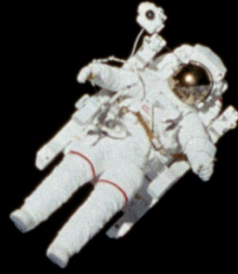


# CANA

JOURNAL



# noise

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## *a letter from the editor*

**P**ause from reading, just for a moment. Sit or stand as you are now, quietly, without motion, and just listen. What do you hear? Is it the low drum of conversation, no more than a mumble to your ears? Perhaps it is cars rushing by, horns honking—the bustle of individuals scurrying about in an attempt to escape the ‘rat race’? Or is it the chirp of birds and the slow trickle of a mountain stream, etched across the canvas of a soft spring breeze?

Wherever you find yourself, one thing must certainly be clear: our world is full of noise. Noise shocks us like an alarm in the wee hours of the morning, shakes us like the rumble of a train, comforts us like applause following a performance well done. No matter where we go, noise is there, our constant companion. Even in perfect silence, our thoughts—the ‘voices’ in our head—pursue us. Noise is something each of us must reckon with.

In this issue, we, Christians and students of the University of Chicago, invite you to listen along with us. Read on and encounter poems about trains and villages, essays about signal and sound, and short stories that come alive with life’s tangible struggles. An interview with UChicago alumnus Paul A. Nelson—Christian, creationist, and philosopher of evolutionary biology—guides us through navigating dissonance between our own rhythm and the soundtrack of the society we inhabit.

While our contributors come from various traditions within the Christian faith, their works collectively examine noise in all its facets from the conceptual to the experiential. May the uniting feature of this issue be not only our theme but our hearts parsing the noise for the voice of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Louis DiModica  
*Editor-in-Chief*  
CANA



# After the Fire

By Nikko Wheeler

**T**he world's noise can manifest itself in many external and internal forms. Externally, it rises from the problems and chaos around us—from a world in crisis, crying out for attention. Internally, it echoes our longing for resolution, driven by the weight of those problems. Whether the noise comes from the world's cries for help or our souls' desire for justice, it can overwhelm us, demanding a resolution of the tension to quiet the noise.

In 1 Kings 19, we encounter Elijah, a prophet of God overwhelmed by external and internal struggles. He has fought tirelessly to turn the unfaithful northern kingdom of Israel away from false gods and back to the worship of the one true God. Externally, Elijah contends with wicked rulers (1 Kings 18:17-18), false prophets (18:19-40), and the devastating drought (17:3-4). Despite his efforts, he flees in fear of continued idolatry and threats to his life (19:1-3). These external pressures eventually spiral into internal struggles—Elijah becomes fearful (19:3), exhausted, and even suicidal (19:4), needing angelic assistance to find the strength to continue his journey to the mount of God (19:5-8). There, amidst the noise of Elijah's turmoil, God reveals Himself:

*There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9-13)*

Up to this point in Israel's history, God has typically revealed Himself in awe-inspiring ways—through plagues in Egypt (Exodus 7-12), thunder and fire on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-19), and his glory filling the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-38). Yet, when His prophet comes to Him overwhelmed and seeking Him, God reveals Himself in a low whisper, simply asking,

*“What are you doing here?”*

Of course, God already knows why Elijah is there. The question isn't about gathering information but prompting Elijah to reflect on why he came—what he truly seeks and believes about God's plan. Amidst the noise of the external problems and internal struggles Elijah has faced, he has forgotten that God has carried and sustained him through these tribulations.

As Christians in the West, we are facing a situation not much different from what Elijah faced. While we may not face direct persecution like Elijah—or like some of our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world—we still face wars and rumors of wars, a declining belief in the Christian God, and sociopolitical turmoil resulting from shifting presidential administrations. External problems abound. And despite one of the highest qualities of life, it doesn't seem to be doing us much good when internal issues such as anxiety, depression, and suicide are so rampant. The noise screams at us from both inside and out.

When overwhelmed by such noise, we often seek loud, obvious answers. However, as 1 Kings 19:9-13 shows, God doesn't always reveal Himself in dramatic forms, especially when there is so much noise. Instead, He may reveal himself in a whisper, even when the world around us is deafening. A whisper demands intentional listening—God's presence may not always be immediately apparent, but it is never absent. Sometimes, it must be actively sought, inviting us to focus and hear his quiet but sustaining word.

Yet, as the passage continues, God doesn't relieve Elijah from the world's noise. Instead, He uses the whisper to send Elijah back into the noise, to face the external problems head-on, to continue his mission, and to trust God's plan (1 Kings 19:15-18). God doesn't remove Elijah from the chaos of the noise; He calls him to engage with it. The whisper doesn't promise that the noise will cease, but it gives Elijah the strength to move forward despite it.

We, too, may not be removed from the world's noise should we try to escape it. God may call us to continue moving forward in the face of external pressures and internal struggles that make up the present ruckus. The world's noise may not cease in the way we want it to, but God's whisper reminds us that He is near. His voice provides the reminder needed to move through the noise with purpose. After the winds, earthquakes, and fires of the world rage, be sure to listen for the low whisper of God's voice. Sometimes, all that is needed to "quiet" the world's noise is a whisper from God.

# CARDIAC



**arrest**

By Lucien Levant

Dwelling in the core of the crusted city  
in the center of the concrete iceberg,  
birthed from the marriage of Industry and Columbia  
and nursed by oil in a crib of steel girders,  
lives a rushing god, an emergent sea-god,  
the god of unnature.

He floats under black gum-dotted sidewalks,  
above underground rapid transit tunnels,  
inside the hazy air, the smog, the vented steam.  
He is concrete. His voice is asphalt.  
His grinding, clanking, throbbing machine  
surges high pressure seminal fuel  
into rubber hose and lead pipe orifices,  
while he skims and collects like a parasite.  
He is the hum, the roaring inescapable din  
that no secular sabbath can pause or drown.  
Some say he is the rat race,  
because wherever he goes they will surely follow.  
But he is the track, the crowd, and the starting gun.

He blots the stars out of the night sky.  
He is always growing, fed by fuel and fabric paper,  
swelling upward, outward, and downward.  
There is little hope to overcome him, only escape,  
but when too many escape together  
he will follow,  
to rebuild a new concrete machine among them.  
Whether within or without he emits a deafening isolation.  
It is not his intent;  
it is his waste, his byproduct, his apathy.  
The lonely generation grows deaf from his hum;  
though they can see and speak,  
they cannot hear each other's cries.  
The god of unnature drowns their desire  
for connection and community.  
There are some who worship him,

who pray day and night at his altar of labor  
to relinquish their humanity and swim  
through his currents. See how they toil  
in their Sisyphean tasks,  
dying for a glimmer of recognition.  
But his eyes are fixed forward,  
his head locked in place.  
Even if he saw their efforts,  
his heart is filled with oblivion.  
He is wholly disengaged;  
he speaks a language all his own  
and would not understand.  
Though these few serve him, all tend his machine.  
In the end they will owe him;  
he pays his wages on credit.

His city grows bigger day by day,  
his apathy piles in the streets.  
Can we ever hope to escape or dethrone?  
Remember  
we wrestle not against flesh and blood,  
but powers and principalities:  
the authority of the dark city.  
His waste infects the heart;  
this is where we hold our revolution.  
Arm yourself to brave the rushing stream of isolation;  
we must unite to overcome  
the god of unnature who lives within our land,  
our homes, our hearts.  
Our only hope, our only cure, our only weapon  
to debride the god from our septic hearts is  
a cardiac arrest.

