

Don't Just Do Something, Sit There

Psalm 131

The Psalms (no. 5 in the series)

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Message

A girl from the Midwest on a trip to Hollywood, California ran into Paul Newman in an ice cream store. She couldn't believe it. He was so gorgeous, so famous. She tried so hard not to stare. She tried so hard to be cool. She paid for her ice-cream cone and casually walked out of the store. When she got outside, she took a deep breath and then realized she'd walked out without her ice-cream cone. Already feeling like a ditz, she decided to wait outside until Mr. Newman left the counter. When she saw him move away, she went in to find her ice-cream cone. As she got to the counter, she felt a tap on her shoulder.

She turned and it was Paul Newman! He flashed his famous smile and said, "Miss, if you're looking for your ice-cream cone, you put it in your purse."

Ever done something like that? In the presence of someone truly glorious you get so self-conscious that you just do stupid stuff like walk into a pole, or put your ice-cream cone in your purse? Imagine if it wasn't just Paul Newman, but God incarnate...

Remember when Jesus took Peter James and John up a mountain and was transfigured before them on the 7th day? (Matt. 17:1-8) His face shown like the sun as he spoke with Moses and Elijah.

Remember what Peter did? It was worse than putting his ice-cream cone in his purse. He invented religion—human religion. He judged the situation, exclaiming "This is good!" And then he said, "Shall I build three tabernacles, three containers for all this glory?... maybe we could publish a book, start a non-profit organization...advertise?"

He was still speaking when a bright cloud appeared over his head and a voice boomed: "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased listen to him."

"Peter stop, *shabat*, shut up, and listen."

"Don't just do something; sit there!"

This seems to be a perpetual problem for God: He shows up and people just freak out—they put their ice-cream cones in their purses, start denominations, or just go up in smoke.

In 2nd Thessalonians Paul talks about people being destroyed by the “Epiphany of his *parousia*,” the manifestation of his coming.ⁱ Paul himself—the Pharisee of Pharisees—was destroyed by the manifestation of Christ’s appearing on the road to Damascus. And so, He wrote, “It’s no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.” You’ll remember Jesus’ good buddy John dropped like a dead man when Jesus appeared at the start of the Revelation. Isaiah cried out in horror, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts!”

Remember when the Lord went for a walk in the Garden of Paradise in the cool of the day, calling to the man and the woman, “Where are you?” And they were hiding in terror. At the Presence of Perfect Love, they hid in the trees, dressed in fig leaf bikinis and began to lie to God and lie to each other and themselves.

I’ve always wondered what would’ve happened if they hadn’t done something and just sat there.ⁱⁱ

Blaise Pascal wrote, “All evil stems from this: men do not know how to handle solitude.” We have such a hard time just sitting there in the presence of God.

Psalm 131

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

- 1 **O Lord, my heart is not lifted up;
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.**
- 2 **But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a child quieted at its mother’s breast;
like a child that is quieted is my soul.**
- 3 **O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time forth and forevermore. (RSV)**

For a long time, this has been a favorite of mine: If you want to memorize a whole chapter of Scripture Psalm 131 is a great place to start—not only cause it’s short, but because it’s so helpful.

David prays, “I don’t occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.” What was too great and too marvelous for King David?

Well, how about his job? I can’t handle being the pastor of a small church with a little staff. Imagine if you were King David. Imagine all the expectations, and the knowledge that you could never please everyone, and would always be hated by someone. The distance between everyone’s expectations, and your scared little self might be pretty hard to handle.

Maybe it was others’ expectations; maybe it was his own expectations. After all he was the Messiah—Messiah means “the anointed one” and David was the anointed one...

It probably felt like it when he killed Goliath. But it must’ve been a troubling thought while he was hiding from King Saul in the cave of Adullam, or the morning after he slept with Bathsheba and

murdered her husband, or the day he learned that his own son Absalom raped his wives, on the roof of the palace, for all of Jerusalem to see.

Maybe it was others' expectations, his own expectations, or God's expectations. Maybe the thing too great and too marvelous for him was God! How could he be with God and not be utterly consumed?

Remember Uzzah occupied himself with things too great and too marvelous for him. He touched the Ark. And God smote him.

While they were bringing the Ark of the Covenant (the Judgment Seat of God) into the city, the cart hit a bump and Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the Ark, and God smote him. Uzzah tried to judge the Judgment, he tried to save the Savior... and the Savior smote him. God is salvation, God is Love... and He smote Uzzah. And David witnessed it. "Things too great and marvelous for me."

The word translated "marvelous" is commonly associated with God's Relentless Love (his *hesed*)ⁱⁱⁱ that is consuming fire... that smote Uzzah. God had to have been more than a little overwhelming for David. How could he deal with the distance between himself and his own knowledge of God, His knowledge of Good and his own not good—that is evil?

