

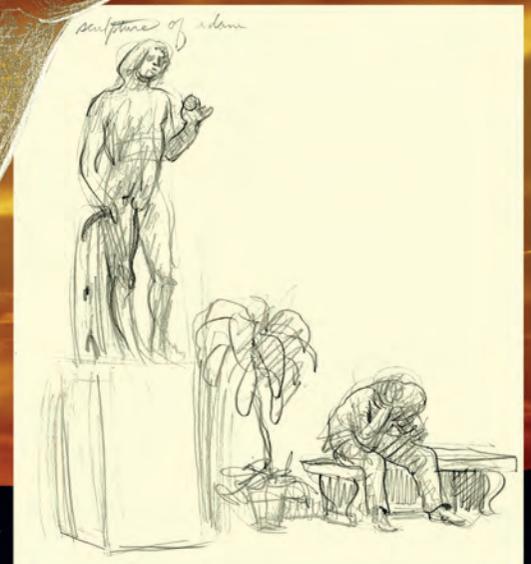
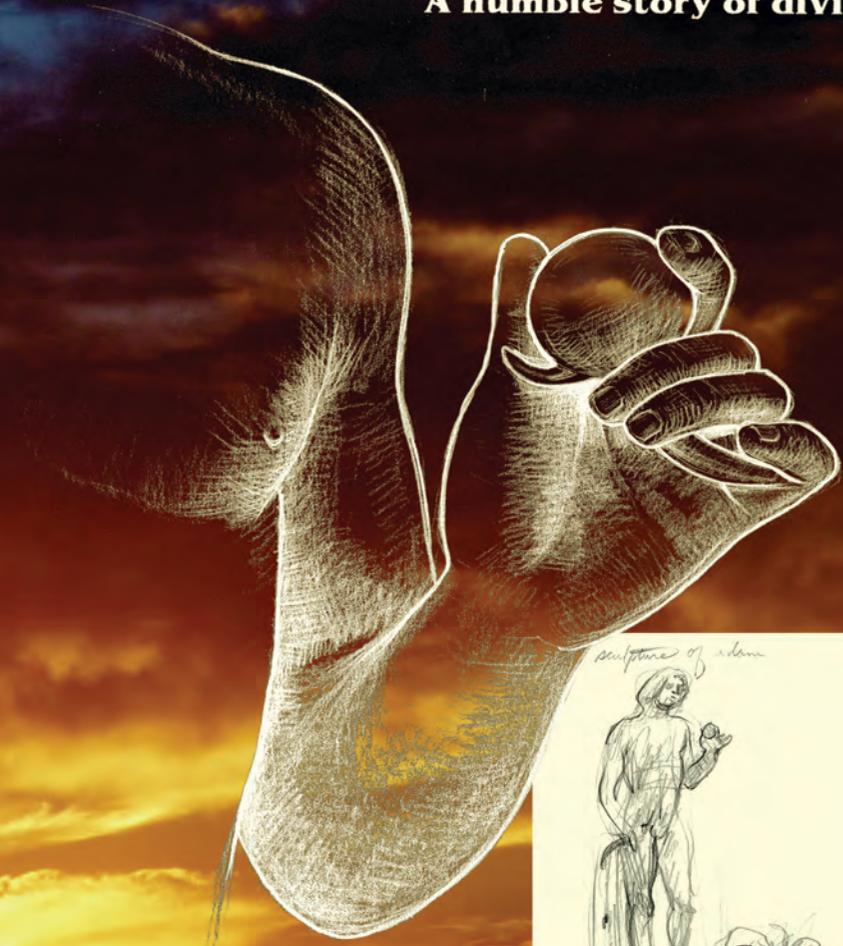
RESTORED

ULTIMATE LOSS — ULTIMATE GAIN
A humble story of divine rebirth

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Neither are your ways My ways,”
declares the LORD*

*“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

(Isaiah Ch 55: v 8, 9)



By Bob Napolitano

RESTORED

ULTIMATE LOSS — ULTIMATE GAIN

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Central Park N.Y. just prior to Spring 1976 (Sepia pen and ink wash)

INTRODUCTION

This brief autobiographical summary covers a narrow sliver of time in 1976. It's a record of a series of events mostly within a period of two months, and, for the most part, within a radius of less than three miles from my upper east-side apartment in Manhattan New York.

Admittedly, what I've written has no soaring vistas, no thrills and spills, no grand exploits. But rather it's a small personal introspective account.

None of us enjoy having our substantial flaws and weaknesses exposed. So I struggled with the necessity of giving an unvarnished account of various personal character flaws, fears and moral failure. I have only included that which was integral to this transforming time in my life. In some cases what I do mention is merely the tip of the iceberg. But as you read, I hope that you'll be able to see beyond my personal issues.

I hope that you will gradually become aware (as I did back then) of a much bigger story behind the scene, one that pulled back the veil between time and eternity just enough to forever change the direction of my life, and provide a glimpse into a reality of universal and eternal consequences.

ABOUT THE ART

Much of the artwork done during the events of 1976 is rough and transitional. These images are mainly significant because they reflect a visual record, sometimes of key events as they actually occurred.

At that time as you can see, I was exploring various styles and mediums as I sought to find a meaningful breakthrough in direction and inspiration in my work.



Central Park N.Y. just prior to Spring 1976 (Sepia pen and ink wash)

Reno, Nevada- November 22, 2014

A casual chat with my friend Tom on one of our Saturday morning walks...

Tom I was wondering if you could look up something for me when we get back to your house. It's a sculpture of Adam. It played a significant role in the events surrounding my conversion. The last time I saw it was thirty-eight years ago at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan. Years later I looked for it but it was no longer on display.

Tom's Computer Screen

Tom that's it!... 500 year old sculpture of Adam by Tullio Lombardo one of the old masters of the Italian Renaissance!

ADAM HAS FALLEN!

In astonishment I read on. Quoting the Wall Street Journal's Jessica Dawson, "It was one of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's greatest embarrassments".

"On Sunday Oct 6th 2002 the pedestal housing Adam, a 15th Century marble statue gave way sending the 770 lb nude crashing to the ground."

"It was the worse thing that can happen in a museum," said Luke Syson the Met's Curator of European sculpture and decorative art."

The online article went on to discuss a laborious state of the art, 12 year restoration project to reassemble the shattered masterpiece.

To my further astonishment the restored statue was celebrated as it was unveiled and displayed once again at the Met on November 11th 2014.



*500 year old masterpiece of Adam,
By Tullio Lombardo*



What prompted me, after 38 years totally out of the blue, to ask Tom to do an online search a mere 10 days after this statues celebrated unveiling once again at the Met.

Tom suggested that I might have heard something on a peripheral level that triggered my inquiry. I guess that's a possibility. But I can say with complete candor that I had absolutely no conscious recollection of reading, hearing or seeing anything prior to what unfolded on the internet.



The timeliness of the search, the discovery of the extraordinary events of Adam's fall and restoration, and the significance of my first encounter with this sculpture 38 years earlier, was the impetus to pull together the written and visual element of my story. Elements that have been in storage for nearly four decades.

