

There He is: enthroned, high and mighty, exalted, Lord of All, Lord over all the universe that sits beneath His feet. Yet there He is, reduced somehow in our mind to a sad, forlorn figure, distant, His voice echoing tinny and weak, as if traveling from the far end of a long, cold linoleum hallway. There He is: calling and waiting... calling and waiting...

LAYERS

From one perspective this is a fairly amazing world in which we live. The strides we've made in reducing hunger, in the health and life span of the average person, and in the viability of the premature infant are astounding. Advancements in science and technology have been nothing short of breathtaking. Cellular, digital, and satellite phone technology mean that no matter where one is in the world, one never need be out of touch with anyone else. The inexpensive and ubiquitous Internet means an immediate source for news, entertainment, and almost instantaneous communication with people from all corners of the globe.

heavy square box that offered a convenient place to set a plant or a lamp.

Television for many today, however, has become the right arm they can't do without. The sets have become huge—room size—and one or more of the literally hundreds of channels available will be playing at all times of the day. Image quality has become so refined that the lifelike Technicolor image draws the viewer into the box as if drawing him into a magical realm from which he might never wish to leave. The stereo sound system envelops the supplicant inside a theatre-like environment, shutting out from the senses all other stimuli, such as the sound of the doorbell, the ding of the oven timer, a baby's cry—and the soft call of a discarded God.

The man who would know God must give time to Him. A.W. Tozer

From a different perspective, however, the new and dazzling advancements in science and technology today have successfully erected barriers that now stand between the God of heaven and His people. As we have created new technology to facilitate communication between ourselves, we've added new layers of insulation that have reduced the communication between ourselves and the Creator.

As mankind has invented its way into self-sufficiency, it has moved further from its dependency upon God. Where before He was

essential, now—as if “God” were just another selection on a multilayered menu—He has become optional.

And as the layers build up and compact down upon each other, setting the voice and touch of God even further from our senses, we fail to notice His ever-diminishing call.

Back in the late Fifties, when I was a little boy growing up in the American Midwest, not much of our time was given to watching TV. Televisions back then were physically smaller, the image was black and white, and channel selections were limited. Tuesday night meant Red Skelton, Saturday night meant wrestling, and Sunday night meant *The Ed Sullivan Show*. People gathered around the glowing picture tube in the evening much as they had earlier around the softly glowing dial of the radio: to pause at the end of the day to hear and see a little of the world outside their own small community. For the rest of the day it was mostly silent, a

Hebrews 11:8b NASB

...and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Oswald Chambers

Believe God is always the God you know Him to be when you are nearest to Him. Let the attitude of your life be a continual willingness to “go out” in dependence upon God, and your life will have a sacred and inexpressible charm about it that is very satisfying to Jesus. You must learn to “go out” through your convictions, creeds, or experiences until you come to the point in your faith where there is nothing between yourself and God.



THE MEDIUM ISN'T THE MESSAGE

Technology isn't the villain. We can't blame an inanimate object for the layers of insulation wrapped over our heads. Neither can we blame the scientists, technicians and visionaries who have created the remarkable inventions that have become the objects of our affection. God is as much the Creator of the super computer as He is the mewling infant. As always, we must look to ourselves to find the one to blame.

For years I did all of my writing on a manual typewriter—a machine as far removed from my current writing instrument as the quill pen is from the typewriter. It felt right to me, organic. The pounding it was necessary to inflict upon the stiff keys to impress ink upon paper had become a part of my thought process. The words flowed out in lines and paragraphs to the rhythm of the tapping and ding, tapping and ding, and the satisfying rasp of the return lever.

Once in a while I would have access to one of the electric typewriters at Linda's office. Suddenly the technology became an obstacle to my thought process. The massive beast—usually an *IBM Selectric*—would sit there and vibrate, its internal motor humming: "Write something. Write something. Write something." Intimidated, I'd sit frozen, staring at the blank page, sniffing the grease and oil of the mechanical wonder churning and waiting, churning and waiting beneath my nose. With relief I would flee back to my more familiar typewriter, the one that worked at *my* pace, and wasn't nearly so insistent.

