” Or another: “A traveler is far from home. He sheds his coat and quietly sinks into the back row. The weight of their judgmental glances tells him that his chances are better out on his own. If we are the Body, why aren’t his arms reaching? Why aren’t his hands healing? Why aren’t his words teaching? And if we are the body, why aren’t his feet going? Why is his love not showing them there is a way?” And there are others.

In all of these songs the main voice paints a picture of a wounded or broken person and laments over our inaction. And in the case of this last song, the main character wonders why. Why is there a whole population of privileged people out there who refuse to see? Why do we have a hard time sustaining our care and concern for others? Why? The implicit answer: perhaps there is something suspect about our motivations, or maybe there’s something flawed with our inspiration. But what is it? Is there a way to be inspired to make a difference in this world that moves us beyond the hundreds of self-centered-when-helping-hurts approaches?

There are many fine inspirations that sustain us as we help others. For some, they operate on the “if I put myself in their shoes” inspiration. This is a great place to work from. Do unto others as you would have them do to you. For others, they start from a deep belief in equality. If there is unfairness or unjustness around, their blood literally

boils, and they jump into action. If I have been given grace, how awful of me to withhold it. Jesus told a parable about the wrath of God against those who can't forgive a penny of debt when they have been forgiven a million fold. This inspires some to feel that they owe something to somebody. Our ancestors took your ancestors' treasure, land, or freedom. Your people built our country. We took the profits. So now it is time to return what is rightfully yours. Others take a similar route: when I give something to somebody, I am banking up my points in heaven or my karma on earth. I am giving something to get something. Whether that be money in the future or simply soul medicine: "helping disabled people reminds me how good I have it." Pay it forward. Other people try to make a difference because they feel it is the good thing to do. They believe in the power of love working like an invisible force.

But what happens when you put yourself in their shoes and you conclude that they don't deserve your time, energy, or money. Or what if you or one of your family members gets scammed by one of "those people", and you think "never again." Or what happens when you discover injustice woven into the fabric of our society? You feel like you can't take on the whole world, or that the whole world will turn against you if you take it on. Or what if you realize that trying to pay back historical injustice is like taking water from the Pacific and some from the Atlantic and mixing them together. Then you try and separate out the Atlantic from the Pacific from your new bowl of salty marine? You can't do it. Who owes what to whom? Or what happens when you find out that equality isn't equal like freedom is never free? Or what if you realize that "pay it forward" doesn't really work? That there are too many entitled people who think that they are owed the gift that comes to them?

What happens when life deals you the bad hand or your bad choices catch up to you, and your moral high ground gets swept from under your feet? Or when your own issues become too much for you? When you can't even take care of yourself, let alone anybody else in need. When all of the sudden you are no longer lamenting that others have it rough and you are ignoring them. What happens when you become the poor wayfarer or worse when you find out that your ignorance is lamentable, not because of some neutral guilt because you haven't helped, but because you find out that your actions and

your choices have been part of the problem? Will your half-selfish inspirations get you through? Will you still stand then as *the one* who wants to make a difference in the world? Ultimately this is a question about creating positive futures. And we have to ask: what makes the difference between rioting in New Orleans and utter order in Japan after two similar disasters? Why can the Amish produce startling acts of forgiveness while our culture at large seems to run on greed and retribution?

Christians in America especially have to be careful about their motivations. There are enough good atheists today who are far better human beings than the Christians they know. And there are enough humans, good humans, who have fixed their eyes on some foundation of sand. They can do good things for others when life is going well and they can hold on to a sense of worth through their intact morality. Wisdom itself seems to have no regard for religion. When surveyed, 90% of Americans feel they are above average. But whether you are stuck in a hot and forever winding roller coaster line or in an astrodome full of half corpses, you better hope your inspirations hold and that you have come to terms with true love, which works like yeast but is not a positive sentiment tossed into the wind. Love works mostly through real sacrifice, real suffering, which might cost you more than you will ever get back. You will find out then if your inspiration is deep enough.