*Meticulous Cataloging of fragments
online access to more information:
(<http://online.wsj.com/articles/metropolitan-museumof-art-unveils-adam-a15th-centurystatue...>)*



Thanks and acknowledgements to the Metropolitan Museum of Arts' 2014 Journal for the photographs of the restoration of Tullio Lombardo's sculpture of Adam. For more information go online to <http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/press-room/exhibitions/2014/tullio-lombardos-adam>

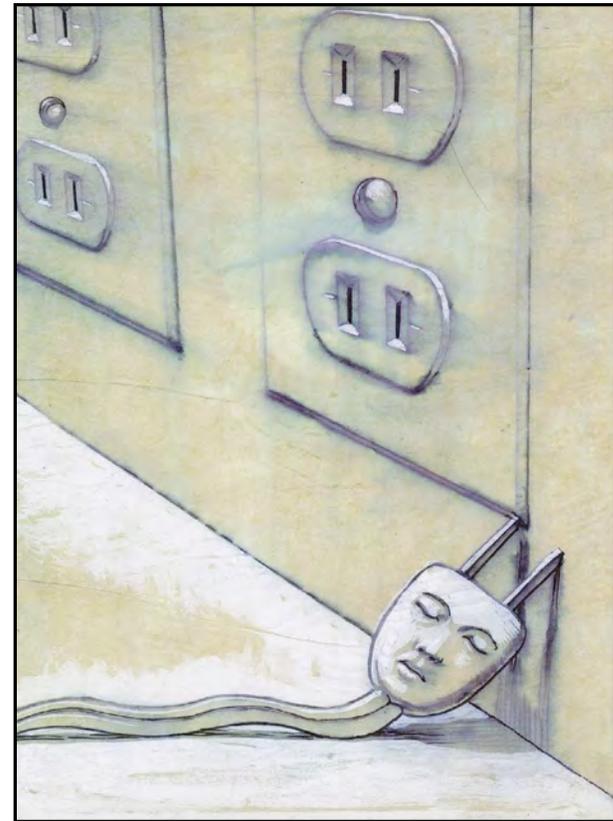
EVERYTHING IS BROKEN

Broken lines, broken strings
Broken threads, broken springs
Broken idols, broken heads
People sleeping in broken beds
Ain't no use jiving
Ain't no use joking
Everything is broken
Broken bottles, broken plates
Broken switches, broken gates
Broken dishes, broken parts
Streets are filled with broken hearts
Broken words never meant to be spoken
Everything is broken
Seem like every time you stop and turn around
Something else just hit the ground
Broken cutters, broken saws
Broken buckles, broken laws
Broken bodies, broken bones
Broken voices on broken phones
Take a deep breath, feel like you're chokin'
Everything is broken
Every time you leave and go out someplace
Things fall to pieces in my face
Broken hands, on broken ploughs
Broken treaties, broken vows
Broken pipes, broken tools
People bending broken rules
Hound dog howling,
Bullfrog croaking
Everything is broken

Oh mercy, Everything is Broken by Bob Dylan

Thanks and acknowledgements to Bob Dylan for lyrics to Everything is Broken

Manhattan, NY, Spring 1976



Alienation – Ink wash on vellum

A SEASON OF TRANSFORMATION

In the early spring of 1976 I was living on 2nd Ave and 89th Street in a street level studio apartment. I was *not* living the American dream. In fact, my life at that time was in pieces. I was dysfunctional, deficient and depressed. I had become seriously disappointed with myself and felt incapable of pulling my life together. I often felt empty, hopeless and alienated from the world around me. But that spring I was determined to make a serious effort to develop some meaningful direction in my pursuit of the one thing that offered a glimmer of hope, my interest in art.

With the weather warming up, I was getting out and visiting Central Park and the museums. During this period I spent most of my time alone. I did have a small group of acquaintances in the neighborhood through parties and a local nightclub, but had no real close friends in the city.

As I continued to exercise my art skills, I felt I was building some momentum. But I got sick, and it laid me low for about a week. A wave of depression hit me; A recurring pattern that I had struggled with for years. As I recall, I shut down all contact with the outside world. No TV, no radio, I don't even think I answered the phone. I spent almost the entire week in bed.

Finally, on a Sunday morning I turned on my TV. When the picture came in, full screen was the face of Chuck Colson. Colson was Special Counsel to President Nixon. He was called Nixon's "Hatchet Man", and it was rumored that he would run over his own grandmother for Nixon. Well, even though I was still weak, I managed to express a feeling of disgust. The reported corruption and betrayal of the American people associated with him because of the infamous Watergate cover up was roundly condemned. But no sooner did I pass judgment on Colson than the same accusing finger in my heart began to turn back on me.

As I looked and listened, there was something about not only what Colson was saying, but the way he was saying it. There was an honesty, humility, and peacefulness, even as he spoke about the intimate details that led to his downfall and imprisonment (Colson's book *Born Again* tells his story in great detail).

As Colson spoke to a group of people sitting outside on bleachers, I think somewhere in California, some were in tears. When he finished, so was I. From somewhere deep within me I prayed, "God whatever he's got I want that!"

A few days later when I was feeling better, I started back to building my house of cards with hardly a thought of what I had said.

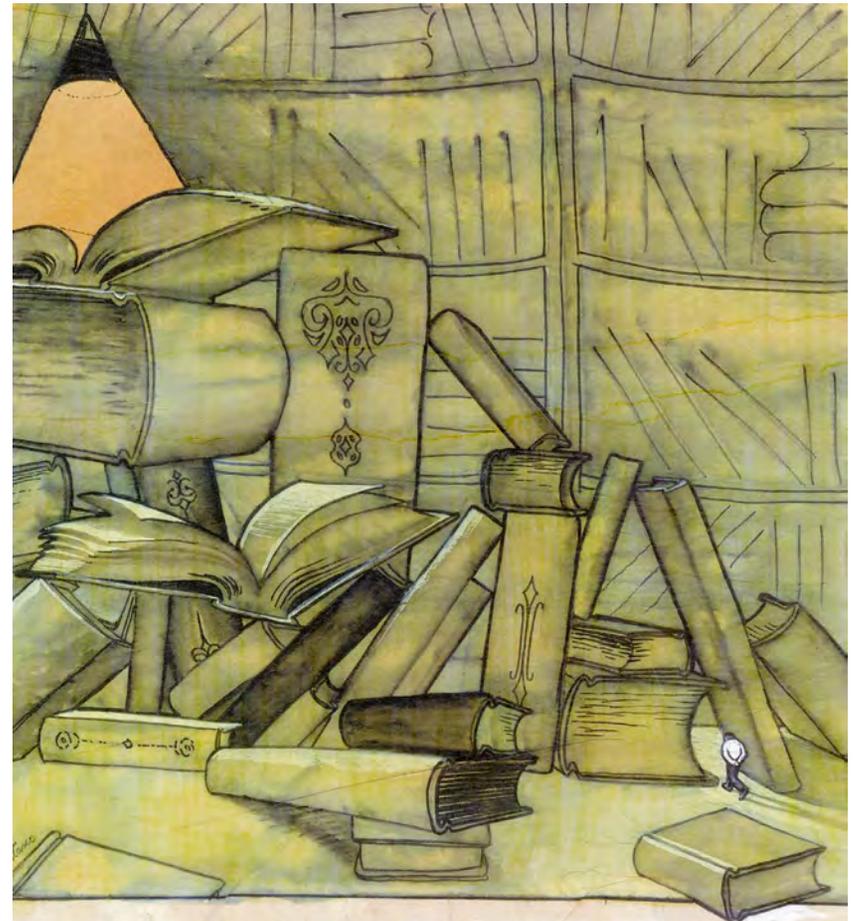
It was sometime around the beginning of April. The weather was getting warmer and I was spending an increasing amount of time in the park and museums. I would set up to do pastels or pen and ink sketches.