But that old typewriter also made my work more time-consuming. A thirty-page script would go through several drafts before completion, with margin pencil scratchings in blue and red in between. If an added line moved text from one page to the next, every page following would have to be retyped. Worse, if a flash of brilliance came over me after the final draft had been completed, I'd often let it pass by unused, since the thought of retyping the entire script to include it was simply too hideous to contemplate.

Now, of course, I use a writing instrument that has made even the *IBM Selectric* obsolete. Now it isn't necessary to use up blue lead; I just make changes to the text itself. Now when I add a new line, the following pages make the adjustment for themselves—and those last-minute flashes of brilliance *always* get included. Yes, technology is a wonderful thing, and it would never

occur to me to return to using my old manual typewriter, now collecting dust in the corner.

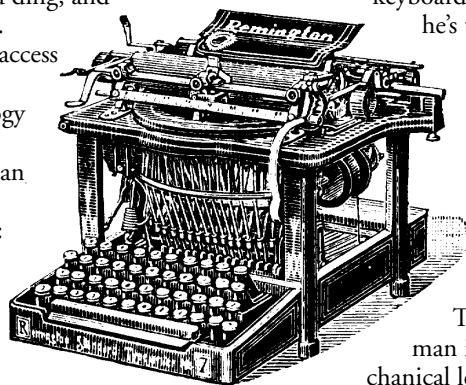
There are still writers who put down words by hand, writing entire books by scratching pencil lead or ink onto a ruled pad. There are still some who craft their sentences and paragraphs on manual typewriters—or even one of those monstrous, overweight, insistently humming *IBM Selectrics*. Most, however, use computers and word processor software of one sort or another.

But one thing has remained the same: No matter the mechanical instrument, every writer is capable of putting down both words of genius and words of insipid pap—the responsibility for which is the writer's alone.

Words come from the mind, not the pen; thoughts and new ideas come from the human imagination, not the keyboard. A bad writer will be bad even if he's using the latest whiz bang software; a good writer will be good even with an old stubby pencil.

And no piece of technology can be blamed if our mind has become numbed to the call of God. We are the ones who have set in place the barriers that block the sound of His voice; we are the ones who have made the choice.

The relationship between God and man is organic, spiritual, and no mechanical leviathan can come between without invitation.



Mark 10:17-25

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

THE YEARNING OF TWO SOULS

The purest reason for Christians to avoid the build up of layers between themselves and God is not for any earthly gain, or even the acquisition of heavenly righteousness, but for the sole reason that their new spirit in Christ cries out for His presence.

At the moment of regeneration the believer is imbued with a familial hunger for God and His ways. But over time the world, working in concert with the Christian's natural bent, heaps on layers of insulation that become, as it were, an appetite suppressant for the things of God. The enticing gewgaws with which we surround ourselves add layer upon layer of pleasant insulation between God's Spirit and the new spirit within us struggling to grow beyond infancy.

The apostle Paul describes our position before Christ:

Ephesians 2:1-3

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

There was no hope for us; we were utterly apart from the holiness and righteousness of God. There was no relationship whatsoever. We were nothing more than another nameless part of the lumbering mass called humanity. Then the Lord God sought us out:

2:4-7

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Suddenly, in one stroke, we who had been little more than a flea on the backside of soil-bound iniquity, found ourselves lifted up out of the mire to share a place of holy honor with the Son, Christ Jesus. We who had been lower than the lowest caste now were taking our

place not just in the royal environs, but in the throne room itself.

2:19-22

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Though positionally we are now members of the household of God, our feet still tread the soil of earth—an earth still bent on everything that stands against what we have now become. Though the spirit in us now reaches heavenward toward its new companion, every day upon the soil our baser parts reach back down to the muck from whence they came. And day by day, little by little, distracting and spirit-numbing layers of insulation that deaden our connection with God are added. Our spirit cries out for its new home, but its voice becomes more muffled and strangled by the heavy weight of the world's glittering alternatives.

