

Additional Musings

Long-forgotten notes revisited

Joe Naumann at White House Retreat

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## preface

While house cleaning, I came upon some notes and musings written while on retreat at the White House some time in the past 4o years, I decided to format them and save them to share with others for whatever they may be worth. In my 76th year, I’m getting comfortable with entering what is probably the last chapter of my life. I have been so abundantly blessed in my life, much of it flowing from my times at White House Retreat, that there is little sadness in recognizing this transition in my state of being. If you read these few thoughts, musings, or ramblings, I hope and pray that you may receive at least some small blessing.

Joe Naumann, April 21, 2018

## Inward Journey

Walking along the paths,

Napping in the sun,

Sitting in quiet rooms,

Kneeling in the chapel,

Praying in many ways

Interior journaling

Seeking the misplaced

And forgotten . . .

Confronting demons

That cloud

Vision

Seeking . . . struggling

To rediscover . . .

My true self . . .

My birthright

Innocence

Seeing where . . . . when,

My perspective

Was flawed

Learning . .

Another firm step

On the journey

Of becoming.



## CONVERSATION

Jesus, I felt so special and important when you put your arm around me. The pressure of your arm around me and the warmth of your body next to me comforted me, soothed me, and I seemed to feel something deep inside me.

Jesus, I shouldn’t be, but I am surprised that you would take the time to walk with me. I can’t describe how I felt when you said, “I love you, Joe!” Jesus, how can I really mature into your vision of me? Why is it taking so long?

*Joe, you know my patience is unlimited. I can’t imagine a world without you in it. I can’t imagine Heaven without you in it. I desire your presence with all my divine*

*heart. I love to hold you, and I am patiently waiting for you to freely embrace Me with all your heart, mind, and soul. What joy there will be!*

## HOMECOMING

Finding anew

 That which was formerly known

That which was cherished

That which has slipped away

Slowly . . .

Silently . . .

My heart yearns to be open

To your presence, Jesus

Help me feel you indwelling

In my heart . . .

As I did before.

Thank you

For waiting patiently

For my homecoming

## ON THE SUBJECT OF GOD

(Written at 9:00 a.m. on some Thanksgiving Day years ago)

God does not ask anything else of you except that you let yourself go and let God be God in you. *Meister Eckhart*

God is not what you imagine or what you think you understand. If you understand you have failed. *St. Augustine*

I know it does not matter that I do not understand. *Brendan Kennelly*

God is the one reality that cannot be defined. *Sebastian Moore*

I know not which is more childish--to deny God, or to define Him. *Samuel Butler*

Dearest God, Trinity beyond comprehension, I don't know you very well; however, I know enough. I know you exist, though I cannot prove it to others. You have touched me deeply in creating me and sustaining me -- I have felt your touch and heard your voice. I have witnessed the transformation you wrought in me, one that Mary Jane calls a miracle. I thank you for the love you showered on me and continue to shower on me.

I know you created the vast cosmos ordering all things beyond my wildest imagination. As science reveals the natural laws that govern the cosmos, the awe I have for you grows and grows. This cosmos simply cannot be an accident! I thank you for the beauty and mystery of creation -- for sunsets and sunrises, for starry nights and gloriously bright summer days.

I believe that you transcend time so that the beginning of time, this moment in my life, and the end of time are simultaneously present to you. You knew the fullness of all the events affecting each and every subatomic particle and each and every living and nonliving entity in the cosmos. You knew I would be a sinner and you knew what those sins would be, and still you wanted me to be part of this creation. You knew I would have serious shortcomings as a father until I would turn to you for healing. You knew every person who would be touched by me, for better or for worse, hopefully more for the better. I thank you for all those who were your instruments in shaping me, and I thank you for using this flawed instrument to touch the lives of others.