Sometimes I would work until the sun was going down. But there was still a feeling of void and emptiness within me.

Some very basic questions were beginning to dominate my thoughts.

- **How did we get here?**
- **What is our main purpose for being here?**
- **Where do we go when we leave here?**

I began to realize that without an adequate authoritative answer to these questions, we're ignorant when it comes to the essentials of our existence!



Seeker – Ink wash on vellum

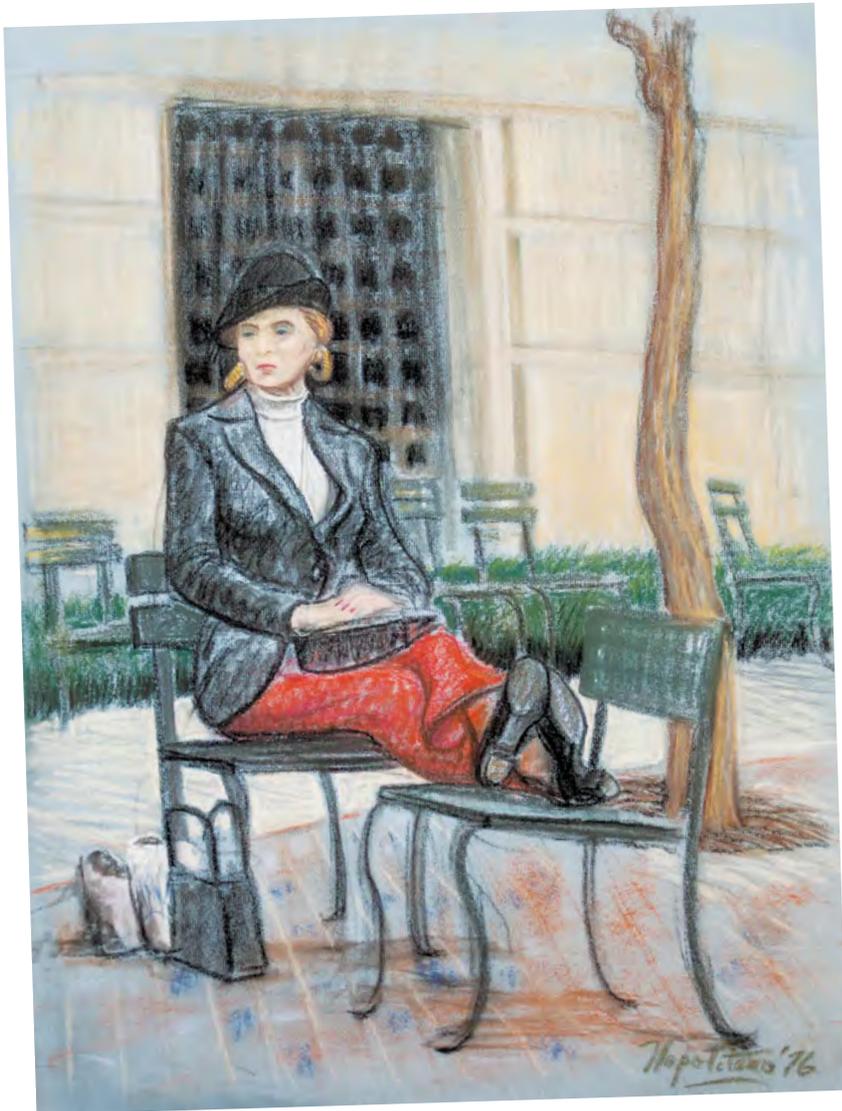
On the lighter side, I was finding a certain amount of enjoyment and potential success in my artwork. Thoughts and concepts of beauty, perfection, purity, simplicity and truth would fill my mind as I drew. But along with these thoughts were selfish, corrupt, ego-driven thoughts and motivations. I was also becoming aware that the transcendent thoughts aided me in my work, while the negative thoughts were more like static.



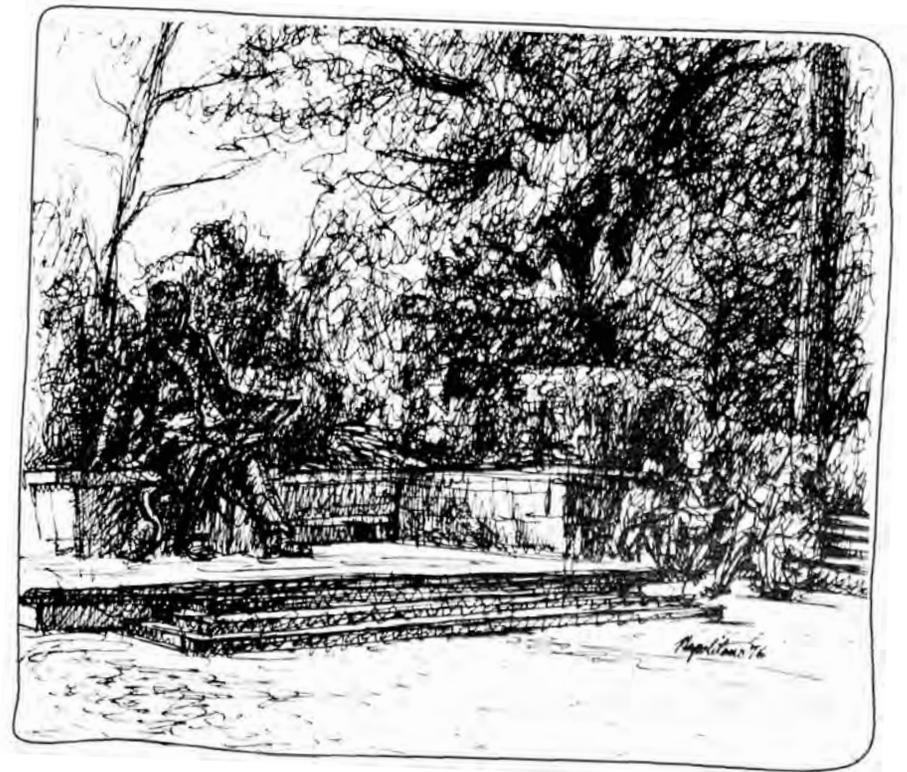
*Study from Alice in
Wonderland bronze
sculpture in Central Park
- Oil pastels*



*Monument at Grand
Army Plaza of General
William T. Sherman with
two street clowns.
-Pastels*