*As pants the hart for cooling streams,
When heated in the chase;
So longs my soul, O God, for Thee,
And Thy refreshing grace.*

*For Thee, my God, the living God,
My thirsty soul doth pine;
Oh, when shall I behold Thy face,
Thou Majesty divine?*

*I sigh to think of happier days,
When Thou, O Lord! wast nigh;
When every heart was tuned to praise,
And none more blessed than I.*

*Why restless, why cast down, my soul?
Hope still; and thou shalt sing
The praise of Him who is thy God,
Thy health's eternal spring.*

Nahum Tate & Nicholas Brady

THE REINHART DIALOGUES: SAND MOUNTAIN

Reinhart enters in darkness and takes a position somewhere to the side of the main stage area. The main stage remains in darkness as spot or small area light comes up on Reinhart. He is dressed in comfortable, semi-dress, contemporary clothing, such as sportcoat & slacks without a tie.

REINHART

It wouldn't be entirely accurate to say Jane and I grew up together. Beginning with Grade School, we seemed to pass in and out of each other's lives: sometimes pals, sometimes enemies; sometimes I had a crush on her— (*wryly*) sometimes enemies. We laughed together — sometimes cried on the other's shoulder. We went our separate ways more times than I can recall — choosing different friends, different crowds. But always there was a bond between us. Years could pass without a word, but there remained something that neither of us ever had with anyone else.

Jane enters. She is dressed, like Reinhart, in comfortable, semi-dress, contemporary clothing. Lights up low on Jane UC as she looks around the Sand Mountain area.

So when I finally — and reluctantly — made the decision to attend my 20th High School Reunion, I hoped Jane would be there. She was, and it was good to see her. But there was something in her voice that told me to accept her invitation when she asked me to join her later at our old meeting place: Sand Mountain.

Lights out on Reinhart, up on Jane. As Reinhart approaches, widen stage area light.

REINHART

(buffing and puffing)

As I recall, those fences used to be lower.

JANE

Well, that was at least fifty pounds ago.

REINHART

Oh, yeah.

(pause; looking around)

It all looks so different. I wasn't sure I was in the right place.

JANE

Yeah, I know what you mean.

REINHART

(sitting down next to her)

Have you been back often?

JANE

Just now — for the reunion. You?

REINHART

Once in awhile. Not often.

(pause)

So, why this? Why here?

JANE

(reluctantly; embarrassed to now come right out and say it)
I thought you might have some answers for me.

REINHART

Me? (*grinning*) The class clown?

JANE

I'm serious, Reinhart.

REINHART

Sorry.

JANE

(taking a deep breath)

There's only one reason I came to this reunion: I had the time. Six months ago you would have had to make an appointment just to call me.

(pause; sarcastically)

The president of my company was very sensitive and caring about the whole thing; I showed up for work one day, and they had already stripped the nameplate from my office door. I punched the extension to his office and my phone line was dead. As a reward for fifteen years of loyal service, the janitor graciously carried my box of things out to the car for me.

(with a heavy sigh)

One day I was there, the next day I wasn't.

REINHART

(quietly)

I'm sorry.

JANE

Is that all you can say?

REINHART

I don't know what you want from me. I haven't seen you since graduation — twenty years.

JANE

Two weeks after it happened, I had this incredible dream. (*wistfully*) I was walking in a winter forest. The air had that sharp bite to it; the snow was brittle — crunched under my feet. Everything was so clean and fresh; it made me feel as if all my worries were gone. All but one. I don't know what, but there was one problem lingering, hanging like a cloud over me. I was walking through the trees, and suddenly you stepped out. And because it was a dream, it was perfectly natural, of course. You smiled at me, took my hand. And then I realized: the cloud was gone — the last worry had been lifted.

REINHART

Jane, I don't know what you want from me.

JANE

(wistfully looking off into the distance)

You were in the dream.

REINHART
(after a long pause)
 Remember church camp in 5th grade? Vespers?

JANE
(thinking)
 Vespers . . .

REINHART
 Church camp in Iowa Falls.

JANE
 Yeah. Wasn't there this big white cross that looked out over the river?

REINHART
 I think it was Friday night vespers. As usual, I wasn't paying attention to what was going on. I glanced over to where you were sitting, and with your face painted by the glow of that campfire, *(with a mischievous grin)* I fell in love.

JANE
(laughing)
 Yeah, with me and every other girl in camp.



(after a pause; soberly)
 What'd you tell your wife?

REINHART
 I told her an old friend needed my help.

JANE
(sighing angrily)
 I hate class reunions.

REINHART
(amused)
 This is your first one.