This is careful and patient work. Can you go deeper than moralisms and half-selfish motivations? In the next chapter I explore the formation of virtues in the global citizen and paint a picture of the type of heart that will keep trying to make a difference despite the challenges our society throws at it. As any seasoned activist will note, too much action on every issue results in the hardening of everybody's hearts and too much compassion will wear you out without making a dent. I see social action as one of eight important core heart dispositions through, when harmonized and integrated, will result in a potency for Christ-like engagement with the world. But as a way of introduction to that, I have enlisted two modern spiritual masters to help us think through good reasons why we should try to work on what they call "transcendent social presence" or a

heart transformed into the image of Christ.³ First, Thomas Kelly. Then Adrian van Kaam.

Kelly- Thomas Kelly has inspired a generation of mystics who often find themselves in the halls of the university. This Quaker scholar, charred by the embers of WWI, found himself deeply depressed after failing to complete his second PhD (his first was in Philosophy) at Harvard University. His awakening, as he called it, during that time inspired him to write a number of essays on the Devotional Life. He died of a heart attack at age 48 just after returning from WWII Germany where he had been encouraging Quakers caught up in the fires of the Holocaust.⁴

After experiencing such a range of atrocity, Kelly had pinpointed his inspiration for social engagement. He calls it the “Eternal Now.” It sounds like the invention of an ivory tower philosopher, but it is simple and potent. The point is this: when we look into this world and especially into its dark places we find God (who lives in eternal time) there, at work now. Social concern for Kelly is never ultimately inspired because it is the right thing to do or because we think humans can fix the problems of other humans. It is not moralism or humanitarianism. Rather, our engagement in this world starts with a profound inward experience of a timeless mystery, Who is unfolding some plan in the immediate.⁵ Humans do not come up with the idea to care; we join God who invites us in. The deep desire to be with God and to do something that matters to God is what inspires a life of faith and action.⁶

³ I am also aware that what follows will seem to some either naïve or too fanciful. But when you talk about deep inspirations they are by their very nature intangible. We will get to the nuts and bolts in later chapters. Others, for the sake of their own personal peace might wish to hold this conversation at arms length, “why not just live life in an authentic way and trust that your small role will play itself out.” I see the logic here and celebrate any journey that leads to more realistic and less puffed up images of one’s self. But I often find an overreaction to our limitations may give you peace; yet it often leaves to the preservation of the status quo. It never leads an individual to the real places of work nor equips them for the hardships they will find there.

⁴ See: Richard Kelly, *Thomas Kelly: A Biography*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1966.

⁵ Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper Publishers, 1941), 47. Actually, notes Kelly, we should not think of the inward Life and outward Concern as two separate entities but as a unified whole repeatedly dancing into and out of our focal consciousness.

⁶ Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, 89.

We respond to the invitation with a yes, always remembering that it is He who is primarily at work and in charge. Our inspiration therefore originates from this “all enfolding Love, which is at the centre of Divine Presence which embraces all creation, not just our little, petty selves.”⁷ Moving beyond selfish concern, we are invited into social concern and are called to actualize this divine impulse to care for the earth—which originates within God— and everything in it and all who live in it.

And this is not just any deity with whom we join up. This All-Enfolding-Mystery treats everything, including us, in his creation with an all-enfolding love “from the sparrow’s fall to the slave under the lash.”⁸ As we become the recipients and benefactors of divine love, we simultaneously seek to give back. In a ‘terrible tenderness’, Kelly says, “we, bear in our feeble spirits the burdens and catastrophes of the fellow creatures of the whole world by entering into their sufferings.”⁹ “He [God] plucks the world out of our hearts, loosening the chain of attachment. And He hurls the world into our hearts, where we and He together carry it in infinitely tender love”.¹⁰

The primary movement then, as we join God, is to find a way as much as possible to be together with him. While Kelly does not discount times of retreat or personal practices of piety, he would rather have us practice the “perpetual return of the soul into the inner sanctuary.”¹¹ Devotion as a way of being (distinct from devotions as a marginal practice) becomes the heartbeat of social presence as the Eternal Now invites and saturates our heart dispositions for effective care and concern.¹² Only if we begin with a lifestyle of devotion, says Kelly, “can the light from the inner sanctuary of the soul be a workaday light for the marketplace, a guide for perplexed feet, a re-creator of culture-patterns for the race of men.”¹³

⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 106-7.