At least a little, I often feel like David. I think "Holy Crap Lord, why would you ever have me speak one word about you... I suck at this?"

- 1^b I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.**
- 2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul...**

The soul is that thing God made when he breathed into the dust—it's you.

"I have calmed (*shavah*) my soul" writes David. That word *shavah* means "to level" to "not exalt," but "make the same." So, Young's literal translation reads, "*I have not compared my soul.*"

Comparing your soul is what's most unsettling isn't it? You compare it to your knowledge of Good and evil—the law. You compare it to other people, and you compare it to God.

You judge yourself and try to justify yourself. And that's why you make fig leaf bikinis and why you hide in laws, works of the flesh, and religion. You hide the fact that you're not right and you're trying to make yourself right but can't make yourself right. That's why your soul is unsettled. And why it won't stop chattering to itself inside your head.

Rick Joyner had an encounter with God and describes it in his book, *The Call*.^{iv} The Lord appeared to him as Wisdom Incarnate, and overwhelmed by glory he plead with God saying, "Lord, I'm sorry...but your presence is so overwhelming. How do I keep from feeling so small when I'm close to you like this?"

And he heard:

You are small, but you must learn to abide in My presence without looking at yourself... You must not look at your inadequacy, but look to My adequacy. You must stop looking at your own unworthiness and look to My righteousness. When you are used, it is because of who I am, not who you are.

You did feel My anger as you began to look at yourself. This is the anger I felt toward Moses when he started to complain about how inadequate he was... This false humility is actually a form of the pride that caused the fall of man. Adam and Eve began to feel inadequate and that they needed to be more than I had made them to be. They took it upon themselves to make themselves into who they should be. You can never make yourself into who you should be, but you must trust Me to make you into who you should be.

You know the concepts of Heaven and Hell (that is *Hades* or *Gehenna*) are really pretty simple in Scripture. Heaven is enjoying the presence of God. And Hell is hating the presence of God such that you hide in outer darkness where men weep and gnash their teeth, and then, when God appears, his presence burns your ego like fire.

Your ego is your fig leaf bikini, it's your flesh, your false self—the thing you think you have constructed to protect you from the presence of God.

**² But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a child quieted at its mother's breast;
like a child that is quieted is my soul.**

David is picturing himself as a child held to the breast of God—that's, like, pretty present to God and God pretty present to him. Right now. Like "The kingdom of Heaven is at hand," (Matt. 3:2) so repent—change your thinking. As if "In God we live and move and have our being..." (Acts 17:28). As if God is always present, but we're not always present.

You know it's pretty wild to think about, but Adam and Eve lost the Garden trying to get what they already had but didn't know they had. They wanted knowledge of the Good, to make themselves Good, so they could have the Good; but God is the Good, who was already with them in the Garden.

And this is even more wild to think about, but that Garden must exist in the Sanctuary of the human soul... at least. In Scripture, God makes it clear that the little children don't yet have the knowledge of Good and evil, but will get the knowledge of Good and evil.^v They get the knowledge of Good and evil from a tree in a garden and that Garden must be in their own soul, as well as the beginning and end of time.

It's what we saw in Ecclesiastes and the Revelation. The tabernacle and temple are the Garden, and we are that Garden. Which means we each crucify Jesus on a tree in the garden of our own soul. And we are each exiled from the Garden, that is our true and deepest self.

When Adam and Eve took the life of the Good from the tree, they began to judge themselves with "the knowledge of Good and evil." If I judge myself, I can't be the self that I'm judging. I'm exiled from myself, my true self—so of course my soul is unsettled! God is always present, but I'm not present, I'm exiled from my own garden... and [from] "I am that I am," who makes his home there in the garden of my soul.

You see the distance is in my head.^{vi} "Repent" means change your mind.

Jesus repents me. Jesus is the Way home, the Truth about me, and the Life Eternal in me. From the tree in the garden Jesus cried “Father forgive” and “It is finished.” And Jesus said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Jesus is “the root and the offspring of David”—He’s the Messiah... in David.

David writes “I have calmed and quieted my soul. Like a child quieted at its mother’s breast is my soul.” David is imagining what’s true—and that’s called Faith.^{vii}

We can’t understand everything I just said, but by God’s Grace we can imagine what’s true. So, for years I’ve imagined what’s true, and I hope you would too. God is my father, and I am a little child of God. In Him I live and move and have my being.