I know you are active in my life and in the lives of all whom you have created. You answered all my prayers, sometimes giving me what I didn't want and for which I later thanked you. I didn't even consider going to St. Louis University -- thank you for getting me there through the scholarship. It was there I met Mary Jane and so many others who shaped my life. I was sad being away from Mary Jane while I was at I.U. getting my M.A.T., but there I met Judy, Bertha, Mike, Marshall, Dr. Benion, & Dr. Barton -- that was an important, though uncomfortable at times, growth experience for me. When I made the mistake of taking a job at Hazelwood H.S., you arranged for me to get a job offer the next year from Ferguson-Florissant where I spent 33, mostly wonderful years. I wondered what I'd do to pay the medical insurance once I was retired, and you arranged an opening at UMSL which quickly became two openings. You have blessed me at UMSL with opportunities to touch the lives of students again. I have been amazed at the effects some casual conversations before or after class have had on a few students. Lord, Krista and Michelle have serious medical problems and I lift them up to you and ask that you send the Holy Spirit to enter their bodies and heal the medical problems with your Love. I thank you for Andrew whose problems are beyond my meager abilities. I lift him up to you, a wounded brother in need of so much healing love. I open myself to you to be your instrument, if you so will it, of love and affirmation for Andrew, Krista, Michelle, and any others you choose to bring into my life. I know you brought me to the Christ Renews His Parish retreat, and I am ready to commit to the 6-month formation process. Help me discern your will and never seek to touch others to gain any kind of praise or glory. To you, Lord, belongs all the glory, praise and honor. I am honored that you choose to use me -- help me know my limits and when to let go so other instruments may be brought into play according to your will. In my spiritual life, you got me to St. Louis U. and my first retreat; you got me to White House Retreat and gifted me with spiritual writings and wonderful counselors; you led me to spiritual direction with Mike Henning for fourteen years; you led me to Sacred Heart Parish and to Tom Miller who has been my spiritual director for four years, and hopefully will be until the day I die and enter into your loving embrace; and now I am embarking, I believe according to your will, on the journey of formation in Christ Renews His Parish.

How could I not know that you love me, Lord? Looking at all the ways you have acted in my life, and I've only enumerated a few that I am aware of, no other conclusion could be drawn. My journey hasn't all been a bed of roses, but you have been with me through the years of Ginny's serious illnesses, my years of terrible parenting, when my morale hit bottom at work for a few years, when Mom and Dad Stephenson were in the nursing homes dying so slowly and with such little dignity. Even when I sin and treat you in a shabby manner, you are there -- you are loving me. You never punish me -- you only love me -- infinite, unconditional love. What I or others might call punishment is the consequence of my turning away from you or of others turning away from you. In those situations, you are still there loving me and helping me find a way to cope and emerge from the situation closer to you.

Lord, on this Thanksgiving Day, I praise you and give you all honor and glory. I thank you for being present in my life and using me as an instrument of your Love. Help me grow according to your will, putting more and more of the darkness behind me and moving into your light. Thank you for your patience with me. I know that at times, I've been a slow learner, slow to respond to your will. At other times I have been obstinately self-centered, resisting your will for me. You've never given up on me and you never will -- that's so amazing, so utterly amazing! Help all those I love realize how much you love them. On this day, in particular, surround Andrew with your loving embrace. He is precious in your sight, as are all your creations, and so he is precious in my sight. Help me bring your light into his life and the lives of all whom you bring to me. Help me be open to receive your love and healing from them for you love us greatly through each other. Bless all who have asked for prayers and for all on the Sacred Heart Prayer chain. Amen

(Written about 2002)

## Blinders

Lord,

Sometimes I put on blinders, not to focus on You and shut out that which is disharmonious with You. I put them on to focus on my own narrow, selfish, self-destructive desires. I put them on to keep myself from seeing that which speaks of You and calls me to be what I was born to be.

Lord, help me transform those blinders to ones which keep me focused on you!

## Shine

Jesus told us to go forth and spread the Good News – He expects us to let our “light” shine for all to see. We must “shine” wherever and whenever we can to the ability we can at that time and place.