Still your pounding heart  
and die to the isolation, die to the god of unnature,  
die to yourself.

Do not run, do not escape to Walden,  
do not numb yourself to the shared pain.  
Have you heard how earth absorbs the sound?  
Look above you, open your eyes,  
see how our daily bread feeds the god of unnature!  
Serve him no longer!  
Arrest is a wrench in the concrete machine.  
A rest is the antibiotic for a septic heart.  
Take up your arms of arrest, walk in shoes of peace,  
wear your righteous breastplate.  
When the armies of rest rise against the isolation,  
the apathy, the god of unnature,  
they will overthrow him and cast him out of the sea,  
out of the earth, out of the air,  
and he will be thrown, shut and sealed into the pit.  
After all have died their second death,  
the din will quiet, absorbed by the earth.  
The lead pipes and rubber hoses  
will aneurysize and burst.  
The haze, the smog, the vented steam  
will dissipate forever.  
The city will be scrubbed clean,  
washing away the black gum-dots  
and revealing golden glass sidewalks underneath.  
Trees will uproot asphalt roads  
and out of the city depths a new spring will bubble:  
a river of crystal water will flow through the streets,  
over the golden glass and iridescent jeweled walls.  
Then the still God, the quiet-earth God,  
the God of nature,  
will take His throne,  
and Heaven's half-hour silence  
will last forever.  
Whoever has ears, let them hear.

# Jesus

## Walks



By Jake Fritts

One of the most outspoken Christians of the 21st century in popular culture has been Kanye West. The rapper from Chicago, Illinois has been outspoken about his faith in Christ, releasing many songs and an album about Him. Despite his public declarations of faith, he has also been at the center of numerous controversies—from interrupting Taylor Swift at the VMAs, to declaring that slavery was a choice, to most recently making a string of antisemitic remarks, including multiple statements praising Adolf Hitler. While these actions are deplorable, they don’t stand in as stark a contrast to his Christian beliefs as one might think. As Christ is represented in West’s music, He is someone that is ultimately forgiving, a Savior not just for saints, but for sinners. Focusing on “Jesus Walks” from his first album, *The College Dropout*, an image of Jesus Christ is formed that highlights His mercy and salvific nature. The Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine is emphasized, while the Man who flips tables and chases merchants is ignored.

“Jesus Walks” was one of West’s first hit songs, winning him a Grammy on his debut album. The song opens with chanting that recalls a military marching song, over which West states that we’re at war, at war with racism and terrorism, but most of all, at war with ourselves. The concept of an internal war is present throughout the song. The rapper juxtaposes the extreme lengths the people he grew up with were willing to take to gain material wealth with the breathtaking glamor of the life he now lives. He states he grew up in the “Valley of the Chi where death is,” where people would steal cars and necklaces. However, he now is at the top where the view alone would leave one breathless—this point is accentuated by the musician gasping. Despite this, West is still plagued by the same issues he faced when he was living in poverty. This leads to his ultimate point—a truth he admits his mother already told him—

that only Jesus can save them. West's pursuit for wealth through his life, his supposed savior, has left him in the same position as before.

In this pursuit, West seemingly has lost his relationship with Christ. He admits that he is afraid to talk to God because they haven't spoken in so long, all the while crying out, pleading for Jesus to walk with him. He acknowledges that he has ignored his relationship with the Divine in his pursuit of wealth; as he alludes throughout the song, many of the people around him have. But he still recognizes the salvific power of Christ. He calls on God, who is one and the same as Christ for West, to lead him away from the devil, who is "trying to break [him] down."

West seemingly gains the strength he needs from Jesus. In the second verse, the choir belts louder and the drums intensify as he begins to address people that may feel outcast in society. He tells the murderers, drug-dealers, and exotic dancers that Jesus walks for them. The verb "walks" seems to recall the carrying of the cross in the Gospels. Just as Christ bore His cross for the salvation of the world's sin, so too must those who follow Him bear their own crosses (Luke 14:27). With this, the people addressed are reminded of two things: Jesus has already gone before them in trial and won them salvation, and their sufferings are part of the Christian life. West states that they feel like they are living in Hell, having to rely on welfare or theft to provide for their families. Yet the background choir reminds them that Jesus walks with them and the triumphant horns invoke the coming of

Christ in Revelation (8:2). In the fullness of the second verse, the struggle of before is brought to completion. Though West's words are somber—he and his community are fighting for a better life,



enduring immense hardship and, at times, distancing themselves from Christ in the process—the choir and the band remind the listener that the victory has already been won. Christ has conquered death through His death on the cross, and the sufferings they bear in this life are but a share in the life of Christ. Jesus is walking with them in their trials; this is not the end, but there is something better to come: eternal life in Christ.

While West captures the awesome, salvific nature of Christ well in the song, he fails to acknowledge His punitive nature as well. He is not just the Savior of the world, but also its King and Judge. Surely, He disapproves of the actions discussed in the song. Throughout the Gospels He condemns thieves and murderers; He ate with sinners, but never approved of their sins (Matthew 19:18, 21:13, 34:39; Mark 10:19; Luke 5:29-32). Perhaps West intentionally chose to leave this aspect of Christ's nature out of the song. Perhaps he feared that his audience would feel the same fear he felt in approaching God if he mentioned the displeasure Christ would have for their actions. While this remains unknown for now, what is clear is that Kanye West believes deeply in the idea that Christ is for the worst of sinners and His salvific power extends even to the deepest depths.

For this reason, it is clear how a man like Mr. West can profess such a strong faith while also acting so contrary to what one may think his beliefs would ordain. He is at war with himself, similar to how all Christians are at war with their corrupted natures. He clearly understands his imperfections and how his actions run contrary to the Gospel. This is seen in his blatant dismissal of his mother's advice, where he acknowledges the truth in her statement that only Jesus can save, yet still decides to leave town to sell cocaine. This is presumably an allegorical statement, as he recalls Wyclef Jean's "Gone 'Til November" and a scene from the TV show *The Wire*, but it speaks to the larger truth of his song. He is battling against his nature, trying to wrangle his passions and whims to be in greater accord with Christ. He recognizes the truth, but similar to all who profess a faith in Jesus, falls short of actualizing that truth in his life. But as the trumpets and choir tell the audience, Jesus is walking beside him, and us, and one day these imperfections will be washed away as we are brought into the unity of Christ in the Kingdom of Heaven.



# Tuning to the Signal

By Nevin Hall

The signal is the truth. The noise is what distracts us from the truth.” These words, penned by Nate Silver in *The Signal and the Noise*, encapsulate a profound dichotomy. Published in 2012, Silver’s book on statistical prediction explores the tension between signal—the meaningful data—and noise—the irrelevant distractions. After accurately predicting every state except Indiana in the 2008 presidential election, Silver became synonymous with statistical wizardry. But discerning the signal from the noise does not only revolutionize our predictions; it can also transform our lives. While most of us may never attempt to forecast elections, Silver’s framework offers a valuable lens for navigating daily life: focus on what truly matters.

This distinction resonates deeply in the context of productivity, a concept familiar to University of Chicago students. Hours spent in the library—the beloved “Reg”—often diverge from genuine accomplishment. A cramped cubicle and an extra cup of coffee may feel like markers of efficiency, yet they rarely guarantee meaningful progress. Paradoxically, a simple coffee break with friends might restore energy and sharpen focus more effectively than hours of strained effort. What appears productive on the surface can sometimes hinder deeper outcomes—a lesson that underscores the danger of mistaking noise for signal.

