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To the many who have cared,

"We take our spiritual consecration and try to make it into a call of God, but when we are one with God, He brushes this aside. Then God gives us a tremendous, riveting, painful reality to focus on, something we never dreamed would be His call for us. And for one flashing moment we see God's purpose and say, 'Here am I! Send me.' Isaiah 6:8" (Chambers, Oswald. *My Utmost for His Highest*)

I never expected to be set aside for a special calling. One tends to assume that such calls are reserved for those leading lives not so ordinary as the ones most have us have known. Once summoned, however, much to my surprise, I readily consented to follow the call, despite not knowing where it would lead me.

Given the disruptive and uncertain nature of unexpectedly transitioning from a former life to its yet to be defined replacement, anxiety dogged me day and night. The transition would eventually be two years in the process, and even at its conclusion, I remained on unsure footing for some time to come. My previous profession as a pastry chef did little to prepare me for the work I had undertaken.

Several things saw me through so prolonged a time of uncertainty. First and foremost was the belief that God had orchestrated my circumstances, simultaneously granting them urgency and an unmistakable sense of inevitability. My heart consented with what God had ordained and endlessly encouraged me to trust in God's infinite wisdom and unwavering care. In addition, I believed that, if God had led me to Guatemala to find my life's purpose, by working in earnest to fulfill it, I'd ultimately find harmony and know peace.

The passing of years has shown that I was naïve on the last count. Without question, moments of harmony and peace have touched me, but sustaining them has proven to be more challenging than I had imagined.

"After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain. There he was transfigured before them.' Mark 9:2. We have all experienced time of exaltation on the mountain, when we see things from God's perspective and wanted to stay there. But...the true test of our spiritual life is in exhibiting the power to descend from the mountain. We are not made for the mountains or other beautiful attractions of life – they are intended to be moments of inspiration. We are made for the valley and the ordinary things of this life and that is where we prove our stamina and strength." (Oswald Chambers)

It would be easy to conclude that, by working in earnest to fulfill one's preordained purpose in this life one would, as a natural consequence, routinely manifest the earthly equivalent of a heavenly

existence. I, at least, assumed such things. I'm not sure if such assumptions on my part should be chalked up to ignorance, arrogance or further naïveté – or a combination of all of these. I arrived to Guatemala well aware of how inadequately prepared I was to face whatever lay before me. I expected rough going at first. What I didn't realize was how challenging things would remain, decades later.

God often places His workers in situations where His healing presence is most needed. As such, they may find themselves in rather godless surroundings, where finding fulfillment takes a back seat to getting through another day. God's purpose for our lives may have little to do with following one's bliss. The call of the divine, in fact, may demand that we put the pursuit of our passions on hold, trusting that something deeper and more meaningful will eventually fill the void, first here on earth, then in the world yet to come.

“After every time of exaltation, we are brought down with a sudden rush of things as they really are...The height of the mountain is measured by the drudgery of the valley, but it is in the valley that we live for God's glory. It is in the valley that we find our true worth to God (and self) ...we are inclined to think that everything that happens to us is to be turned into teaching. In actual fact, it is to be turned into something even better, namely character... To be a holy person means that the elements of the natural life experience the presence of God as they are purified in service to God (and others).” (Oswald Chambers)

I've come to understand that the process of reaching out for and obtaining enlightenment is, more than anything, one of purification. It's not so much about where the search leads us, but rather, what we encounter along the way and how we manage the bumps in the road while in route. Fulfilling God's purpose for one's life is often demanding, requiring self-sacrifice and putting the needs of others first. Our surroundings matter little. Such efforts are often appreciated, but can also be met with indifference and occasional hostility.

It may be that what God asks most of us is to remain godly, always, but never more so that when staring godlessness in the face. Loving neighbor as self when incivility can be found on any corner of the world you inhabit can transform the simple intention of holding on to godliness into an unrelenting challenge. Still, it's worth the effort, undoubtedly so, I believe. For it may be that true fulfillment and transcendence of self is to be found through the unwavering commitment to give of the same self to others. Perhaps this is life's ultimate purpose for one and all. And perhaps it is one of life's great ironies – that only by turning away from ourselves can we find ourselves and come to know who we are, both as individuals and in relations to others. Such beliefs fly in the face of the prevailing winds of culture, yet they are nothing new. To the contrary, they've been around nearly as long as civilized humanity itself.

Those of us who profess to be Christian should take no issue with such challenges and beliefs. For Jesus and His life set the standard for all consuming self-sacrifice and show us the way, to this day.

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:35

This marks the 20th anniversary of the writing of these letters. The first letter, Christmas 1999, remains

among a handful of my favorites, despite its brief length. Its message remains relevant, perhaps more so today than when it was first written many years ago. I've included it in this mailing, as I feel it's a good companion to the 2019 Christmas letter.

Anniversary Letter 1999

Despite the fact that the Christmas season has become for many a stressful time of frenzied shopping and ever-increasing financial burden, it remains for most of us, the magical season of good will, good cheer and above all, hope. For in spite of all the madness, Christmas still manages to bring out the best in us and give us the chance to experience a little heaven on earth. As we witness each other at our Christmas best, we are reminded of our unbounded potential as human beings, of our generosity, of all that we still might be. It is therefore easy to see why, at its finest, Christmas remains the season of kindness, the season of peace.

I am ever mindful that our finest example of human potential was born during this wonderful season and in fact, gave name to it some 2,000 years ago. He was born of love and compassion to show us the way out of our self-inflicted darkness, to offer a living model of all that we should strive for and try to be. It is in fact His spirit that remains at the heart of all that is right with Christmas: the reaching out to others, the caring beyond our own needs, the daring to show our best selves to a world that often mocks such things.

May the babe in swaddling clothes remain for us all a symbol of love, peace and hope. May his star of wonder and might burn brightly in your hearts this Christmas.

Thank you for your support of Only A Child during these past twelve months. You have made it possible for this work to continue and in doing so, have kept a little of the Christmas spirit alive throughout this year.

Merry Christmas. Happy Hanukkah. May God bless.



George