Reflection:

Walking across the law at the retreat house in Belize, I just happened to look down and nestled in the grass was a beautiful flower about a ½ inch in diameter. It looked like a miniature hibiscus. It was so beautiful, it took my breath away. There were bigger flowers all around; however, this tiny one touched my heart and made me think of what a miracle God created in this little, easily overlooked, flower

The next time I walked across the lawn, I looked more closely and saw another tiny flower of about the same size – this was “fluffy” and delicate somewhat like a mimosa bloom. Another tiny miracle had been revealed to me.

Sometimes, it is the tiny lights of God’s love that touch us most deeply.

While walking through the rainforest was a powerful experience, a dream come true, my fondest memories from Belize are of finding the two tiny flowers.

I guess I identify more with the little ones. If it’s God’s will that I remain a little flower in His mysterious “lawn,” I’m very comfortable with that. Even a small event can be just what someone needs at a particular point in his or her journey

Lord, use me and draw me closer to You, that I may be a tiny flower for someone if it be Your will.

(The retreat was in 2006)

## Who Are You?

Jesus, how do I go about

Learning who you are?

I read about you in books, and

I may catch a vague glimpse of you.

In the voice of

Of a friend or a stranger,

I glean a bit of

Your messages.

Just sitting quietly,

I feel your presence.

A warm, comforting

Closeness

When I ask you

To hold me

As I sleep,

I feel your strength

And protection.

Lord, I really know\

So little of you,

Yet I know

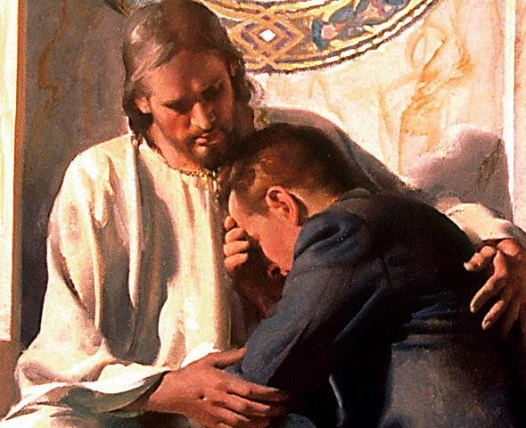
That you are

My only hope.

## A New View

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for the opportunity to see where my “original sin” began. Now I know that I’ve had an envious slant on life rooted in the sense of being inferior, deficient, a disappointment to my parents, particularly my father. Help me Lord, to grow in the belief that I am okay, that the person you created w not and is not inferior or deficient. Lord, let us celebrate this as a new beginning toward a healed self-image. Now that I see the root of my many sins of omission and commission, help me discard those sinful responses to life.

Lord, as I learn to know my true self, help me reveal it to others. I want to celebrate the reconciliation I had at work. Lord, help me maintain positive channels of communication with that person. Thank you for helping me overcome feelings of anxiety and fear that kept me from taking the first step for so long. Help me keep from being immobilized by anxiety and fear as I have been many times.

Lord thank you for my daughter who is growing into the caretaker role with Mary Jane and me. Help me be a positive force in her life. Thank you, also, for the time and sharing Mary Jane and I have had this summer. Help me be more open to her needs. Help me discern the proper use of time so that I maintain much room for her.

Lord, forgive me for all the sins I have committed and help me grow out of those habits and patterns through your love, grace, and patience.

(Written around 1998)

## Beloved

O, my beloved,

You came to me in the darkness this morning listening to a song about the vive and the branches. Yes, I am the vine to which you are connected. I am your only source of life, and I died so that you could receive life fully.

You have been a wounded, crippled branch for so long, and I have longed to heal you. I can heal you, but you must cooperate. When your doctor prescribes an antibiotic, you take it according to the directions, and you are healed. If you don’t cooperate, you aren’t healed. So too, your spiritual healing requires your cooperation.

You confess to me that you are sinner, and I certainly am aware of that being true. You seek the comfort of feeling my nearness, but it takes more than that. Keep me in the center of your consciousness. Begin each day by thankfully inviting me into your day. Be aware of me throughout the day. Be aware that because of me, you breathe, you see, you walk, you have thoughts. . .