The problem intensifies when we allow counterproductive metrics to define our self-worth. On Sidechat—a microcosm of UChicago life if there ever was one—students often equate their value with rituals of productivity, like the student favorite “finals-week-Reg-bender.” Yet these performative habits frequently fail to yield substantive results. Instead, we become ensnared by appearances, prioritizing distractions over genuine goals. Learning material for an exam or crafting a thoughtful paper—the true “signal” of academic effort—gets buried beneath layers of noise.

But life is not merely a tally of accomplishments; life’s worth transcends measurable outcomes. Relationships, growth, and joy defy quantification, yet they are often the most meaningful aspects of existence. Rather than striving to make each day “the most productive day the University of Chicago has ever seen,” perhaps we should aim for steady improvement—a quiet commitment to living better today than yesterday. This shift invites us to reconsider our metrics: what truly matters cannot always be measured.

Some things are inherently immeasurable, and our attempts to quantify them often obscure their value. We already recognize this truth: it’s buried within expressions like “I love you to the moon and back,” phrases that evoke boundless affection yet resist precise calculation. Love, joy, and purpose are signals that guide us through life’s chaos; efforts to assign numbers or rankings to them risk reducing their essence to mere noise.

Why obsess over quantifying every moment? Instead, we should ask deeper questions: Does this action contribute meaningfully to my community? Does it make me kinder or more compas-

sionate? How does this behavior improve what I create or how I relate? Choosing the signal over the noise requires discernment and courage—it's far easier to chase superficial markers of success than to pursue what truly matters.

Jesus of Nazareth preached a similar message: focus on what truly matters—faith and love—over performative acts of devotion. When asked about God's commandments, Jesus distilled them into two: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37, 39). These are faith's signals—love for God and service to others—qualities that resist measurement yet demand pursuit.

Jesus also warned against mistaking appearances for substance. In one parable, a Pharisee boasts about his righteousness while a tax collector humbly asks for mercy; it is the latter who finds favor with God (Luke 18:9-14). Outward displays of piety pale next to genuine humility and trust, a reminder that faith resides in the unseen depths of the heart rather than visible rituals: "The Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Attempting to measure such qualities inevitably amplifies the noise while obscuring the signal.

Regardless of religious beliefs, life's obsession with noise can feel overwhelming—even Spotify churns out statistics analyzing your listening habits, letting you compare your listening rates of "study music" versus "vibe music." The temptation to measure success by what is most visible or quantifiable lurks everywhere. Yet life's most profound moments often defy such simplistic metrics. Reflecting on our actions—asking whether they deepen relationships, expand understanding, or improve our shared world—helps us tune into life's signals.

Whether carving out time for focused work or choosing to listen without distraction, embracing Silver's framework can quiet superficial clamor and guide us toward genuine creativity and connection. In doing so, we not only enrich our own lives but also serve those around us—a pursuit far more meaningful than any measurable output.

# Finding Harmony Amidst Dissonance

An Interview with UChicago Alumnus Paul A. Nelson

By Louis DiModica



**Paul A. Nelson** (Ph.D., Philosophy of Biology and Evolutionary Theory, 1998) is a Senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture and Adjunct Professor at Biola University. His research explores developmental biology, intelligent design, and the interaction of science and theology. Paul's forthcoming book,

tentatively titled *Common Descent and the Mask of Theory*, critically examines how universal common descent, often treated as an axiom, shapes the interpretation of biological evidence through thought experiments. Paul resides in Glenview, Illinois, with his wife, Suzanne, and their two daughters.

*Each of us experiences a background hum, a default "noise" that shapes the way we see the world. Paul Nelson's approach to evolutionary theory illustrates the value of understanding both the dominant narratives and the quieter, discordant voices. By embracing such complexities, we can foster dialogue across disparate worldviews to reveal new harmonies amidst the noise.*

**Q: Can you share about your journey into evolutionary biology and philosophy of science?**

I never planned to study History and Philosophy of Science (HPS) or Biology when I was in high school—I wanted to be a painter. Art was a great way to attract female attention back then. But after two years studying art in college, I was miserable. I said to God: “Alright, I’m miserable. What would you like me to do?”

By chance—or providence—I read Thomas Kuhn’s classic, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. It completely changed my view of science. I thought science was just dull formulas to memorize, but Kuhn revealed an inimitable human element—the creativity in constructing theories from evidence. That’s both the glory and the shortcoming of science—theories are never perfect and must be rebuilt or even torn down as new evidence emerges.

In the fall of 1978, I moved back home to Pittsburgh and stumbled into a world-class HPS program at Pitt. By the end of my bachelor’s degree, I knew: “This is what God wants me to do. I don’t know how yet, but I’m sticking with it.”

**Q: Why did you choose UChicago?**

Chicago was ideal. It had excellent programs in evolutionary theory and philosophy of science, along with a tradition of intellectual independence and resistance to academic fads. I applied and got in, but they didn’t offer me funding initially—likely to “look me over” because, as I later learned, Jim Lennox had mentioned in his recommendation letter that I didn’t accept Darwinian evolution.

I can still imagine the admissions committee debating my admission, thinking, “If he’s crazy, he won’t afford tuition or we’ll give him a master’s and send him off.” That first year, I had to borrow serious money for someone from a family with none. Walking through campus, I prayed: “God, if You’re not here for me, this place will crush me.” After a year, they decided I wasn’t crazy and gave me a full ride, which I desperately needed.

Chicago was wonderful, though they occasionally warned

me to stay on track. “You’re doing too many debates,” or “You’re writing a few too many articles attacking evolution—you have to stay on topic.” During my second year, my pre-candidacy advisor, David Malman, cautioned me in a fatherly tone: “We’re worried

**“Despite my public dissent from standard evolutionary theory, I always felt supported, like they had my back.”**

you’re drifting out of philosophy into too many other activities. Stay focused.” Despite my public dissent from standard evolutionary theory, I always felt supported, like they had my back. To this day, I tell anyone considering graduate school to put Chicago near the top of their list, and I’ve never wavered in that opinion.

**Q: What is one lesson you learned at UChicago that still sticks with you?**

One of my first major conversations at UChicago was with Bill Wimsatt, who later became my PhD advisor. At the time, Bill was a heavy smoker, so I’d sit in his office with a big cup of Earl Grey tea to counteract the cigarette smoke. We had been talking for about an hour—Bill was very generous with his time—when he paused and said, “Paul, I have to ask you a leading question.” I immediately knew where this was going. He continued, “Jim Lennox at Pitt told me you’re a creationist. Is that true?”

**“But if you master the theory from within, you’ll earn the right to dissent.”**

I was a first-year student with no money or support, but I had resolved to be honest if asked. My hands were practically shaking as I replied, “Yeah, that’s true.” To my surprise, Bill was delighted. He laughed and said, “Isn’t that great?” He explained that while I hadn’t mentioned my beliefs in my application, they had admitted me knowing I didn’t accept the standard theory of origins in biology.

In that same conversation, Bill gave me advice that has stayed with me ever since: “You have to be a better evolutionary biologist than anyone else in the program. It may seem unfair—maybe it is—but if you master the theory from within, you’ll earn the right to dissent.”