¹⁰ Ibid., 47.

¹¹ Ibid., 35.

¹² Susan Muto, *John of the Cross for Today* (Pittsburgh: Epiphany Press, 2000), 17.

¹³ Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, 31.

And here the idea of the eternal and the present joined in marriage really packs a punch. There is a way, Kelly suggests, of unceasing prayerfulness whereby everyday experiences can be processed through our present responsibilities and practical concerns and simultaneously be cradled deep in the heart in prayer and worship. Holding together time and timelessness leads us from religious devotions to a lifestyle of devotion, as the title of Kelly's text indicates. He calls this harmony a "fruitful interplay with the accent upon the deeper level."¹⁴ It is at this deeper level whereby God can illumine our imaginations as we consider the turmoil of our world. It is at this deeper level where our vision can be transformed, and we can see things in a "new way, responding to them in spontaneous, incisive, and simple ways of love and faith."¹⁵

We want to be with God always everywhere, but what does that mean and where is He? Kelly is right that He dwells in the corners of our hearts. And we can find him present in the situations of our life. But can we find God at work in the dark places? Liberation Theology suggests that we can find God exclusively among the world's poor. Scripture and the masters show us that God dwells especially among the sick and suffering. The healthy don't need a doctor, claims Jesus. In the darkest of evils, within the deepest of injustice, we sense that God has gone their first and is calling us with him. We have come to see that, wherever we go to make a difference in this world, God is there first in the grimmest of pits.

And to say yes to the invitation means we submit to the transformation demanded by the crucible of unjust darkness. The repeated experience of the transformation of life and its possibility leads us to live in awareness of this Eternal Now.¹⁶ We are tenderized when we enter into this cycle of Love and are caught up in into the essence of it. If we abandon ourselves to the fellowship of a loving God, we become people who spontaneously give love back. And its upon this inspiring Love that Kelly builds a way of life, which sometimes looks like the everyday humanitarian but is rooted way deeper than the everyday humanitarian impulse.

¹⁴ Kelly, *A Testament to Devotion*, 36.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 91

After his important guidance that we engage in a lifestyle of devotion, Kelly outlines a second implication of the Eternal Now. This holding together of time and timelessness engages our spirit in care for the cosmic universe while pressing us toward a realistic focus. This two-fold move, says Kelly, is about a background and a foreground: The background is the universal concern, the fore, our unique task. Aflame with the fires of the Eternal Now, says Kelly, the hands which care for humanity should seek to particularize their concern so to avoid violating their limitations: “Against this [awareness] of cosmic suffering and cosmic responsibility we must set the special responsibility experienced in a *concern*.”¹⁷ Our concerns are a reflection of God’s overarching yearning for his Kingdom to come, but our concerns are also a reflection of *our* unique responsibilities. Therefore, as we respond to the Eternal now while listening to our inspirations toward saviorhood, we embrace our unique callings, and that requires obedience.

Obedience, for Kelly, may be the most important factor in responding rightly to the implications of a loving Eternal Now. Not only do we subjectively experience a tendering of heart in the presence of the Eternal Now, but “when commitment comes in a human life, God breaks through, miracles are wrought, world-renewing divine forces are released, history changes.”¹⁸ Stark obedience produces the fruit, says Kelly, “of passion for personal holiness and the sense of utter humility.”¹⁹ Holiness and Humility bring us to the feet of the divine mystery that dwells among us in passionate and transformative love. And in this posture, our manifold concerns are divinely infused. We have the power and stamina to enter into the suffering of this age remaking it into greener and peaceful lands.

Then, the end mission for social action becomes clear: our destiny is not in the mere service to suffering creation but in calling all humans to tap their eternal source and reorient their being to inward fellowship with the divine who resides in the corners of

¹⁷ Ibid., 108.

¹⁸ Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, 52.