When sinful thoughts and desires enter your mind, and they will as long as you live on the earth, focus on me and call upon the Holy Spirit. Focus on the Living Water that comes through the vine. Above all, if you fail in this effort, do not despair, but refocus on me. I’m still there – I have not cut you off and cast you into the fire. The living water is still there for you for the asking. Be aware of your failures, and try to learn from them, but do not wallow despairingly in them.

Remember that I love you with a passion beyond comprehension. You have known my loving embrace – remember that and focus on it. Re-member yourself to the community of this vine. Seek prayers from your brothers and sisters in my body and continue to pray for them. If you try to keep each moment as a prayerful moment, you will be open to the healing power of the Living Water.

Take my hand, my Beloved, trust in me, let yourself sink into my passionate embrace. I’m glad that I could die for you because when I spoke the universe into existence, I was thinking you you!

## Earth Love

Earth . . .

Born of Love

And sustained

By Love

Despoiled by humans

Formed from love

And redeemed by Love

Who are blind

To the Reality of Love

In the Earth . . .

In themselves

Brothers and sisters,

Awake to the Truth

And be enlightened

To live lovingly

With the Earth

## Ponderings at White House 1994

Brother and sister birds

Is the sky ballet

You fly in 1994

The same one

You flew in 1988?

Brother, Jesus,

Are my sins in 1994

The same ones

I committed in 1988?

## 

## Sunday, August 15, 1994

Cool, grey morning

Clouds on the ground and

Clouds in the sky

A sense of mourning

A day of endings

A day of deaths

A day of losses

The retreat is moving

Towards its ending . . .

Aspects of my false-self,

I hope, are dying

In letting go, there is

Always mourning

The grey clouds are

Pregnant . . .

With life-giving waters

To nurture new births

The false self may be dying

But greater awareness

Of the true self

Is being birthed

There cannot be birth

Or renewal

Without death

And mourning

Lord, may this

Bittersweet day

Nurture the growth

Of the Kingdom.

## Enriching Memories

Upon the cool breeze

Comes melodies from

Crickets and birds

Enriching the lives

Of those who stop

To listen and to see

The birds dancing in the air

While the chorus sings

From the trees

Lord, teach me

To sing your song

To dance your dance

To enrich the lives

Of those who will stop

To see

To hear

To grow.

## Ordinary Lives

Ordinary lives

Infused with Love

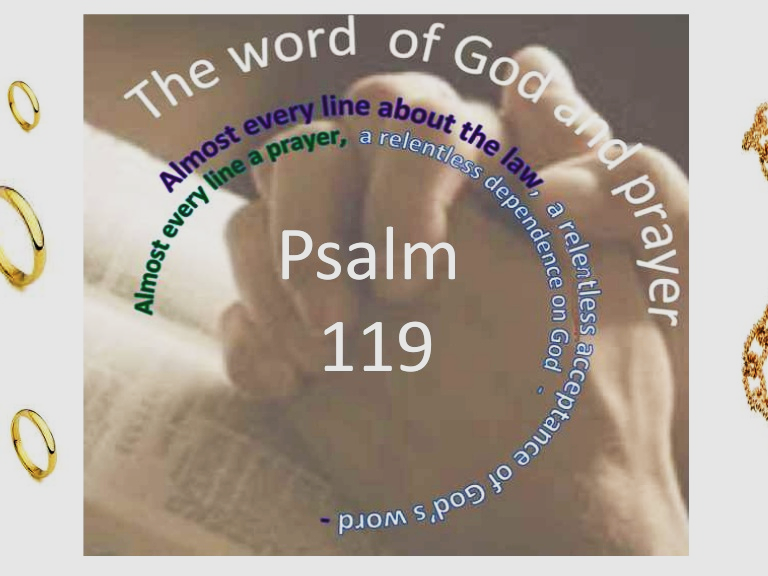
Unfold like roses

In the Son

Birthing justice

In the world,

Mirroring Eternal Love.