That lesson shaped how I approach disagreements, and it's the same advice I give to Christian students: master the immanent critique. Understand ideas from within before you challenge them. Not only is it more interesting than a direct attack, but it also earns you the right to dissent. More importantly, it makes you a greater asset to your colleagues who may disagree with you on deeper issues, like the existence of God or the reliability of the Bible. The empathy and understanding you gain by engaging ideas on their own terms allow for conversations that would otherwise be impossible. And as I said before, it's just more fun that way. As long as you maintain your freedom and independence, it's a heck of a lot more rewarding.

**Q: How does your use of immanent critique shape your understanding of evolutionary theory?**

I spend about 50% of my time at evolution meetings—attending talks, interacting with presenters, and presenting my own work. I feel perfectly at home in that environment. I'm able to sift through ideas and say, "That talk made sense; those data are solid; I can use that." On any given workday, I'm probably reading and thinking as much about evolutionary theory as I am about intelligent design. I recognize there are valuable insights in evolutionary theory, even if its foundations have significant problems. This approach helps me discern what's worth keeping while maintaining my intellectual freedom as I engage with the field.

**Q: How do you handle being in the minority when your views challenge the popular scientific consensus?**

Consensus is a very unreliable indicator of truth. History is full of examples where the majority was wrong. Take Einstein in physics—before him, many believed physics was complete, that there was nothing more to discover. Or Copernicus and Galileo, who overturned centuries of consensus about the structure of the cosmos. In biology, there's

**"Consensus is a very unreliable indicator of truth. History is full of examples where the majority was wrong."**

Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis in Vienna in the 1800s. Mothers and babies were dying from childbed fever, and Semmelweis realized it was caused by doctors carrying infections from cadaver labs. He told his colleagues they needed to wash their hands, but they were insulted. “What do you mean I have to wash my hands?” they said—and refused. Tragically, his minority viewpoint was ignored for years.

The point is, any new theory in science begins as a minority perspective. Consensus is great if it's grounded in truth, but you can't determine whether it's grounded in truth simply by looking at the consensus itself.

### **Q: How do you approach conversations with people who disagree, especially about controversial, emotionally charged topics?**

For me, the most effective way to open a conversation and build bridges is to start with the shared experience of being human. Whatever our worldview, we all have to get up in the morning, make a living, care for our families, use our practical reason. These shared dimensions transcend individual cultures because we're all members of *Homo sapiens*. There are countless ways to connect with someone by finding those points of commonality. I'm a human; you're a human—we both know what that means, right? We share this experience.

If you look at the parables of Jesus, He does the same thing. “A man had two sons” (Luke 15:11-32). “Ten virgins took their lamps to meet the bridegroom” (Matthew 25:1-13). “A farmer went out to sow seeds” (Mark 4:1-20). Jesus doesn't present abstract theories about the nature of God. Instead, He speaks to His audience through shared human experiences and says, “Let's start here—let Me teach you something from this.” Over the decades, I've learned to do this almost instinctively. The most fruitful way to interact with people who don't share my worldview is to find where we do share something and start building from there.

**“Jesus doesn't present abstract theories about the nature of God. Instead, He speaks to His audience through shared human experiences and says, ‘Let's start here—let Me teach you something from this.’”**

# Train Tracks, a Window, and the Moon that stays

A Haibun by Ren Brown

The train moves steadily as I stare out onto the passing landscape while trees and cars and people flash onto the window like a sped-up slideshow. When I keep my eyes on one object, I can follow it from the beginning of the windowsill to the end of it, before it disappears for the passengers in the seats behind me to see.

The train rattles loud.  
As scenes move by, unfiltered,  
the sound feels heavy.

Soon, the sky morphs from blue to purple, then pink and orange. Next, it's black, and the scenes muddle to gray. The noise continues, a staple that stays as all things change. It fills my mind, and I have a hard time differentiating what comes from outside and what comes from within. My eyes, fixated on the horizon, begin to blur as tears line their bottoms.

I blink them away,  
and try to look at something  
stable. Something real.

Suddenly, I catch sight of the moon. Almost beyond the pane of my window but— there! In the corner. I realize it'd been there for awhile, although a cloud or two had covered it briefly. Despite the speed of the wheels and the loud whistle from the horn, the moon remains, and for a moment, my mind silences.

The Bible I hold  
weighs down in my lap,  
and I'm encouraged  
to pick it up.

# The hidden years

in Nazareth, with dreams and angels gone,  
the quietude sets in, and by and by,  
in modest work, good Joseph carries on  
while listening to Mary's lullaby.

But even with his gift of trust, he fears  
his weakness as a rustic, humble man,  
when daily in the synagogue he hears  
what being "father" to the Son demands.

Through subtle thrums of muted recitation,  
he turns the question over in his mind  
and lets the psalms infuse his contemplation  
with glints of comfort, toil, and awe combined.

How could the God of sound and trumpet blast,  
of blazing fire, and violent storms of snow  
choose silent Joseph, mild and meek, now asked  
to tend His child and guard Him as He grows?

In voiceless nights, the patient father calls  
in strains that echo softly from the heart.  
The God of tender love perceives them all,  
and answers from a secret place apart.

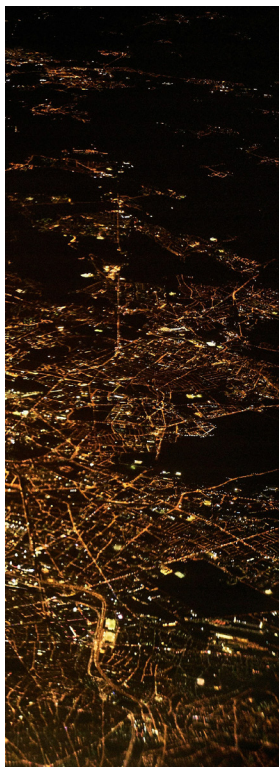
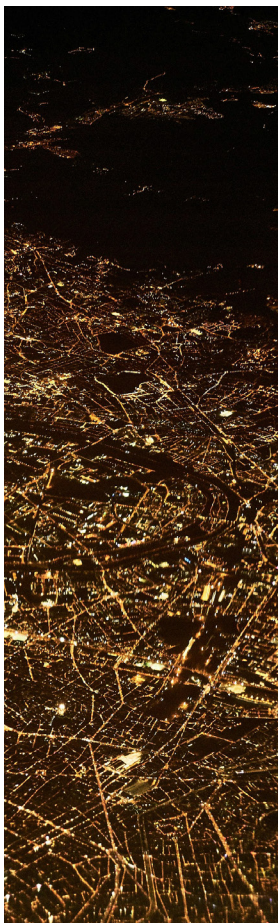
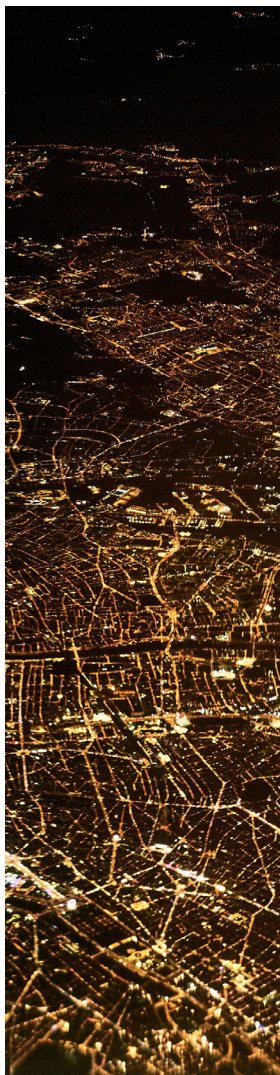
So Joseph, following his tasks, with zeal  
returns each evening, offering a smile  
and, setting down his burden, gently kneels  
to throw his arms around and kiss the child.