JANE
 I hate class reunions. Everybody trying so hard to be something they're not.

REINHART
 Uh-huh. And what have you been telling everyone who asks what you do for a living?

JANE
(taking a deep breath; with a false bravado)
 I look them straight in the eye and tell them I'm Vice-President of Marketing at a prestigious New York firm.

REINHART
 Uh-huh.

JANE
 Then I excuse myself and go throw up.
(long pause)

We had such fun growing up here. Back then Sand Mountain was nothing but soft sand all the way down the cliff to the river's edge. You could leap right off here — head first — tumble through the sand, all the way down without a scratch. Oh, Reinhart, I'm so miserable. Why can't life still be like that? Why does all the soft sand have to be cut away from beneath you? Now you couldn't go more than a few feet without getting cut to ribbons. Where'd all the sand go? Oh, let's get out of here.

REINHART
(stopping her with his voice)
 What I want to know is, whose name is written in the back cover of your Bible?

JANE
(stopping; mystified)
 What?

REINHART
 Simple question: Whose name is in the back of your Bible?

JANE
(thinking, then exasperated, throwing up her hands)
 I don't even know where my Bible is.

REINHART
 That's what I thought. When we were in Junior High, we sat next to each other here at the top of Sand Mountain and wrote our names in each other's Bible. It was like a blood oath. A pact. We didn't put them together with a plus sign: "Reinhart loves Jane." We didn't wrap a heart around it — we just wrote our names. We were too young to know anything about love, but we were old enough to know there would come a day when we would go our separate ways; we were old enough to know there would come a day when we would need each other. We

were too young for love — but we were old enough to be friends. Friends.

JANE
(*simply*)

That's why you were in my dream.

REINHART

And that's why I'm here now. Jane, where'd all the soft sand go in your life? It isn't the job.

JANE
(*irritated*)

Listen, I invested fifteen years of my life in a company that just shoved me out the door. I'm entitled to be just a little depressed about that.

REINHART

You want to jump off the cliff? I'm told it's no longer a soft landing.

JANE

Don't be absurd.

REINHART

You invited me here for answers; maybe I have one.

JANE

Oh really.

REINHART

Where's your Bible, Jane?

JANE

(*she knows where he's going with this*)

Look, you're right. It's been years. I've been working hard on my career; that just became the priority. I was so busy with my life that I didn't leave any time for my Spiritual life.

REINHART

(*honestly stumped by what she has just said*)

How can you have one without the other? What's the difference between the two?

JANE

I didn't ask you here to deliver a sermon.

REINHART

(*jumping up; agitated*)

Oh, I see.

Why is it people will listen to all kinds of inane drivel and accept it as gospel truth, but just hint at some Spiritual advice, and they throw up their hands: "Don't preach to me!"

Jane, we haven't seen each other for twenty years, but long ago we began a friendship — and it's still there. I'm not a preacher; I'm just someone who cares about your life and how you're living it. If I have any answers, they've come by learning from my own stupid mistakes.

JANE

So now I'm making a stupid mistake.

REINHART

(*emphatically*)

Yes. Somewhere along the line you cut out of your life your one hope. The one constant you could always reach out to — and you've forgotten how to stretch out your hand. Have you been so long at the top of the corporate ladder? Is God just a calculator that you pull out of your briefcase whenever you need a fast answer? He's waiting for you to be a real person again; just reach out to Him.

JANE

(*resignedly*)

The layers are too thick. I can't break through.

REINHART

(*exasperated*)

No, no, no . . . You've got it backwards. You're not the boss. You got fired. You don't break through; He does.

Jane says nothing, but sighs heavily. She is still resisting.

REINHART

(*looking up*)

She doesn't want my advice.

(*to Jane; sarcastically*)

Okay, here you go. Stand at the edge of the cliff, rub a magic crystal while chanting a mantra, then swing a dead cat over your head.

JANE

Reinhart, I've been away too long. I've forgotten how.

REINHART

There's no magic chant. Nothing to remember. Just worship Him. Fall on your face and admit that He's God and you're not. And just watch how fast He breaks through those layers you've built up.

JANE

(*after a long pause; with a wry smile*)

I hate it when your right.

REINHART

(*innocently*)

I would think you'd be used to it by now.