So, I have often pictured myself just sitting on his lap, held to his chest like a mother or father holds a little child. I don’t do anything I just sit there. And yet, as I sit there, I often begin to think, “I don’t deserve this. I didn’t hold my children enough. I was too busy with my career. Who am I to even imagine such a thing?” I start comparing myself with my image of my good self and then I must remind myself, “Stop comparing yourself—no little child earns their parents’ love—stop judging yourself and trying to justify yourself. Be quiet! Just be present in the Presence of infinite Love.”

At times, I’ve imagined myself as a little child lying on my back in the bottom of a little boat floating on a deep dark lake on top of a mountain under the stars. It’s a very specific lake—It’s Upper Cataract Lake in the Gore Range Wilderness Area where I used to go backpacking as a young man.

Actually, I imagine my son Jon, about three years old, lying in the boat in his superman underwear, floating on that deep dark lake, and I’m looking down at him from the perspective of deep heaven and billions of shining stars that decorate the night sky with the glory of eternity.

I look down, at him and I feel my love burn for him as I think to myself, “I would gladly give everything for you.”

And then I picture myself in that boat, floating on that that deep dark water, and I think of God looking at me. I don’t talk. I float... in His presence.

Lately, for the last few years, I’ve pictured myself sitting on a beach... a very specific beach. It’s a beach that Susan and I have visited on vacation. It’s a place I have experienced rest, peace, communion, and joy. I imagine myself sitting next to Jesus—he said he’d never leave me nor forsake me—so I’m imagining what’s true.

I sit next to him naked. He’s not naked, but I am. It’s not a sexual thing, and yet I think all sexuality points to this thing. I’m surrendering my shame. I’m sacrificing my fig leaves, my ego.

You know confession is not making excuses for the past or promises about the future—that’s not surrendering the ego, that’s exercising the ego, the flesh.^{viii} Confession is just saying, “Here I am...” But I don’t have to say it, I just have to be it—I am it, my self—my vulnerable naked self.

And here’s the shocker! That’s the self he adores: The true self, not the false self. He adores the self, hidden beneath the fig leaves.^{ix}

See? I think my heart is saying, “Jesus I don’t know how to create myself, redeem myself, save myself and justify myself—I don’t know how to clothe myself—I need you to clothe me in yourself, your righteousness.”

Often, he grabs my head and holds it to his chest, and I rest my mind in his embrace... I stop thinking.

You see, I think most of my thinking is processing my knowledge of Good and evil, in order to justify myself. But in the garden, I must surrender my knowledge of Good and evil, and see that I'm justified by the Good who has given himself to me. I must rest.

I do not achieve rest with all my thinking, feeling and doing. All my thinking feeling and doing must be the product of entering God's rest.

So, for Christians, the Sabbath doesn't come at the end of the work week. The Sabbath is the beginning of the work week. Every Good Deed is born of the living knowledge that "*it is finished*" and *we are forgiven*. Every Good Deed is the fruit of being known by Love. In the words of John, "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

I've been reading a wonderful little book on contemplative prayer by Thomas Keating titled *Open Heart, Open Mind*. He suggests setting a timer for twenty minutes. And then just sitting in the awareness of God's presence. He suggests centering your mind with a word, like "Jesus," or "Mercy." So that when you notice your mind spinning off on a string of thoughts, you just say the word to center yourself back on the presence of God.

If you have a problem, anxiety, or thought, that just won't stop, he suggests placing it in a little boat and just pushing it out into the river that flows all around you knowing that God is sovereign, he is the river of Life and an ocean of Love.

Sometimes Jesus and I load up an entire Armada of boats; I give all these thoughts to him. And then, sometimes, after I've sat in his presence for a time, I let the thoughts just come...as long as I'm thinking them with him, or sense that he is thinking them with me.

I often pray in tongues. It's something that started when I was kid at my friend Ricky's house. Ricky said, "Hey Pete, you wanna pray in tongues?" And I said "sure." So, we knelt by his bed and prayed. He said, "just start talking to God like in another language." And I did, and have been, for about 50 years. I questioned it for a long time, and I've always thought it was a rather silly gift compared to some of the others. I don't understand what I'm saying.

When I was dating Susan and knew we should stop making out, but I couldn't get myself to pray, "God help us stop making out," I'd pray in tongues...

In recent years praying for folks struggling with demonic spirits, I've been amazed at how the devil just hates it when I pray in tongues. But I think, most wonderful of all, it helps me rest in the presence of God—knowing that I don't have to speak, because God is speaking for me.

David writes, I have calmed and quieted my soul—that means "no talking." But, when I pray in tongues, I don't think my soul is talking. Instead, my spirit communes with God's spirit, and the weird tongues thing just reminds me that it's always happening.

Psalm 42:7 "Deep calls to deep and the thunder of thy cataracts; all thy waves and thy billows have gone over me."

Do you know the spirit of Jesus intercedes for you with sighs too deep for words^x whether you have the gift of tongues or not? He intercedes for you, and he does it from the garden of your soul. He prays “Nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done.”