¹⁹ Ibid., 62.

their hearts and amidst them in their suffering.²⁰ We can build a ministry now on this foundation, and I will in the end offer some practical implications from it. But first I will introduce Father Adrian van Kaam, scientist of human formation and modern spiritual master. His concepts will deepen our vision and hone our inspirations for making a difference in this world.

van Kaam- Adrian van Kaam is one of the unique enigmas of the 20th century. Born in Denmark and forged in the destitute winters of WWII, this priest-psychologist has earned a unique perspective on social action. He has also created a science of human spirituality.²¹ And like any science, his textbooks are filled with precise and sometimes difficult language. But like Kelly, his thoughts about our basic inspiration for social action are quite simple and potent. Basically, his point is this: we humans are wired to express the unique imprint of God's image He placed in us for the sake of the community. In his terms, it is the departure from a primordial pride form into a primordial Christ-form by way of formative experiences and transcendence crises as they sculpt a Christ-like heart in us.²² Of course his system is far more complex than this. But the point stands: there is a God shaped seed in each of us sprouting and readying us to care for this world, if we can listen to its unique guidance. God places his DNA in us, then engages it, and we can either let it grow or ignore it.

Like Kelly, this main basis for our inspiration has its implications. First, van Kaam describes this seed. He calls it the Foundational Life Form. At the beginning of our life, in our mother's womb, God placed this unique but communal life calling in us. It is our essence, and its will is essentially to love. No one can touch it or deform it, it is safe and sacred, accessible to God and you alone. Of course, the problem amounts to our fallen inability to express it and actualize our founding form. Our calling is hidden and in our current state has been usurped by our own pride. The work of our life is to give complete and perfect expression to this essence. Luckily, God is ever at work guiding

²⁰ Ibid., 34.

²¹ See: Adrian van Kaam, *The Life Journey of a Joyful Man of God: The Autobiographical Memoir of Adrian Van Kaam*. ed. Susan Muto. Portland: Wipf and Stock, 2010.

²² I've included less material for van Kaam since I've adopted his sensible-responsible structure below, and the outlining of it will describe its pieces parallel to my discussion on Kelly above.

us back to our essence. With every success, failure, obstacle, or fortune God is guiding us to our true selves. This is the work of spirituality. And we experience it deep inside as it interfaces with God's good but broken creation.

In his view of the mysterious universe and its communities, van Kaam stresses also its predestined ability to give and receive formation always along side of our role as greater stewards. Every instinctual glance at the heavens should deepen our awe for its untapped potential and essential sanctity. Though we can discover and study the "cauldron of elementary particles," we must not reduce the depth of creation nor, "imagine they exist in isolation from any higher intelligence."²³ van Kaam's vision of creation suggests that all particles are rooted in a "preformed design that infinitely transcends them."²⁴ In other words, the rules of the game have been written and divinely implanted in creation, and we were created with the same mysterious internal design to express divine love as the "unifying source" that brings all together. This is why when we see a child in chains, we know something has gone awry. The aspirations for care well up from the shadowy depths within us (created first then enacted by God). When we express reverence for this world, we are locking into who we were deeply created to be: co-stewards with God who is the greater governor and ultimate lover of this deep creation. Our story is therefore ultimately shaped for good or ill by "all who live and labor with us...such relationships confirm the fact that nothing escapes the 'internet' of human and divine partnering in the mystery of forming, reforming, and transforming love."²⁵

This brings us to van Kaam's understanding of obedience. Obedience comes at the interplay between divine guidance and the divine image sown in us from the beginning. We can see this most at work in Christ who, "remained frank and fearless as he deciphered intimations emanating from his founding call and leading him to the passion he was destined to endure for our sake...His response to any inner message he received

²³ van Kaam, *Foundations of Christian Formation*, 69.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 66.

was to act on it obediently.”²⁶ The sanctity of creation and our unique sense of god-given care inspire us. Only obedience to divine disclosures can further our unfolding into the people God created us to be before time began.²⁷ Obedience infuses our social awe, cosmic awe, and compassion with power rationed by the unfolding plan of the Forming Mystery. Small ‘yesses’ to everyday inspirations from God pile upon one another and make it easier for harder moments of obedience. Disobedience slowly erodes our peaceful lives and our work to make better the lives of others.²⁸ Ultimately, obedience allows us to humbly follow the unfolding plan of formation for ourselves and for all we seek to serve.