JANE

So—will it be another twenty years?

REINHART

Not if I can help it.

JANE

(*sighing*)

Time to go back into it, isn't it.

REINHART

'Fraid so. My wife's going to be wondering if we fell off this cliff.

JANE

(*as they exit; turning to Reinhart*)

I hate class reunions.

Reinhart laughs and puts his arm around Jane's shoulder as they exit together.

*I have not sought Thee, I have not found Thee,
I have not thirsted for Thee:
And now cold billows of death surround me,
Buffeting billows of death astound me,
Wilt Thou look upon, wilt Thou see
Thy perishing me?*

*Yea, I have sought thee, yea, I have found thee,
Yea, I have thirsted for thee,
Yea, long ago with love's bands I bound thee:
Now the Everlasting Arms surround thee,
Through death's darkness I look and see
And clasp thee to Me.*

Christina Rossetti

TO DWELL WITH THINGS ABOVE

So what are we to do? What are we to do when we realize that a thick layer of insulation now stands between us and God? The best solution is, of course, to never let the layers build up in the first place. But what is the prescription when we discover they are already there?

Reinhart suggested simple confession and worship to his friend Jane—to stop wasting time feeling bad about her condition, and simply throw herself at God's feet. Honest confession, followed naturally by worship, is never inappropriate, and usually does restore our lost communion. But following this pattern repeatedly is a little like taking a diet pill to lose weight: You may actually shed some pounds by popping a magic pill, but without a substantial change in eating habits and lifestyle, those pounds will just come right back. True worship will always restore our injured relationship with the Father, but, used in this way as a Band-Aid over a larger problem, it is only a quick fix that will never change anything substantially.

Exodus 33:13-18 NKJV

"Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people." And He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth." So the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name." And he said, "Please, show me Your glory."

A.W. Tozer

We have been snared in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that if we have found Him, we need no more seek Him. In the midst of this great chill there are some who will not be content with shallow logic. They will admit the force of the argument, and then turn away with tears to hunt some lonely place and pray, "O God, show me Thy glory." They want to taste, to touch with their hearts, to see with their inner eyes the wonder that is God.

Our world is indeed a marvelous place, and mankind has used the gifts of God to create breathtaking marvels that contribute to easier living, better communication, and the free flow of vital information. Who can find fault with a technology that permits a doctor thousands of miles away to diagnose and even heal someone desperately in need of her skills? Who can take issue with a marvel like the Internet that permits such effortless flow of correspondence that a grandmother will hear more often from her grandchildren, or that members of the body of Christ will more quickly receive encouragement and affirmation from kindred souls, bonding them together in ways never before imagined?

Philippians. 4:8

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

The feet may still be mired in the muck of the earth, but our spirit is free to soar. After the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, our own new spirit is free to mingle in the heavenlies and yearn for something higher than the chrysalis of this flesh. So long as we dwell on the things of the flesh, the layers will inevitably mound up, and it will be necessary to repeatedly confess and seek revival. It will be necessary to ache for that which lies on the other side, momentarily beyond our reach, and to long for the intimacy with God we once enjoyed.

But so long as we dwell on things above, the layers of insulation will never materialize. It will never be necessary to long for that which lies on the other side, because that pristine communion will already be our dwelling place. Heaven need not be only a far-off longing, something so profound and mystical that we can't even imagine its reality. For the believer, heaven is also a condition of the heart; the spirit is free to dwell in that place of holy tranquility every moment of every day.

St. Anselm

O Lord our God, grant us grace to desire Thee with our whole heart; that, so desiring, we may seek, and seeking find Thee; and so finding Thee may love Thee; and loving Thee, may hate those sins from which Thou hast redeemed us.



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To say "Thank You"...

We have compiled a selection of narratives from past issues, entitled *The Living Word: Favorite Narratives from the monthly devotional journal Aspects*. We also still have a few copies remaining of our previous booklet, *Summer Reflections*, a collection of columns from our weekly column, *Reflections by the Pond*.

One of these two booklets will be sent—along with our deep appreciation—to those who include a request along with their gift to this work. If you would like to receive one of these booklets, fill out the accompanying form and include it with your gift—and be sure to check the box stating which booklet you would like to receive!

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