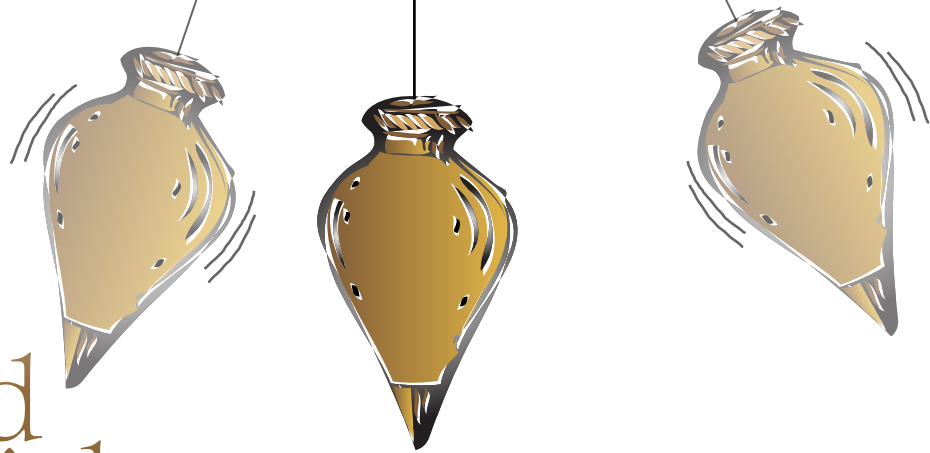


A LIFE PAYS ITSELF OUT LIKE A PLUMB LINE IN A WINDSTORM—ALWAYS WISHING TO STAY STRAIGHT AND TRUE, BUT BOWING TO THE INSISTENT DEMANDS OF THE GALE AS IT REACHES FOR THE ONE, TRUE POINT. LIFE HAS A WAY OF TELLING THE TRUTH THROUGH A SERIES OF SMALL INCONSISTENCIES THAT KEEP US PERILOUSLY OFF-BALANCE, ALWAYS REACHING FOR SOMETHING STRAIGHT AND SOLID, WHILE NEVER QUITE UNDERSTANDING THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF THE LIFE IN WHICH WE HAVE BEEN SET. ■ MAN IS A BLITHE SPIRIT BORNE DOWN BY THE WEIGHT OF FLESH—A SOUL DESPERATELY IN SEARCH OF FREEDOM. HE IS CREATED WITH A LONGING FOR SOMEONE LARGER THAN HIMSELF, SOMEONE WHO (UNLIKE HIM) DOES NOT DWELL ON QUICKSAND. HE LONGS FOR SOMEONE WITH A SURER FOOTING AND STRONG ARMS. ■ LIFE IS THE SPIRIT'S NEVER-ENDING SEARCH FOR A WAY OUT OF ITS CORPOREAL BONDS.



# Rising Toward the Bright Sweetness



## The Decision

"By the sweat of your face  
You will eat bread,  
Till you return to the ground,  
Because from it you were taken;  
For you are dust,  
And to dust you shall return."

Genesis 3:19

**H**uman life is a quest—a quest up from the soil that fills our veins, toward the purity of heaven. The problem is, for most of mankind's time on earth, humans have defined a multitude of different "heavens," each imagined and crafted into a comfortable dwelling place for a multitude of eternities.

There was a point in time when there *was* heaven on earth. For a brief moment, paradise dwelt upon the dust of earth, and man and woman enjoyed a blissful, perfect harmony with God. But then the dust from which they had been made drew back from God—like its cousin, gravity—to pull them into the deceitful clutches of one who had once been beautiful, but was now the epitome of dark evil.

In one dark, ugly moment, heaven departed the leaden gravity of earth, not to return until sin and its father had been forever vanquished. Between these two points in time—between the innocence of Eden and the bliss of the New Jerusalem—man and woman would be condemned to be born in sin, creatures of depravity, spirits condemned to the claustrophobic woolen cloak of the flesh, longing for the bright sweetness they had once enjoyed.

## Poverty

There is poverty in the United States, but it is a poverty on a level so much higher than that found in other parts of the world that it should, in all fairness, not presume

to borrow the same word. Those typically situated within the “poverty” level of our society may still enjoy a home, a car in the drive, a color television glowing into the night. Their children get an education, and, if they choose, the adults have employment. And for those few who are truly living on the baseline, there are usually any number of government or private services available for their relief.

Poverty in other countries—especially Third World countries—meets the truer definition of the word. A peasant family eking out survival from a tin-roofed hovel on the outskirts of Mexico City, or clinging to the Santa Marta hillside overlooking Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil, has slim hope of climbing even to the level of US poverty—a level of relative wealth of which they can only dream. The dirt-caked children playing in the dust outside their family’s mud brick dwelling in Egypt, or those who scavenge for food and saleable rags in Cairo’s city dump, will never receive an education, never live in a furnished apartment, never own a car or draw a fair salary for a day’s work.

By contrast, in the United States there are always possibilities. We really do not have a “peasant” class, since, by the measure of other lands such as India or Russia, we do not have a class-structured society. Change is always possible; in the U.S., one is not necessarily destined to die in the station to which one was born. (We do, thanks to liberals, have class *envy* in the U.S., but that is another thing entirely.)

In a free, democratic republic, such as the United States today, change is not only possible, but almost inevitable. One *does* rise, one generally *does* become more tomorrow than what one is today. One is not born into a permanent, societal station.

And no matter the country of one’s birth, one is not necessarily destined to remain in the sin-laden dust from which one is born. Man and woman are born into sin, into earthbound depravity, but that need not be a permanent condition. The spirit of a man (if not his body) dwells in a free, democratic republic, where tomorrow always holds out the possibility for change. One may be born into abject spiritual poverty, but one need not remain there.

Sadly, many do make the choice to remain where they are, stuck in the muck of their own birth. They have turned a deaf ear to the cries of their soul, listening instead to the Siren song of the earth from which they sprang. Like their parents, Adam and Eve, they have blindly reasoned that they know better than the Spirit that beckons them upward.

## Change

The beginning of change is the decision to make it. The Spirit calls to the heart of man to ignite a longing for God—a longing not just for redemption, but for something better; not just for holiness, but for a higher plane. There is something better, and God knows what it is. But man and woman must decide whether they will live with God on His higher plane, or remain stuck in the foul muck of earth.

Without question, it is a mystery, and difficult for the temporal mind to grasp. God is all-powerful and all-knowing; He knows the way of every individual ever born. Yet—and here is the mystery—man is still a free agent. God is not a gangster forcing His will at gunpoint, but a wise Father offering a better way. A wise dad counsels and influences his teenage children; he corrects and chastises when they do wrong, but he also recognizes the folly in dictatorship. The wise parent dictates the way of a two-year-old, but allows the eighteen-year-old to become bruised by his own decisions, learning the hard lessons that will, ultimately, develop character. The dad understands the risk: the child may not seek higher ground, but become lost to the enticements of earth and flesh. But it is a necessary risk, for without learning self-determination the child will never grow up at all.

God is nothing if not a wise dad. He is not interested in raising up brain-numb weaklings who must be told everything to do, but desires the fellowship of bruised-but-mature adults who have consciously made the decision for Him.



(Next week: *A Love Affair with the Familiar*)

You give to them, they gather it up;  
You open Your hand,  
they are satisfied with good.  
You hide Your face,  
they are dismayed;  
You take away their spirit,  
they expire  
And return to their dust.  
You send forth Your Spirit,  
they are created;  
And You renew the face of the ground.

Psalms 104:28-30