Therefore obedience is less of drudgery than it is an awe-filled yes to our deepest and truest self-calling, which in turn is being fulfilled by God. And our life calling is both unique like the variance of every leaf or snowflake. Yet when we lock into that unique calling, it always meant to interweave with other unique callings and work for the sake of the community. This is more about our turning into flames of love than it is the right occupation. This calling is our essential God-likeness being worked out in everyday situations. The luckier of us get to have an occupation that engages our essence. But we see that even in the worst of situations our callings can operate with sparkling power. If I am working at a factory and have a calling that is most enriched by the woods, I can still be a light in the factory. While I work my way gently to the woods, a good deal of transformation can follow in my wake—as I stay committed to my less-than ideal situation. For in the end, like Kelly observed, our essential call is to help others discover their destinies in interplay with God’s consistent work in their lives. And for many called to the streets, they are especially called to do this with abandoned people. “The Gospel reassures the abandoned of body and soul that despite our

²⁶ Ibid., 172.

²⁷ Adrian van Kaam, *Formation of the Christian Heart* (Pittsburgh, Epiphany Press, 2006). 52. c.f. 57 “Obedience in the spirit of the *yes* of the Son to the father generates the ‘ought directives’ that lead to prudent decisions and upright actions. The virtue of obedience takes root in the responsible-sensible core of our Christian heart”, which I’ll discuss below.

²⁸ Susan Muto and Adrian van Kaam, *Divine Guidance: Seeking to Find and Follow the Will of God*, 17.

brokenness, Christ has the power to change our lives for the better, not so much by offering us instant cures or quick solutions, but by transforming us from within.”²⁹

Both Kelly and van Kaam have different ways of exploring social action or guiding us to healthy social presence. For Kelly, he wants to be with God where He is and to do something there that matters to God. For van Kaam, he wants to give expression to his unfolding divine essence, a unique imprint of God’s image He has placed in us for the sake of the community. Like Kelly, van Kaam emphasizes the integration of the human experience in the core form or heart wherein our emerging dispositions are formed, reformed, deformed, or transformed.³⁰ Whereas Kelly described this integration as holding together time and timelessness, van Kaam talks about this integration as a responsible-sensible heart.³¹

They each have their own system of thought that brings out different aspects of a deep enough inspiration. And, they each use big words to express it. But their ideas have street value. And it can be said as clear as this: I am inspired by the God-given sacredness of the earth and its peoples, and I feel like I am being who I was created to be when I join God and do something that matters to Him. I stand up against human trafficking because I believe in the sanctity of the earth and its peoples and because God is there at work; and stopping it matters to him. I engage in the dangerous work of racial unity because I sense the hidden nobility in all people and because I sense that God is there working tirelessly for the unity and fellowship he created in us to enjoy. I step out of my door each morning to teach music students, to study PhD, to work at a nation wide food chain with little honor, to be the best grandmother I can be because I sense the sacredness of the people and the world I live in and because I know God is there and it matters to him that I engage in the dark places as a light for my fellow humans to add to and to be warmed by. It’s like an awe-filled glory that neither lifts me above others or places me lower than I need be.

²⁹ van Kaam, *Foundations of Christian Formation*, 261.

³⁰ van Kaam, *Human Formation*, 168.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 166-8. van Kaam speaks of five dimensions in need of harmony, socio-historical, vital, functional, transcendent, and ecclesial pneumatic. The heart, he claims, translates the aspirations, ambitions, pulsions and pulsations of our harmonized spiritual dimensions.

And there are many ways to express these inspirations. After all, it has been said that the road to hell has been paved by good motives. We can be inspired with the most selfless motivation and give the most self-centered attempt to do something about it. Kelly and van Kaam offer some guidance. Kelly stresses the importance of a life of devotion and the transformation of a human person when they give specific shape to a focused concern. We would do well to stay in constant and humble reflection. It would serve us to take the daily medicine of abandoning ourselves to whatever sacrifices we are confronted with. van Kaam stresses the sanctity of the creation and the seed that God places in it that we might both give shape and be shaped for good. We are not out making ourselves or saving the world. Our role is as a steward who has been wired by the governor of creation and who follows that governor who is deeply at work unfolding his plan. van Kaam suggests that caring for the world is important for all people despite how one is disposed to find inspiration. Both Kelly and van Kaam talk about obedience and calling.