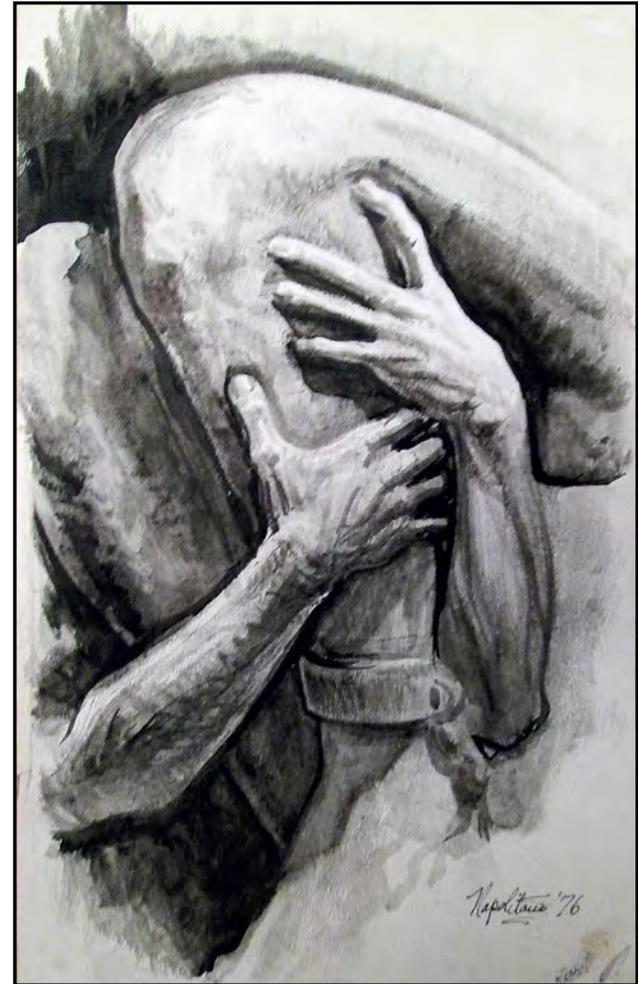
*Women resting outside
the Met. - Pastel*



*Statue of Hans Christian
Anderson, Central Park - Pen
and Ink. (An experimental
less explicit visual approach)*



Study of Virgin and Child from Esteban Murillo, oil painting at the Met. – Pen and Ink



Study from sculpture of Two Figures at Met. – Ink wash

Some days or weeks later, after doing a pastel painting of the exterior of a Bar on 84th street, I noticed some used books in a box for half price in front of a basement book store. I found a paperback book I had heard of, *The Art of Loving*, by Eric Fromm. Shamefully, I decided to steal it. I think part of it was that I had developed a bitter attitude, kind of like the



World owes me a living. Little things like stealing the book seemed justified in my warped desperate mind. So I slipped the book into my hip pocket.

I got about half way up the street and began to feel guilty. I remembered something someone I used to work with said “Whatever you steal is what you’re worth.” The idea was that such an act puts a price on your integrity.

Feeling flush, I came down the other side of the street trying to be inconspicuous. I crossed over in front of the bookstore and went in and paid for the paperback.

As I browsed around I noticed, what else, a section of art books. As I began to flip through them I noticed a smaller black book among them. It was a Bible. I asked the storekeeper if it was a regular Bible. She said it was a King James. I don’t know what I was expecting to hear. I wouldn’t have known a King James from a Queen Victoria. Anyway I decided to return it to the shelf.

As I headed home, I felt a lot better about not pricing my life at 30 cents and still having *The Art of Loving* in my hip pocket.

84th street Bar – Pastel



*Seal pool and plaza
at Central Park Zoo
- Pastel*

On another beautiful spring day, I set my pastels up in the Central Park Zoo area. I was sitting on the back of a park bench and my pastels were set up on a tray table on the bench seat. I spent the morning and afternoon working on the scene before me. Occasionally people would stop and chat. Some would compliment my work. Needless to say I was into the attention.

A young couple came by and showed interest in what I was doing. Jeff asked me if I did art for a living. I said I hope to do a series of pastels of the park that I might be able to sell. I also mentioned that I was unemployed at that time, but felt it was a blessing because it gave

me the opportunity to pursue my interest in art. Jeff said something like, "Blessing, where did you get that word from? Do you ever think about God?" At that moment I must have expressed some non-verbal resistance, even some level of disdain. Jeff asked why I reacted the way I did? Frankly, I didn't say so, but I didn't want to talk about God. I wanted to talk about me! Nevertheless we continued to talk for awhile. What I remember most is that Jeff based all he said on what God's Word says, and I based everything I said on what I read or heard from other men, or my own opinion.

Jeff and Nancy, the young lady with him, had to leave after awhile. He gave me a booklet called *The Living Water*. It was the Gospel according to St. John in booklet form. Jeff also wrote some contact information in it, and said that I was welcome to come out to their house in Flushing Queens for dinner, and a Bible study would follow.

A little later a friend of theirs named Meg came by. She was an artist also, but she talked a lot about God too. After she left, I thought I might take them up on their invitation just out of curiosity.



Brass ensemble outside Met. – Contour action sketch – Pen and Ink

Some days later, I once again was headed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for some inspiration. As I approached the museum, I noticed a brass ensemble playing classical music just to the left of the entrance.

People were gathered around, and it was the kind of setting that made you glad to live in New York City. I made a few pen and ink sketches of the scene, and actually sold one on the spot. But this perfect day was about to take a disturbing turn.

On my way home I was feeling exuberant. When I got to 2nd Avenue and 89th Street where my apartment was, I noticed a small crowd had gathered. It was the beginning of a street fight that had everyone's attention. It was a typical bully routine. The bully, whose name I later found out was Barnabus, had another teenager in subjection and led him around the corner to the crowd.

Barnabus punched the other fellow in the face. Rather than fighting back, he turned in humiliation and walked away. He went about 50 feet down 89th Street, but Barnabus went after him and brought him back. At this point I found myself walking toward Barnabus. When I came up to him I placed my hand on his chest and calmly said, "Why don't you stop hitting him? He's not defending himself." It seems like this took Barnabus by surprise and for a moment he seemed powerless and backed off. The next moment two older guys from the crowd were in front of me hurling threats and cursing me out. I repeated to them what I had said to Barnabus, but they just kept on. As I turned to leave, a few feet to my right Barnabus chimed in and said something like, "A lot of people would be out to get me". I replied, "I can see there's a lot of people".

The whole experience was unusual. There was a certain power I felt because I thought I did the right thing standing up for the underdog. I don't remember experiencing any fear throughout the confrontation. But once I stepped into my apartment things began to change. When I considered the threats and hostility right outside my apartment and realized I was no longer anonymous, I began to be afraid. I stayed indoors that night and tried to sort things out.

Revisiting the street fight incident after all these years caused me to wonder what was behind the impulse to get involved. In general, my natural tendency would have been to avoid such conflict and risk. For me, the glorious Spring weather, the brass ensemble, and the selling of the drawing, made that day a day of unusual exuberance. For all I know at the surreal moment I stepped into the fight, the Mighty Mouse theme song was ringing in my ears.

Kidding aside, I have a new category for what I think may have happened in that pivotal moment, and the things that followed. God's Sovereign Providence was at work! God who knows the end from the beginning of all things moved me emotionally, spiritually and physically in the new Godward direction my life would take.

That night I began to read *The Living Water* booklet. I became absorbed in what I was reading. I saw the phone number Jeff had written and called. At some point Meg got on the phone. I began to share with her the experience I had just gone through that day. She encouraged me to keep on reading the booklet. After a little more discussion I made plans to visit their house in Queens the following evening.