He knows not how to give much more than joy,  
and small attentions, often spoken roughly,  
and yet true miracles make little noise:  
in Nazareth, He learned to say, "Who touched me?"





By Lindsey Esselman



# Noise, Sound, Quiet

By Vaughn Jarvi

*“ . . . but let your  
adorning be the  
hidden person of  
the heart with the  
imperishable beauty  
of a gentle and quiet  
spirit, which in God’s  
sight is very precious.”  
(1 Peter 3:4)*

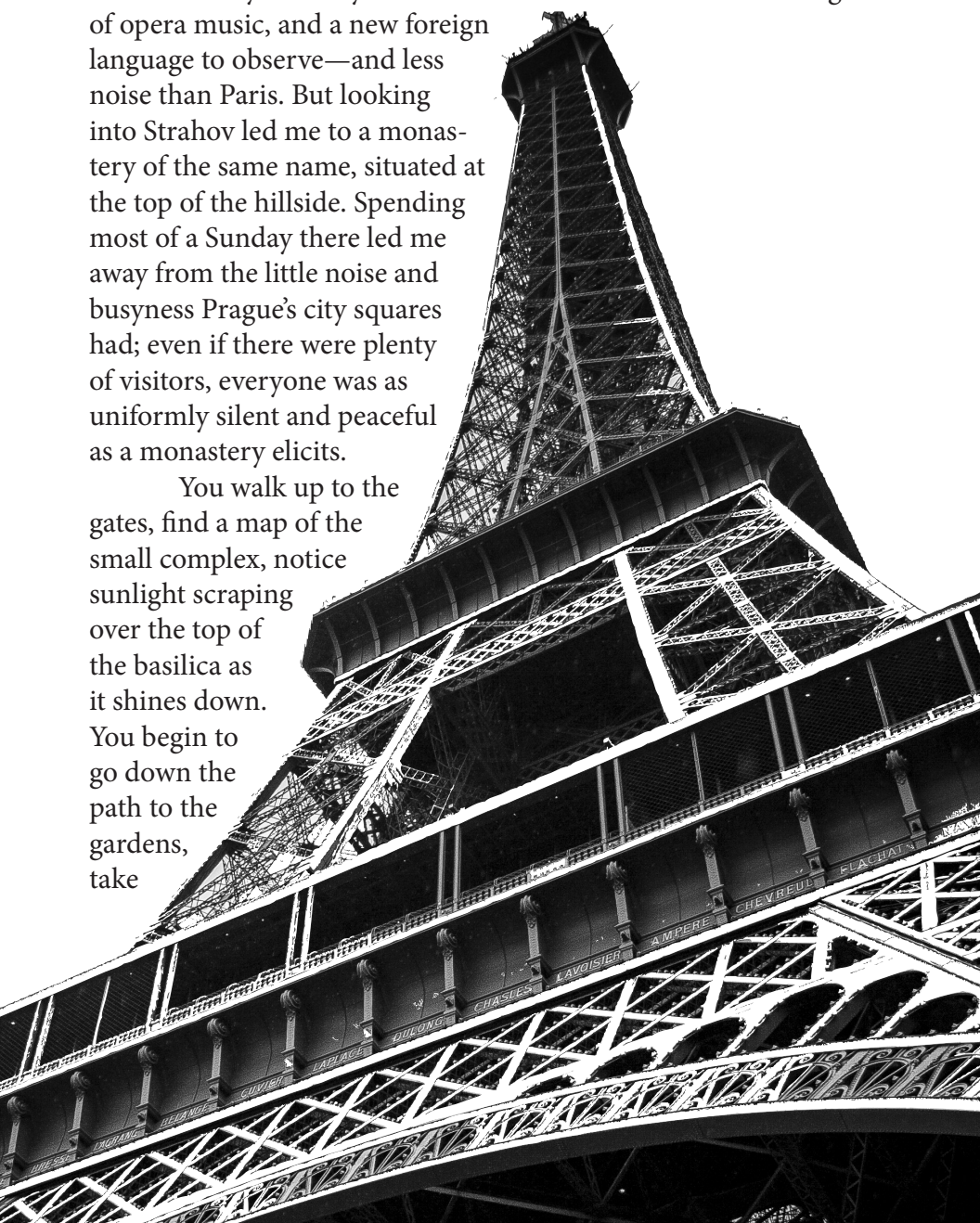
In my life, I would describe external stimuli as falling into three categories: noise, sound, and quiet. Sound is intentionally listened to and focused on; noise is distraction, background, or cacophony; quiet is the absence of either noise or sound. An individual sound is often beautiful, like a treasured piece of music—but when many build up, focus is lost. I might typically be moved by a favorite song, but when this sound competes through earbuds with the noise of a crowded train, its meaning is diminished. Noise may not always overwhelm consciously, but it certainly can subconsciously and spiritually. Reflecting on 1 Peter 3:4, this subconscious overwhelming leads to unrest—which, over the long term, is not gentle or quiet in my spirit.

But just as the writer of Ecclesiastes describes “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (3:7), it is clear to me that there are times when noise is given, where sound can be appreciated, or when quiet is necessary. Noise is a part of our world, but as its tendency is to distract from thoughts or take presence away from a moment, its connotation is a negative one to me. Sound is a blessing from the Lord, something which should serve to glorify Him. It often shows His beauty through creation: in the ability to make or enjoy music, to hear nature, or to speak closely with another person. I see quiet, though, as entirely a provision from God. Being in quiet is obviously a meditative space, mentally if not physically: time when reflecting and speaking with God cannot be taken away from me. My heart wants to be reminded of God’s presence, goodness, and peace in every moment, but it takes conscious effort to subvert noise or not be distracted by sound. I am always struck, then, when the Lord provides a moment where I don’t have to worry about this—when the spiritual sound of hearing from Him is not crowded out by physical ones.

This winter quarter, I spent time studying abroad. It was an experience which gave just as much noise as any other season, but even starker sound and quiet. Paris is at no loss for people or cars, and hearing the congestion of either *dans la rue* is clear noise. But stepping from a city square into church on Sunday afternoon brings welcome sound in worship and catching up with brothers and sisters, even more a departure from the Parisian norm because

of the city's particular busyness. These sabbaths also bring quiet, often in small moments—but I see extended ones as being just as necessary, if less common. One experience that reflected this for me (and gave the strongest sense of *provision*) came when I heard about the Strahov hillside of Prague in passing, while spending a weekend away. The city had its own beautiful sounds—a heritage of opera music, and a new foreign language to observe—and less noise than Paris. But looking into Strahov led me to a monastery of the same name, situated at the top of the hillside. Spending most of a Sunday there led me away from the little noise and busyness Prague's city squares had; even if there were plenty of visitors, everyone was as uniformly silent and peaceful as a monastery elicits.