# Psalm 119: Reflections on Selected Verses

## Psalm 119: Trust and obedience

Lord, this morning I read about how my life and all that I have and experience is a trust and you have appointed me the trustee. Psalm 119 stresses that the key to being a good trustee or steward is obedience to your commands. You have placed your precepts before me -- I can't dodge the truth that I am aware of your expectations concerning my attitudes and actions. The book also stressed that every action, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, had eternal implications or consequences. For years, Lord, I've tried to delude myself into thinking that that was true of only some of my attitudes and actions -- those that seemed to only involve me weren't on my list or were ranked near the bottom. Well, I see that ranking them and not considering the lower ones as important is a deception fostered by the devil. It's like erosion, the Grand Canyon began as a tiny rivulet and slowly, tiny bit, by tiny bit, it widened and deepened until it became this huge gash in the earth's surface. My task, through cooperating with your grace, is to, first and foremost, prevent the smallest bit of erosion from following your precepts -- from being obedient. Where I have failed in the past, I must be open to your grace to prevent further erosion and to rebuild or repair wherever possible. You have entrusted me with much, Father. Help me be true to your precepts that I might be the trustee of these gifts that you desire me to be. I know you forgive me my past failures, and I thank you and praise you for your love, compassion, and kindness. Help me to find the strength through your grace to set your commands, ordinances, and precepts before me and to be obedient to you by following them. Oh, God, you are my God, and your Love is everlasting. Lord, teach me your ways and guide me on the straight, but narrow, paths that lay before me.

## Psalm 119:01

**1**How happy are those whose actions are blameless, who obey the Law of the LORD.

True happiness proceeds from walking in the way of the Lord or obeying the Law of the Lord. To seek the will of the Lord with one's whole heart and follow what one discerns to be the teachings or Law of the Lord produces a life in harmony with both God and nature. From this flows true happiness -- that sense of "rightness" that gives one confidence and contentment. Lord, I confess that I don't always try too hard to discern Your will -- frequently I insist on my will even when I know it is contrary to yours. I am stubborn and hard headed, seeking my own ends which center on me instead of on you. Even when I achieve them, the result is emptiness -- disappointment. If what I feel is joy, it is but a fleeting expression of it -- a poor imitation of real joy -- real contentment. Lord, help me turn to You every day and every time each day when I am tempted to follow my own self-centered appetites. Like Saint Paul, I often will to do what is right but end up doing what I know is wrong -- disappointing and unfulfilling. Help me grow closer to You each day. Help me learn more and more how to be a true friend to You as You are to me.

## Psalm 119:02

**2** How happy are those who observe his rules, and seek him with all their heart,

Obedience is the key to happiness. Seeking God's will and doing it produces happiness and peace. One must seek God and His will with all one's heart and mind. Lord, I'm afraid I've made too many half-hearted attempts to know Your will and then have fallen down in being obedient to it. I know I must give up control to You, but at the gut level, I keep trying to maintain control. Help me grow from a self-centered life to a God-centered life. I've been in the "zone" enough times to know that that is really the only way to live. I've known the peace and happiness for times of varying length. Help me find You, Lord, and subject myself firmly to Your will. Lord, you have been my true Love, I know that -- help me return that love to You.

## Psalm 119:03

3who, moreover, do no wrong, but obey his demands.

Doing the will of God is obeying His demands. If one is obedient to the will of God, then one will do no wrong. Lord, I find myself doing things contrary to Your will even as I proclaim my desire to live Your will. Help me focus on Your will instead of being self-centered and hedonistic and materialistic. I've known the peace that comes from doing no wrong -- of living in Your will. It is a lasting, satisfying feeling to be in Your will. Thank you for being with me when I was inclined to seek to follow my own will -- I'm really glad that I didn't. Help me, Lord, I know I don't make sense when I turn my back on that which is lasting and satisfying to reach for the easily accessible, but momentary illusion of satisfaction. I will keep retuning to You and seeking Your strength. I have progressed, Lord, but there is still a long way to go. I know You are willing to work with me as long as I keep trying. Thank You for Your patience.