That following day was wet and miserable. I remained indoors until about 5 p.m. As I left my building the street was desolate even though the rain had let up. But what seemed like the very moment I turned to go downtown, a lone figure about two blocks away turned on to 2nd Avenue heading in my direction. It was a dark stocky teenager carrying a couple of bags of groceries. It was Barnabus! As we got closer to each other I could tell that he recognized me. As we passed each other I let my expression spell out, I know what you are!

I continued to walk downtown to 59th Street. It had been arranged for me to get a ride out to Queens from Terrestris, a tropical greenhouse where Jeff, Nancy, Meg and others worked. A bunch of us hopped into the company truck and drove to Queens.

When we arrived, dinner was prepared and it seemed like people kept coming out of the woodwork. About fifteen or more young people sat down at a very large dining room table.

Thanks for the food was given and we ate. I was so paranoid I wondered if my food had been spiked.

After dinner we all gathered together in the living room for a Bible study. After singing a few Christian songs, the Bible study began. I tried to catch every word, mostly because I was looking for some flaw or some issue for debate.

After the Bible study Jeff asked me what I thought about it. We got into a disagreement about some trivial issue. Eventually I left and took the train home.

As a new week began I continued to go through changes about the street incident. It left me uncomfortable and confused.

I resumed my trips to the park and sometime during the days that followed, I went back to the bookstore and bought the Bible I had inquired about.

I think it would be a good time to mention that I was unaware of any connection regarding the various experiences I've been describing. Each event had a momentary impact on me, but it wasn't until sometime later I sensed certain characteristics that tied them together. But there was a growing sense at some level, that the One I was reading about in the booklet was connected to the true and transcendent thoughts.



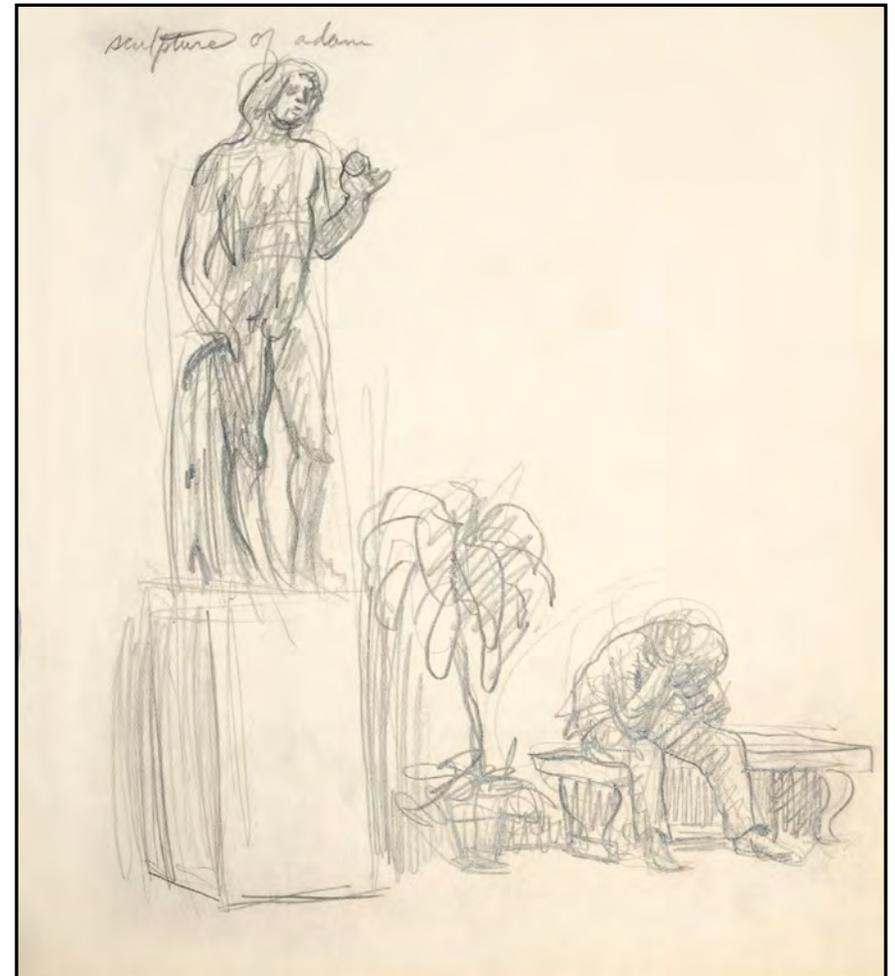
First encounter in 1976 with Tullio Lombardo's sculpture of Adam. – Pencil sketch

Some days later I was in the Metropolitan Museum of Art again looking for something stimulating to draw. I came across a life-sized marble statue of a man holding a sphere in his hand about the size of a plum. I started to do some pencil studies. Once again my mind traveled into those transcendent thoughts of simplicity, perfection, beauty, truth, and purity. But again, ego-driven, manipulative, corrupting thoughts also surfaced.

As I sat there pondering these conflicting thoughts a disheveled young man came into the room. He obviously was strung out on drugs,

and he sat down on a marble bench to the right of the statue. Between the sculpture and the bench was a tropical plant. There he was on the bench, stringy dirty blond hair covering his face, bent over with his head in his hands.

As my focus shifted from my inner thoughts to this scene unfolding before me, it reminded me of something. It was like the opening scene of an off Broadway play. A contemporary metaphor of *the fall of man!*



Brief preliminary sketch of unfolding scene with Adam and disheveled Young man – Pencil

I started to do a quick sketch. Immediately self-exalting thoughts kicked in. If I could pull it off, a full-blown painting of this scene could make a powerful artistic statement. In my mind this would be my ticket to success!

While I was in this frame of mind I heard an inner voice. “Stop drawing”.

All my hopes and dreams were bound up in my artistic ability. It was my identity, but this tainted gift had short-circuited my relationships with the gift Giver. I later realized this was a form of idolatry. (Idolatry is allowing anything, even good things, to become more important to us than the One who made us).

I didn't intend to stop drawing so early. Before I left the gallery I took a closer look at the statue. What I should have already realized was that this sculpture was indeed a representation of Adam.

As I left the museum, I had no clue as to what I was going to do for the rest of the day. I headed south into the park.

As I entered the park I saw an acquaintance named Phil sitting on a park bench. We sat and talked for awhile. I began to tell him that I felt that God was revealing Himself to me. After awhile I invited Phil to my apartment.

When we got there I began to show him some of my artwork. As I went through those images a few of them were perverse, vulgar and even sadistic (some time later I destroyed them).

After what seemed to be an hour or more of deep conversation, Phil had to leave. Our conversation was so refreshing that we uncharacteristically embraced each other at the door.

After Phil left I spontaneously knelt to pray. I just felt a deep love and awe toward God at that moment.

I got up momentarily to adjust a makeshift covering I had over the window that faced the back courtyard. As I did, I heard someone say something like “Hey he's coming over to the window”. I had no idea how long, but it appeared that someone had been invading my privacy. I became very angry and had a good idea who it was. The guy who owned the corner grocery store lived downstairs. Some of the neighborhood kids who worked for him hung out in his apartment. I felt certain it was them.

I went downstairs. Their door was already opened. There were three teenagers in the room. The one closest to me was cooking something. I made an inane indiscriminate accusation about the invasion of my privacy. They all denied any involvement. I went back upstairs.