You walk up to the gates, find a map of the small complex, notice sunlight scraping over the top of the basilica as it shines down. You begin to go down the path to the gardens, take



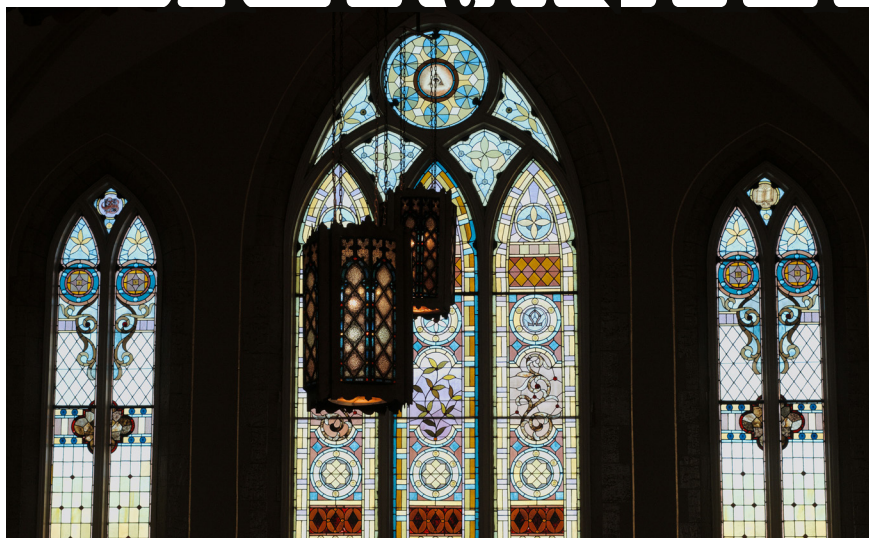
note of beautiful, natural sounds and soft footsteps along gravel. But then, as is intended by the monastery, walking, prayer, and reflection drown out even these small aspects of your surroundings. Your phone—source of noise beyond even metro busyness—remains out of sight, though you reach for a camera as one prayer ends to take a photo into direct, shining light.

Another meditation begins as you walk, and you are reminded of *how much* there is to think about. On a given day, or in a given week, or in a given quarter—not to worry about, but simple things to thank God for, or parts of your heart to bring to Him. Even if rhythms of prayer are deep within the everyday, why shouldn't they be as peaceful and extended even without a monastery garden as background?

You think about the feeling of this quiet, how you would define it beyond absence of noise: intimacy, interiority. You are present, in the moment, without engaging with the world around you. And after this extended meditation, this walk in the sun, you see the ways in which you confront noise and appreciate sound differently—not because of a change in either, but because of the way that quiet moves.

Noise may distract, but could still come from a loud and busy city in which God is honored. Sound can be explicitly worshipful to Him, or show reflection of His beauty as it moves us. Just as these are so, I think of work and rest: the rest serves as its own time to be with God and to draw from Him, full stop, but it also goes on to enrich days, weeks after. I see quiet as being deeply connected, or similar to express the necessity of: God's provision to make singularly clear that He is with us, and that we may spend time in His spirit, without the things that otherwise occupy the conscious or subconscious.

# A TRINITY



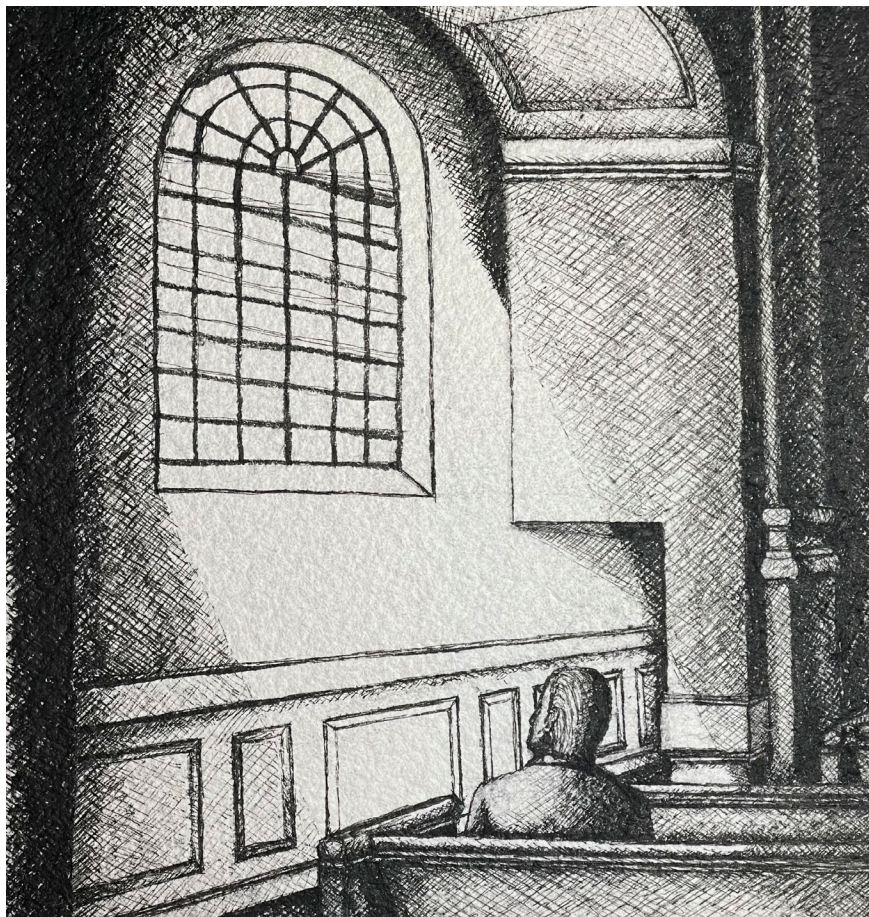
of sorts

By Clara Harris

*Visit Española Way  
A place that's for fun and for play  
Then spotted between  
Two stores I had seen  
Was a chapel in which I could pray.*

*A waitress and baker,  
A coffee-drink-maker  
Whose hollers should I  
(And purchase thereby)  
Hear and then be a partaker?*

*No food will suffice  
No drink pays the price  
All promises pale  
But He will not fail;  
The wonderful love of our Christ!*



First Presbyterian Church of Houston

By Kevin Flores  
*Ink on Cotton Pulp Paper*  
9 x 9 inches

# God's Forging Process in Seasons of Transition

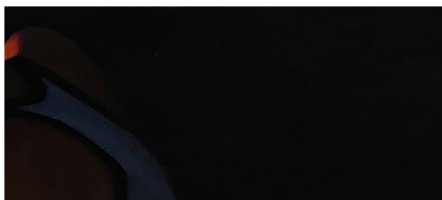
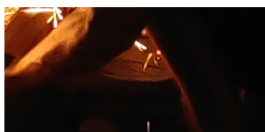
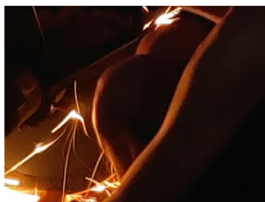
By Jonathan Herrera

There are two truths about seasons of transition in our lives: they will be both persistent and hard. Noise, which comes in the form of negative internal thoughts, can be generated during these periods no matter our age. As Christians, noise can cloud our perception of what the Lord wants and our judgment of how we should conduct ourselves during these difficult times.

The transition to the University of Chicago was tough for me. Due to my upbringing, I was not used to an intense academic environment like UChicago. As a result, I struggled with my academic performance during the first few quarters and suffered mentally for it.



Outside of academics, I was juggling performing to the highest level at a career I cared deeply about and growing in my social life. With so much pressure to succeed from different places, I struggled to figure



Gospel and who God is. Specifically, in chapter 5, he applies the central theme of justification by faith to the context of suffering. This intersection of themes brought Paul to say the following in Romans 5:3-5,

*“Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*

out who I was in this new chapter of life. I often caught myself saying, “I’m not good enough,” “I’m going to fail,” and “I do not belong here.”