He will rejoice over you. You will rest in his love; he will sing and be joyful about you.

Zephaniah 3:17

## Psalm 119:04

4You demand that your precepts be carefully kept.

Lord, what you expect is total devotion from us -- at least a maximum effort to grow in that direction. Precepts are guidelines, teachings, or laws so you expect us to learn the laws you are teaching us and use them as guidelines in our pilgrimage to you. So that means I must pay attention to what you teach in scripture, through the Holy Spirit, through the Church, and through my spiritual mentor and fellow-pilgrims. As a teacher, I am aware that there is great responsibility on the part of the learner to be open to what is taught. Then, you ask me to internalize these laws as guidelines in my life; however, I must be careful not to worship the laws, but worship you. Jesus, you showed the error of enshrining and worshiping the laws when you walked among us. These guidelines which you expect me to keep in accordance with careful discernment should keep me walking in your Light and living your most holy will. I should celebrate your precepts -- they are not a burden but a joyful guide to the life of peace in you. I praise you, Lord, and I ask your help and strength in learning your precepts, discerning how they apply in my life, and then living your will. All glory, praise and honor to you most Holy God: Father, Son, and Spirit.

## Psalm 119:05

5If only I were predisposed to keep your statutes!

Here is the crux of most problems -- sin reigns in me. I desire to keep your laws, Lord; however, in my weakness, I fall for the easy, illusionary promises of sin. I must depend on you, Lord, for my renewal. I cannot renew myself -- renewal flows from you. I must, however, dispose myself to be open to the Holy Spirit. I must call upon the name of the Lord at the first temptation instead of waiting until after I have succumbed and then run to the Lord. Lord, you want me to live according to your laws voluntarily. You want obedience given freely. I want the easy way of giving up the gift of free will to you and letting you operate me like a puppet -- always doing what is right. You want my love freely given, so only offer help with which I must cooperate. Returning your gift of free will to you isn't much of a show of gratitude for a wonderful gift. Lord, I can see progress and also much yet to be done in my journey home. Help me, Lord. Help me choose to rely on you for you are the way, the truth and the life.

## Psalm 119:06

6 Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands.

When I see how I have failed to live up to your teachings and laws, Lord, the only response I can have is repentance. I have failed to put you first in my life so many times that I almost find it difficult to believe that you are still ready to receive me as your son. I am thankful that you have infinite patience. Lord, I regret my self-centered sinning and am ready to try to let go and let you reign in my heart and soul. I will not let shame keep me from you, dearest Lord. No, I will admit my sinfulness and turn to you and I will boast of my weakness and your unlimited love and kindness. I accept your offer and resolve to turn to you when tempted to put myself at the center of my life. Thank you, Father

## Psalm 119:07

7 I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.

Yes, Lord, I will praise you with an upright heart because you have made it holy by your free gift of salvific Love. I praise you and thank you for offering that gift to me. I do treasure it, Lord, though at times I seem to forget that I accepted it and turn away from you. In spite of my unfaithfulness, you remain ever ready to renew the love-bond between us. I will praise you because you have never severed that bond or reneged on it -- I have frequently, but you remain faithful beyond human comprehension. All praise and honor and glory be yours most high and glorious God of all -- God of my heart, my savior, friend, father, consoler, counselor, lover.

## Psalm 119:08

8 I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.

Lord, I know my track record is poor; however, I resolve, once more, to obey your decrees. You issued them to guide me and lead me to the eternal love-union with you. I have placed my judgment above yours, Father and I acknowledge my sins of self-centered pride and acquisitiveness and accept you as my Lord and master, friend and lover. You are such a faithful lover, and I am so much like an unfaithful harlot. Every time I return to you, you accept me with love. Mom and Dad Stephenson modeled that kind of love for me when I returned to Mary Jane after inflicting great hurt to her. I have so much to learn, Lord, and the surest way to learn correctly is to obey your decrees. I know you will not forsake me -- you never have! Lord, I praise you and I thank you for your decrees. Help me be true to you as you have been true to me.