After I returned to my apartment and began to calm down, I knew what I had done was wrong-headed and not of God. I also realized that my actions potentially inflamed the situation concerning the hostility on the street. These teenagers were probably part of the same group. The aftermath of my angry outburst caused me to turn to God once again.

After this incident, in my mind, I saw the kid who was cooking sitting in front of a building. God gave me a message for him. I was to apologize to him and say, “If you or any of your friends are interested in knowing what's going on in my apartment, you don't have to look in my window. Come to my front door and I'll let you in”.

Soon after this, I saw that kid whose name was Tom sitting in front of the 2nd Avenue store. He was by himself. When I walked up to him he seemed a bit frightened. I asked him if he was the one I accused, even though I knew it was him. I then apologized and added the invitation. Although no one ever took me up on that invitation, I was almost hoping someone would. The things that God was doing in my life seemed worth the risk.

I did see Tom on several other occasions working at the grocery store. He seemed to have a respectful attitude toward me. At some point, I found out that the fellow Barnabus was bullying was Tom's older brother. That might have been the reason for his positive attitude.

At this point, I had become sufficiently aware of God's presence in my life and my need for Him. The encounters I experienced revealed a powerful, righteous, intimate guiding presence, both spiritual and Divine. As I read through the Gospel of John, I began to understand that God was giving me an awareness and faith in Jesus I had never known before.

I believe that all along God was answering my heartfelt prayer weeks earlier in response to Colson's humble words. God had taken me from being broken and lost to redeemed and saved. Like Colson, by grace through faith in the resurrected Son of God, I too became born again (John Ch 3:v 3)(1 Peter Ch 1:v 3).

On a regular basis I started to go to Bible studies in Queens. I also got a job at the tropical plant house on 59th Street. Then on May 31st, 1976, I moved out of my apartment and into the Christian home which was part of Shiloh, a national Christian Youth Ministry. There were thirty-six such homes throughout the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii.

Shiloh also had a Bible Study Center in Dexter, Oregon, just outside of Eugene. The study center was a converted ranch furnished with a school building, administrative offices, a large dining hall, dorms, several cabins and a barn nestled near the foothills of the Cascade Mountains.

After some time in Flushing Queens, I was given the opportunity to go through a six month Bible study program. Tuition would be paid in full. Along with the six month course, we all worked crew jobs for local businesses. Our earnings went toward the tuition of the next class of students.

During the two plus years in Shiloh I traveled cross country twice, eventually ending up in South Lake Tahoe, CA. Within those years of study, Christian fellowship and service, I grew in the knowledge of God's Word, and in the essentials of what it means to have saving faith in Jesus.

After my commitment to Shiloh ended, I remained in Tahoe and entered back into civilian life. When I met my wife in 1981, she also had been restored by God's grace through faith in Jesus. We have been blessed with two daughters and a bunch of grandkids. We also have been blessed to be part of a local church where Jesus is faithfully proclaimed, and where the love of God and others is clearly evident in an ever-increasing way, even to the farthest reaches of our world.

At some point God opened the way for me to resume my art as an avocation while working other jobs. In 1984 I expressed my faith in Jesus Christ through a series of charcoal drawings, some of which I've included in this booklet.

BROKEN THINGS

God uses broken things
He takes broken soil
To bring us golden grain
God uses broken clouds to bring the rain
And broken grain to give our daily bread
And broken bread to give us strength again
For God to use us, we must be broken down
So the seed of His Word can be sown
Man can not live by bread alone
So when the seed is grown
Deep inside your heart
You'll find the greatest love
That the world has ever known
So Lord, if I'm gonna be broken
I'd rather be broken for You
You have a way of taking broken things
And making them just like new
Lord, I don't mind the pain
Do all that you must do
So take me and break me
And make me just like You,
Oh Father take me and break me
And make me just like You
So if you're feeling broken
Remember the Word was spoken
A broken spirit and a contrite heart
Would give the Lord a perfect place to start
Just take me and break me
And make me just like You

Psalm 51 / Isaiah 61:1

Thanks and acknowledgements to Morris Chapman and Davis Baroni for the lyrics to the song Broken Things

A HUMBLE ADMISSION AND IMPORTANT CAUTION

Although I'm convinced that God can and does use experiences to reveal His presence and will, experiences spiritual or otherwise are never to be viewed as the final authority. So if you don't believe the things I've written about myself I understand. There's no requirement to do so. My words and recollections may be of little significance to anyone else but me.

I'm also aware that there are multitudes of personal stories, both of believers and nonbelievers, that may be far more dramatic and sensational than mine. But if nothing else, my story demonstrates that God is willing and able to restore anyone he pleases regardless of worldly status.

We all need to heed God's warning, "Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar," (Romans Ch 3:v 4). Only that which is supported by the unrivaled authority of God's Word is to be trusted. Jesus said, "Heaven and Earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matthew Ch 34:v 35).

BROKENNESS AND RESTORATION

In my introduction I spoke of a glimpse into a reality of universal significance and eternal consequence. The theme of brokenness and restoration permeates all that I've written.

- It's in the underlying theme of my brief autobiographical account.
- It's in the unfolding scene in 1976 of Lombardo's regal statue, contrasted with a disheveled broken young man.
- And it's clearly illustrated as an object lesson in the extraordinary events surrounding that same fallen broken statue of Adam, and its laborious and costly restoration discovered online nearly four decades later.

- Furthermore, the overarching theme concerning each and every one of us is presented in God's Word as an epic, four act drama (creation, man's fall, God's redemptive plan, and the restoration of all things in Jesus Christ).

"THE BIBLE PURE AND SIMPLE"

This is the title of a Bible reading program I sometimes listen to. The introduction to each broadcast starts with these words. "The Bible is God's Word. It tells us all we need to know about who God is and how to know Him".

There are many unique characteristics that set the Bible apart from all other literature, whether secular or religious, ancient or recent. The Bible stands alone, not merely as one of the great books, but The Book of books. (*Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, by Josh McDowell is one of many books that explore the authority authenticity and uniqueness of the Bible).

If there is any truth or insight worth hearing in anything I've said, its source and inspiration is found in the infallible inerrant Word of God. So in the pages that follow I hope to summarize some insights gleaned from God's Word.

The very first verse I read in *The Living Water* booklet Jeff gave me in Central Park was the Gospel of John Ch 1:v 1. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*". Then as I read down further, John Ch 1:v 14 says, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*".

I mentioned earlier that the Divine presence that intervened in my life, and the account of Jesus in the Gospel of John, became inextricably linked. I later discovered that God's Word from beginning to end, through all of its particular parts point to One central figure. In the Old Testament He is the promised One who would come. In the New Testament He is the One who has come, and who will come again. That one is Jesus. *God incarnate!*

God is a God of distinctions. The first and foremost of these distinctions is that of Creator/creation. There is a profound mystery throughout God's Word that declares God to be One God in three co-equal, co-eternal Persons: The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. All that is part of God's, creation including us, is not God and never will be God. As Creator, God is the ultimate authority over all that He has made and over what is right vs. wrong, good vs. evil, and truth vs. lies.