In these moments of suffering, it is particularly important to look at what Scripture says. In Romans, the Apostle Paul is writing a letter to the Church in Rome to encourage Christians to speak the Gospel and condemn sinful behaviors. In the first part of his letter, Paul explains the

What we first learn about how Paul views sufferings in verse 3 is that they produce endurance. The struggles that Paul may have been referring to specifically in-

clude the persecution that early Christians faced. However, this has many applications in a contemporary setting. Returning to my first quarters at UChicago, I felt I was suffering mentally. Despite giving my all to everything I did, I wasn't living up to the expectations I had set for myself. Going through this suffering allows you to endure more adversity in the future in the same way that progressive overload applies to resistance exercises in the gym.

Paul goes on to say in verse 4 that endurance produces character. This reminds me of the process of forging a sword, where intense heat and repeated hammering refine the metal and shape it into a fully transformed, strong, and resilient object. In the same manner, the struggles during my first quarter at UChicago, where I was trying to balance academics, a career, and a social life, were like being in the forge. Each challenge I faced was part of God's refining process, shaping my character and preparing me to endure future challenges.

What Paul then goes on to say in verses 4 and 5 is that character produces hope that does not put us to shame. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins and rose on the third day. After going through the refining process where suffering transformed me, I think about how Jesus was the one who led me through my struggles, producing an everlasting hope in His ability to lead me through whatever comes my way.

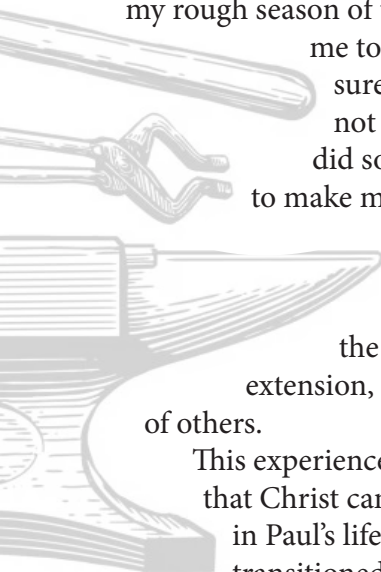
Despite learning about the wisdom that Paul has left us—about the transformative power that suffering has—it should be noted that, in the moment, our minds will be clouded with noise that removes our focus from Jesus, such as ideas of low self-worth and not being good enough. This can lead to an inability to listen to what the Lord wants of us and how we should conduct our lives according to His will.

The book of Acts gives us insight into how Paul dealt with noise. In Acts, Luke recounts the spread of the Gospel and the early church's growth while also focusing on key events such as Paul's conversion. Acts 22:6-11 holds one of the three accounts of Paul's encounter with Jesus on his road to Damascus.



Paul was plagued with noise. He was a highly-regarded Pharisee greatly influenced by false teachings in the synagogue and had a hatred towards Christians that led him to persecute them. In verses 7 and 8, we learn that the voice of God cuts through all the noise in Paul's life,

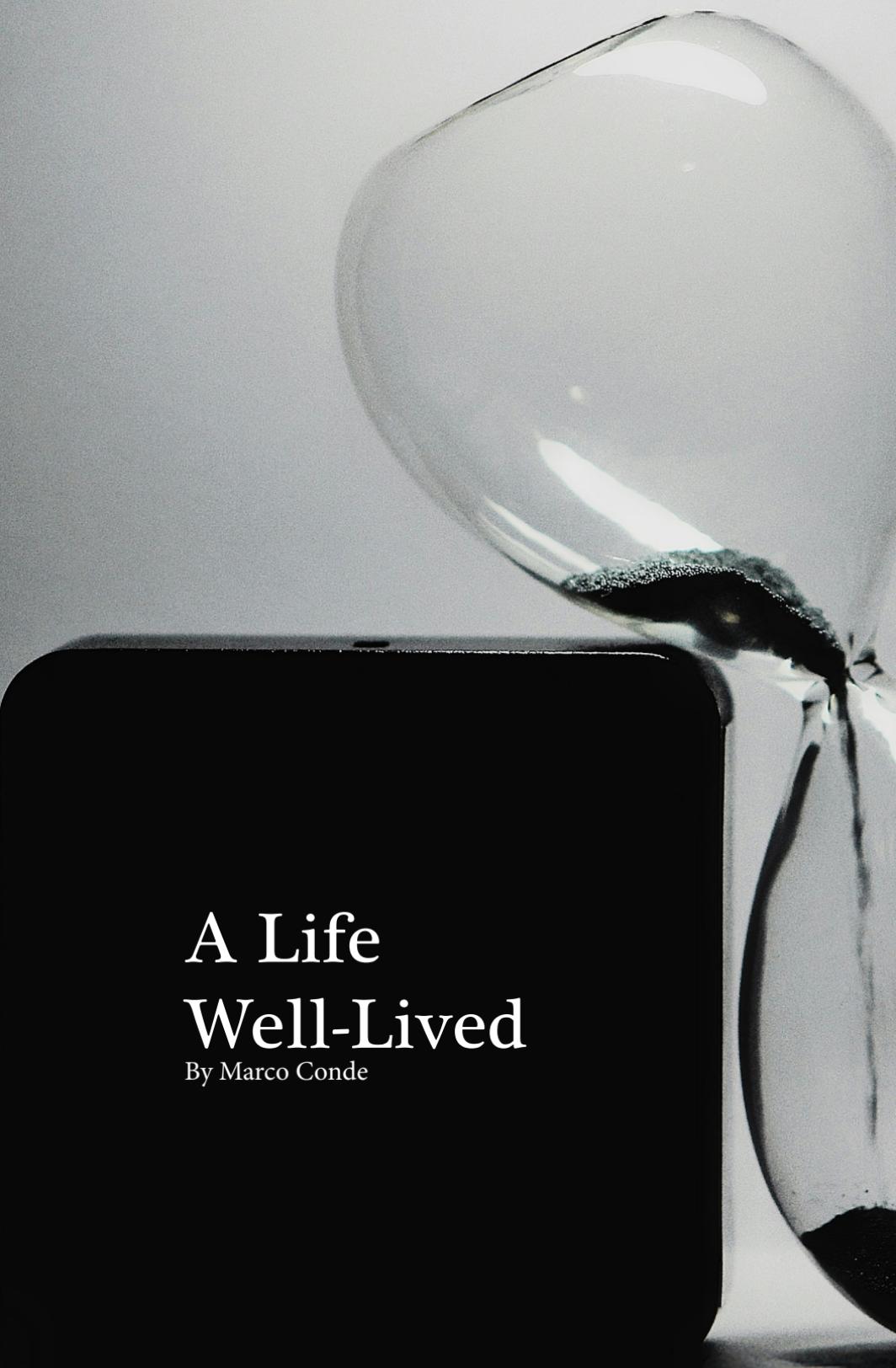
*“And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’”*



After Paul heard God's voice and the orders given to him, he was blinded by light and was led by the hand to Damascus. During my rough season of transition filled with noise, I felt God calling me to change my ways of pursuing worldly pleasures to fill the void in my heart. While God did not talk to me in a manner as intense as Paul, He did so in His own way, meeting me where I was at to make me realize the trap of sin I was falling into. Just like Paul, I had someone (an upperclassmen friend involved in church life in my case) who led me by the hand to church in the same way that Paul was led to Damascus. By extension, this was Jesus working in me through the acts of others.