And as these two voices join in their visions, we are reminded of some powerful bits of direction and wisdom. First, the active life must be surrounded not with acts of devotion (we are often too busy for that). The active life must be filled with the age old skill of listening to God in every circumstance that comes our way. If we find ourselves in a season of dryness or depression as someone who is trying to make a difference, we approach the season itself as a gift from above and abandon ourselves anew to the higher power Who cares far more than we ever could. Second, we pay attention to our limits. We can over-express our call to join God in the dark places. We trust that God will protect us as we join Him, though we also know that we cannot work along side God in every way. We listen to the ways we have been uniquely made and led and gently but decisively press into limited areas of God's broken but sacred creation. Third, obedience is less about gritting it out even when you don't want to. It is more about what originates in the hidden sanctuary and the guidance found there. I used to hate the part of ministry where you had to approach somebody in the cold or worse write a card to him or her if they put their name on the attendance ledger that week. I disingenuously did it anyway out of a lower sense of obedience. van Kaam and Kelly lead us to think about obedience as more of a faithfulness to our unique selves and what

bubbles up from it. Fourth, in social work, we often experience a God like impulse for care. This can be very dangerous. I put myself in a kingly role while you, poor you, are the recipient of my care. This way disregards the hidden nobility in others and the texture of God's kingdom that persistently reminds us of the spiritual riches we might find in the marginalized and physically destitute. In reaction to this possible abuse of power, some throw the baby out with the bath water. We must not crush the impulse to be God-like, we must reorient ourselves to God's true self. When we discover that God is a glory giver, not a glory grabber, we see that our most God-like moments will be filled with suffering and self-giving.

Finally. Our callings. We must not confuse our vocations with our callings. And we must not limit our callings if we have a limiting occupation. The unique but communal calling of any social activist is in the end to help others find *their* unique nobility and to facilitate *their* journey into a lifestyle of devotion. We do this by removing obstacles in their path, often the obstacle of material or emotional poverty. But we must not abandon the abandoned to a spiritual iron lung. Our jobs must include seeing people through to a full recovery as much is possible, a transformation of the wounded who can make the best out of the cards they have been dealt.

It was a cold November morning on the streets of Boulder Colorado. My wife and I found ourselves welling with compassion as we saw a homeless man begging on the streets outside the local starbucks. We passed him at first. But a sense of concern came bubbling up. We turned back, invited him in for some breakfast with us. His was a likely story. He needed money for bus tickets to see his parents. As we shared ourselves with this man, I couldn't help but notice his shirt. It read, "John 316". I said, "Where did you get that shirt?" He replied, "somewhere. I don't know." "Do you know that is a reference to the Bible?" My wife happened to have her bible on her. We opened it, shared its message with the young man and gave him the book. As we were leaving, I wadded up a 50 dollar bill inside some ones. "This is all I have," I said. Who knows when he found the 50 or what he used it for. I sensed in that moment a rightness about life, that we were doing something that mattered to God who was mysteriously present with this man even before we arrived. I suspect I need to continually make

room in my life for encounters like these and hope that if I ever find myself on the streets I would have the grace to be patronized by a young privileged couple discovering the world. Why did we do it? Perhaps out of some half-selfish motive. But as I look back on it now, I see it may have been full of right inspirations as three beloved children of God experienced the fingerprints of the creator networking us together in a sacred dance of transformation.

Like I said before, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Right motivations are not enough. We must take our half-selfish selves and actualize and rightly express our concerns. It takes a lifetime of work to do it. But how do we become people that can express our inspirations in Christ like ways and what kind of things can we do to act on our good motivations? I turn to these two questions in the upcoming chapters before finally laying out a core example practice for any community who is reaching to share life together and social concern.