COSMIC TREASON

In Genesis, Adam willingly received the lie that through rebellion he could be equal with God. But instead, Adam's act of disobedience brought about catastrophic, devastating, long-range consequences that continue to this very day. Adam's fall shattered our relationship with God. This was the beginning of a cosmic treason and spiritual warfare between God and all humanity. Every conflict, ill-motive, injustice, corruption, perversion; every act of cruelty, violence, bloodshed and war, and every other act of evil and ungodliness finds its root in Adam's fall. In every way fallen humanity has sought to deny, defy, corrupt, undermine, twist, and reject the distinctions God has established. In fact, God the Creator of all things is not welcome in His own creation! The spiritual void created through the rejection of God and His Word inevitably is filled with counterfeit self-exalting philosophies, and barbaric ruthless savagery in the name of false religion and false gods. To anyone who has eyes to see it's obvious that these evils are on the increase in our world on an individual, national, and global basis.

Since September 11, 2001, our world has turned a dark and sinister corner. There seems to be few who understand, or are willing to acknowledge, the spiritual dimension to the desperate condition of this fallen broken world. To be in a broken relationship with God in a God rejecting world, is Ultimate bad news that leads to eternal torment and despair. Such an affront to the eternal God is worthy of eternal judgment, but thankfully God has a restoration plan.

THE DILEMMA

“God's Ways Are Not Our Ways”

(Isaiah Ch 55:v 8-9)

Like brokenness and restoration, the counterintuitive wisdom and way God chooses those who will be saved from His just judgment, is also a consistent theme in God's Word.

“For consider your calling brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, but God has chosen the foolish things of this world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong and the base things of the world and despised, God has chosen the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are that no man should boast before God” (1 Corinthians Ch 1:v 26-29).

On the surface, it sounds as though God is against those who are strong, savvy, and successful, and partial to the foolish, weak, and insignificant. On a closer look, this assumption doesn't hold up. In fact, those who are at the lowest rung of accomplishments and worldly esteem, as well as the best, brightest, bravest and most accomplished people on the planet who have a humble abiding faith in Jesus and not in their own merit are among God's chosen. They are among those who understand that in order to be made right with God we must meet His perfect standard perfectly, and know that none of us in our fallen sinful nature can fulfill this requirement. To paraphrase something someone once said, “The best of men are (fallen) men at best.” Jesus made it clear that he came to save sinners. Why? Because that is all He has to work with. The dark delusion of self-justification, where sin is treated lightly, or even worse, the refusal to see ourselves as sinners, is equivalent to calling God a liar and being devoid of truth (1 John Ch 1:v 8-10).

In a very real sense, our spiritually broken condition makes it as impossible to restore ourselves as those shattered chunks and fragments of marble at the museum. In both cases the care, skill and sacrifice of an outside source is necessary. God is the only One who can restore our souls back to Himself. He did it through the intervention and sacrifice of His Son.

Therefore the only hope for any of us to enter into God's redemptive plan must start with the humble recognition of our own spiritual bankruptcy,

brokenness, and desperate need before an All knowing, Ever present, Almighty Creator. God only saves sinners who know they're broken and totally unable to restore themselves.

So those who are excluded from God's gracious choice are those who chose to reject it in a high minded boastful spirit. This could describe anyone from a destitute street beggar to a highly successful corporate C.E.O. But of course, it may be harder for the accomplished to acknowledge that their goodness and efforts will never be good enough to meet God's perfect standard.

Any culture that turns its back on God as ours increasingly has, has nowhere to turn other than Self. Without the light of God's truth, our fallen nature goes its way in open defiance, passive indifference or godless religiosity (i.e., sentimental self righteous piety). Godless efforts may bring temporal success, but autonomy from God will ensure eternal rejection and failure in the end. It's just a matter of time!

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter Ch 5:v 5-6).

"Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Matthew Ch 23:v 12).

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling" (Proverbs Ch 16:v 18).

"GOSPEL" MEANS GOOD NEWS

"Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling..." (Rock of Ages)

God has provided a way to take our brokenness and turn it into full restoration. The good news of our redemption, and guaranteed eventual complete restoration, is found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The essence of the Gospel is that our restoration into a right relationship with God is a work of God from start to finish. It's based exclusively and absolutely on what Jesus has done for us.

God the Father sent God the Son to become one of us, to restore us to Himself. Where the first Adam failed, the second Adam (Jesus) succeeded! **Jesus lived the perfect life we could not live. He died a sacrificial, sin-bearing, substitutionary death for our sins. Three days later, He rose from the dead, opening the only way of eternal restoration for those who simply put their trust in Him (John Ch 3:v 16). This restoration, eternal life, starts the moment we put our trust in Jesus.**

To put the good news of the Gospel another way:

- God requires perfect righteousness.
- In our fallen nature, none of us can achieve this righteousness.
- God, in an act of divine grace and mercy, provides His perfect righteousness as a gift to all who humbly put their faith in the saving work of Jesus (Romans Ch 1:v 6-17).

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

In a divine masterstroke, God's perfectly just judgment against our sin, and His perfect love, mercy and grace were fully expressed.

Jesus willingly took upon Himself the full penalty for our sin and drank the cup of God's wrath to the last drop, leaving none for us. In exchange, the perfect righteousness of Jesus is given to us as our own, declaring us to be blameless in God's sight. By grace through faith in Jesus' life death and resurrection, we are reconciled, restored and forgiven (John Ch 3:v 36).

Jesus paid a debt He did not owe
because
we owed a debt we could not pay.

DIVINE GRACE, MERCY, LOVE AND TRUTH

Although all of God's attributes are eternal in nature, in this vapor of earthly existence, God has provided means to restore and reconcile us to Himself. The immeasurable, unearnable gift of eternal life, and even the humble faith to believe, are gifts that are given to us through God's grace, mercy, love and truth. All of the blessings, benefits, and promises contained in God's Word come to us as free but costly gifts. The purchase price is the life's blood of God's beloved Son. But even His warnings are expressions of His perfect love and truth to lead us from the ways of darkness to light, and from death to eternal life.

What grows out of such undeserved God-given faith is the humble loving desire to praise and glorify God, and grow in obedience to His will. This is something that tainted, prideful, self-generated efforts to merit anything from God can never produce.

I'm a lot older now, and the older I get, and in light of the eternity that is fast approaching, I can not think of a more supremely important and pressing question than this: How can we as natural-born sinners be made right with the Holy, Righteous, Sovereign, Creator of all things on His terms?

God's Word uniquely declares that the burden of our acceptance is not dependent on our performance. It is instead a gift of God's loving mercy and grace to all those who have put their faith in what Jesus has done on our behalf, plus nothing!

"Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe, sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow" *Jesus Paid it All.*

A helpful definition of God's grace and mercy:

Grace- Getting all the blessings of God we do not deserve.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God; not a result of works that none should boast" (Ephesians Ch 2:v 8).

Mercy- Not getting God's just judgment we do deserve.

"He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to his mercy"...(Titus Ch 3:v 5).

The following acronym states the means of our acceptance to God even more succinctly.