This experience taught me that suffering is not meaningless, that Christ can lead us through the noise in our lives. As in Paul's life, noise is normal but not permanent. Jesus transitioned him from being a persecutor of Christians to following what He called him to do: spread the Gospel to Gentiles. We also learn in Acts that God is protecting and strengthening Paul even in his most challenging moments, such as when he is stoned in Lystra and returns to the city shortly after (Acts 14:19-23).

When moments of struggle appear in life and noise is generated, as it certainly has in my life, Jesus' voice cuts through the noise. If Jesus's voice could cut through the noise I was experiencing, He can certainly cut through the noise in anyone else's life and transform it for the better.



A Life  
Well-Lived

By Marco Conde

"I have it!" The sweet silence of the dorm room was broken as Dally rushed in. At his desk, Chase glanced back.

"What's got you so excited? Finally ask that girl out?"

"No, it's not that. Check this out!" Dally took out his laptop. The screen flashed, and Chase was met with pages upon pages of outlines, maps, drawings, even an encyclopedia. "It's complete. My full outline for the story of the century."

Chase scrolled through the document in awe. "Dang, Dally. How long did it take you to make this?"

"Only twelve hours! The idea just popped into my head and I had to write it down." He pulled the computer back to him, scrolling to the map. "This will be my life's work: a ten-book epic spanning generations. I've already got it all planned out."

"Dang, I didn't know I was in the presence of a big-shot novelist." Chase grinned before turning back to his own work. "When you have a draft, you'll have to let me read it. It sounds incredible."

"Will do!" Dally grinned. There was a glow to him at that moment, like a light finally given a power source.

\* \* \*

Six months later, Dally lay dazed at the desk. In front of him, his laptop was open on a spreadsheet titled: "Summer Internship Tracker." On the taskbar, minimized, was the outline for his story. He hadn't opened it in nearly three months. Applications for finance internships were due, and while he did love writing, it didn't put food on the table. It didn't put a wedding ring on his girlfriend. Just for now, he'd stop writing. He had to secure this internship.

He'd come back to that story. He wouldn't forget his dream.

2 AM. The entire office had cleared out at this point. The only sound that remained was the slow methodical clacks of a single keyboard and the long labored breaths of the man using it. It had been a long night at the office. Dally had screwed up a model for a company they were working with and was now forced to stay late to get it done. He couldn't tell who was more upset: his wife or his boss.

The job was a lot of work. Of course, Dally was grateful to land it. And now, one year into his job, he was finally starting to get the hang of it. When he started, he made so many mistakes that all-nighters became a weekly occurrence. Now, they were more of a monthly one. It was getting better, and Dally had enough money to live comfortably. Of course, he barely had any free time, but sacrifices had to be made.

He wondered how Chase was doing. They hadn't spoken since the wedding a year back. Too much work to do. Too many ducks to align. Dally chuckled to himself. He didn't even like this work. He was fortunate enough to be pretty good at it, but deep down, he knew he'd rather be writing.

It was okay though. He had asked for this. Just a few more years, a few more bonuses, and he'd leave for a less demanding job. He'd finally write his epic. Just a couple more years.

Just a couple more years.

The air was crisp in the climate-controlled corner office. Mr. Jones stood in his signature pressed custom-fitted Italian suit, looking out over Central Park. It was a beautiful view. Sadly, the experience was spoiled when his cell phone rang. Hesitantly, he picked up the phone.

"Hello? Dally, this you man?"

"Yes, this is. Who am I speaking to?"

"It's Chase, man! From college! Gosh, how long has it been since we last spoke, 10 years? You have no idea how hard it was to get your number. How you been man?"

That's right. Chase from college. "Things have been well. How about you?"

"I've been doing great! My wife just had our second child.

A daughter this time. Oh, and I've finally been making my own music! Give me your email and I'll send you my Spotify."

Suddenly, his phone buzzed. Meeting in five, a notification flashed.

"That's great, Chase. I'm happy to hear that. Sorry to cut this short but I have a meeting right now. Work has me swamped."

A pause came from the other end. "Oh, I see. Sorry to interrupt you. I thought for sure you'd be free, seeing how it's Sunday. I'll let you get onto your meeting. Oh, but before I do, I wanted to ask about your story. You got a pen name? I looked up your name but couldn't find any book. Surely you must be at least a few books in by now."

Dally paused this time. "Haven't started yet. Too much work to do for now. Too many people counting on me." With that, Dally hung up, gathered his briefcase, and left for the meeting.

However, as he went on with his day, his heart became restless. He pushed it down. He couldn't write. So many people depended on him. He had a responsibility to his kids, his coworkers, his wife, and so many more. Who was he to just up and leave?

\* \* \*

Everyone raised a glass as Dally entered. It was his last day before retirement. He had moved around companies a lot before landing at this one, where he had been working for the last 15 years. He smiled sadly and looked around, thinking about all the work he had done. He thought back on all the memories he had made, but they all seemed hollow, like placeholders for better days.

At last, he had finally figured out what was missing. He would write that story. Deep in the recesses of an old hard drive, he had dug up his old outline and was excited to revisit it. It had been so long, but now he finally had the time.

Dally was daydreaming to himself when he heard glass shattering. He looked around, only to find everyone staring at him. It was then that he looked down to see a collection of shining shards at his feet, and an empty hand where his wine glass was. It was strange. He knew the shards must have been glass, but as he gazed down all he could see were specks of light. It was then that his legs gave out, and before anyone could do anything, his head collided with the corner of a table and everything went black.

Dally woke up in a hospital bed to the low metronome beep of a heart rate monitor. He tried to read what it said, but the more he tried to focus his eyes on it the blurrier they got, like someone had coated his eyes in an opaque film. He tried to rub them only to find his arms and the rest of his body unresponsive. Indeed, it was then that he realized the gravity of his state.

And as it dawned on him, his eyes grew blurrier with tears.

“Oh damn it all” He sobbed “All those years lived, all that money made, and I hadn’t even started my story. Now no one will be able to read it.”

He despaired, for the more he thought of his story, the more his mind wept. He had failed. His life was over, and what did he have to show for it? Nothing.

His sobbing was cut short as the door to his room opened, and a man walked in, rolling a cluttered cart. Any specifics about the man or the cart were lost on Dally. His eyes could barely tell shapes through the tears. “This should be the right room.” His voice resounded with the crack of faraway thunder, powerful but gentle. Dally had never heard such a voice. The figure glanced up. “Dally, correct? Pleasure to meet you. I noticed you were almost out the door, so I thought I should stop by. I just finished these after all.” He grabbed the nearest item stacked precariously on the cart, setting it in Dally’s lap. Dally looked down, and out of the blur a flicker of focus returned to him, enough to see that the item in his lap was a book. He was shocked to see the author’s name: “Dally Jones.”

He looked up in confusion, the blindness quickly taking hold once again, “I don’t understand. I hadn’t ever written them.”

“Ah but I’ve read them. Every word, sentence, scene, and plot line. Every character, arc, setting, and ending. They’re all permanently ingrained up here,” he tapped his temple, “and Dally, what amazing books they are.” He laid a hand on Dally’s shoulder. “Well done, my son. I couldn’t be more proud.”

And with that, everything went white for Dally, and in that moment there was a glow to him, like a lightbulb imbued with the sun.

# THE NICENE CREED


We believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
begotten from the Father before all ages,  
God from God,  
Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made;  
of one being with the Father.  
Through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven;  
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,  
and was made human.  
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.  
He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again with glory  
to judge the living and the dead.  
His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the giver of life.  
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.  
He spoke through the prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.  
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,  
and to life in the world to come. Amen.



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