G. R. A. C. E.

God's Riches At Christ's Expense

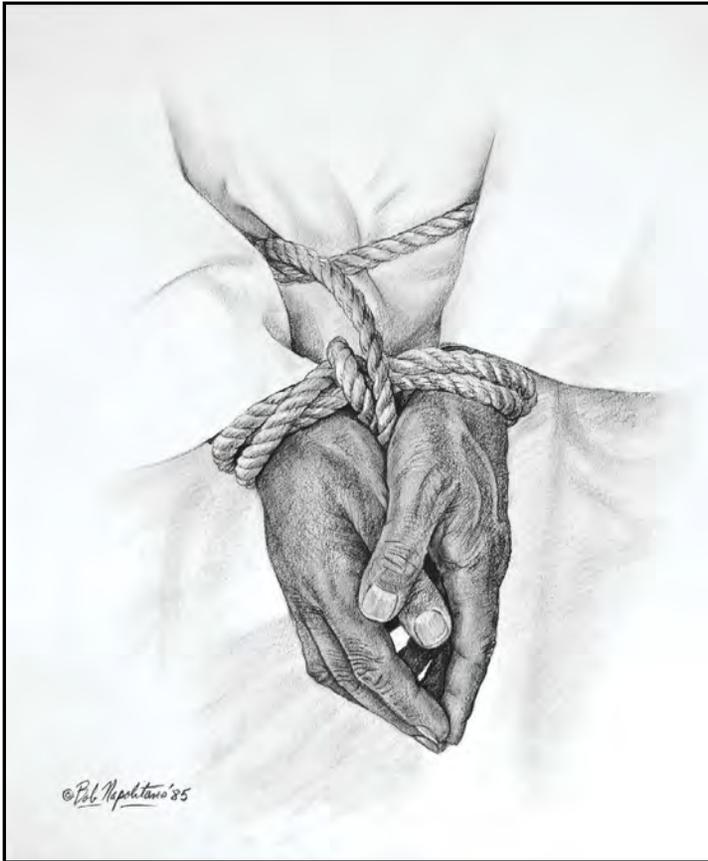
ALL I HAVE IS CHRIST

I once was lost in darkest night
Yet thought I knew the way
The sin that promised joy and life
Had led me to the grave
I had no hope that You would own
A rebel to Your will
And if You had not loved me first
I would refuse You still

But as I ran my hell-bound race
Indifferent to the cost
You looked upon my helpless state
And led me to the cross
And I beheld God's love displayed
You suffered in my place
You bore the wrath reserved for me
Now all I know is grace

Now, Lord, I would be Yours alone
And live so all might see
The strength to follow Your commands
Could never come from me
Oh Father, use my ransomed life
In any way You choose
And let my song forever be
My only boast is You

Thanks and acknowledgements to Mark Altrogge for these lyrics to All I have is Christ.



“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth.”

(Isaiah Ch 53:v 7)



“And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat: this is My body.’ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; For this is My blood of the covenant, Which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.’”

(MATTHEW Ch 26:v 26-28)

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Even the most minimal understanding of God's Word reveals that God is able to use and redeem everything for His ultimate purpose, which is to create in us the likeness of Jesus. He uses our successes and failures, our victories and defeats, our disappointments and even our tragic losses to work out this restoration plan to make us right with Him for all eternity.

It's only when we come to the end of ourselves that we begin to know what true saving faith is.

Flawed and broken as we are before the Holiness of God, the moment we put our faith in the saving work of the resurrected incarnate Son of God, we are viewed by God as completely restored, even though God's work in us has just begun.

As God's work progresses in us, the best any of us can claim to be are perishable broken earthen vessel that God has chosen to fill with the Living Water of His Word – an imperishable message that seeps through the cracks and flaws, and overflows to a world in need of restoration, eternal hope and peace with its Maker.

The only way to know if what I've expressed in this booklet is accurate is to go to God's Word on your own. My hope and prayer is that God will use these pages to motivate others to do just that. The Gospel of John (in the New Testament) would be a good place to start.

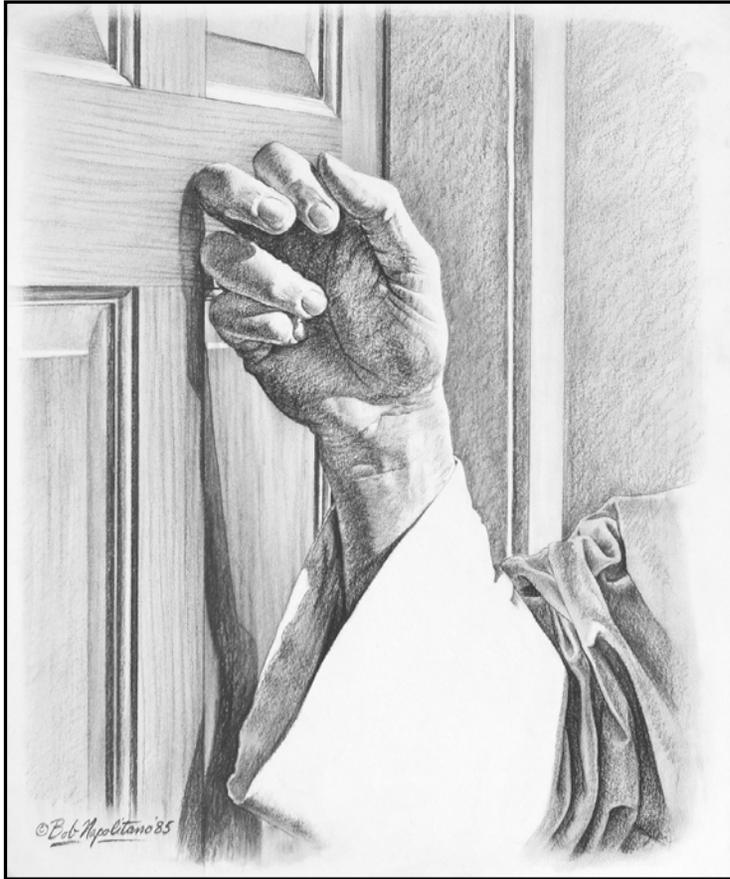
Basic Questions. God's Answer:

- **How did we get here?** (*Genesis Ch 1:v 26-27*) (*Colossians Ch 1:v 16*) (*Revelation Ch 4:v 11*) (Speaking of Jesus)
- **What is our main purpose for being here?** (*Romans Ch 11:v 36*) (*Colossians Ch 3:v 17*) (*1 Peter Ch 1:v 3-9*)
- **Where do we go when we leave here?** (*The Gospel according to John Ch 3:v 16, 36*) (*Romans Ch 10:v 8-9*)



“How precious also are thy thoughts to me, O God. How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.”

(Psalm Ch 139:v 17-18)



*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock;
If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,
I will come into him,
And will dine with him,
And him with me.”*

(Revelation Ch 3:v 20)

So much more could be said, and has been said by others more able than me. But to those who can see through the myth of self-merit and self-sufficiency when it comes to our restoration to God, I offer the following passages for guidance and encouragement:

(The Gospel of Matthew Ch 11:v 28-30)

(The Gospel of John Ch 1:v 1-5) (Ch 3:v 16, 36) (Ch 14: v 6)

(Romans Ch 8:v 31-39) (Ch 10:v 9-13)

(Ephesians Ch 2:v 1-9)

(Titus Ch 3:v 5)

(1 Peter Ch 3:v 18) (Ch 5:v 6-7)

All scripture references are from The New American Standard Bible.

OTHER RESOURCES

There are a great many resources available to anyone who would like to further explore the way to be reconciled to God the Father through Jesus the Son.

One great resource is (Pilgrim Radio.com). I also recommend a variety of concise, insightful, topical, booklets published by John Blanchard. These can be obtained through John Blanchard, Evangelical Press.

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