If you want to pray in tongues, ask the Lord for the gift, and maybe he'll give it. But no matter what, calm and quiet your soul “like a child quieted at its mother's breast.”

That's the way the RSV translates verse 2; the ESV is probably a little more accurate, even if a little less poetic in English:

**2 I have calmed and quieted my soul
like a weaned child with its mother (ESV)**

That probably refers to a three-year old child that's stopped nursing (that was the customary time for a child to stop nursing in those days). But it may refer to any child that has drunk its fill and is now content. You see, that child wants nothing from his or her mother but her presence.

Our God is Love and Love is the Good. Our Lord is Truth, Wisdom, Beauty, and Life.

Like newborn infants we naturally try to suck the Life out of everything around us.^{xi} Have you ever held a hungry newborn? I once made the mistake of holding my newborn son without my shirt on. It was a bad experience for me—and for him! I still remember the look on his face.

Like newborn infants we naturally try to suck the Life out of everything around us. We see the Good and we take the Good. We suck the Good out of Life.

We suck the life and the love out of anything we can get our hands on. We suck the life and the love, to make ourselves lovely and alive.

But when we mature, we don't suck life and love from things. We begin to rest in the presence of Love and Life himself, the presence of Good himself. When we mature, we don't take the life of Love from a tree in a garden. We rest in the presence of the Life who is Love, given on a tree in a garden.

Let me be a little more blunt: infants, love women for their breasts...and I can totally relate to that. I've got nothing against breasts, but if you're only about breasts, you're missing the best part. You're an infant, and you suck...or, at least, suckle.

And that's OK for a time. But faith is not simply your ability to suck, or suck harder than the next guy. Mature faith is your ability to not suck. It's a prayer from a tree in a garden, “Into your hands I commit my spirit,” that is also a psalm of David (Psalm 31).

There may have been moments in your life when it felt like every prayer was answered the moment you asked; you cried, sucked, and the milk began to flow. It was certainly like that at moments in Paul's ministry. But later you cried, sucked, and there was no milk—only a word, like the Word spoken to St. Paul in his afflictions, “My Grace is sufficient for you...”

Well, God is Grace, and He is always present, and always giving you exactly what you need, exactly when you need it.^{xii}

So, what's wrong? Nothing is wrong...it's just that you're a weanee. God is the *wean*-er, and you're the *wean*-ee. So, stop sucking and be content.^{xiii} Ask God for things, and if you don't immediately get those things, trust that he's giving you the very best thing... which is himself, and all things with him.

You see a weaned child has forgotten about his own needs, which is, actually, his greatest need—the need to die to himself and learn to enjoy the presence of another. It's the need to love and be loved... and God is Love.

Understand? It's your ego that sucks. It's your ego that compares. It's your ego that won't shut up. It's your ego that regrets the past and worries about the future. It's your ego that is never satisfied, for your ego constantly seeks to justify itself, and refuses to believe that you have been justified.^{xiv} It's your ego that uses Love to exalt itself, that crucifies the savior trying to save itself. It's your ego that sucks the life from Love, pretending to be godly.

It's your ego that sucks, and it's Christ in you who is content. He's the Prince of Peace. "Let the Peace of Christ rule in your hearts," wrote Paul (Col. 3:15).

In the words of David:

- 2 I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a child quieted at its mother's breast;
like a child that is quieted is my soul.**
- 3 O Israel, hope in the LORD
from this time forth and forevermore. (RSV)**

"Forevermore" [*olam*], also translated "eternity."

We think the presence of God is like a fleeting emotion. But it turns out that the presence of God is more substantial than all of space and time. And space and time is like a womb in which we are formed and prepared for the unmitigated presence of God.

The Garden of Eden, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Garden of Calvary, the Garden city in the Revelation, and the Garden in my heart—all exist at the edge of spacetime and eternity, where eternity touches time.^{xv} And so, I can go sit on the beach with Jesus, float on the lake under the stars and then snuggle up on my father's lap anytime I like. When I do, this world loses its grip on me... and I'm happy.^{xvi} Or maybe I should say, I begin to experience the happiness of God.

Do you understand? God wants to be with you, far more than you have ever wanted to be with God. He doesn't need you in order to get things done, but he hung on a tree, in your garden, just to be with you and never ever leave you.

Sometimes, when we're sitting on the beach and he's holding my head against his chest, I'll feel a warm liquid on the side of my head. It's not milk; it's blood... and it comes from a wound in his hand.

Sometimes, when I can't seem to calm and quiet my soul, when I can't stop worrying, and fretting, and accusing myself, when I can't stop whining and crying, saying, "God I suck as a pastor, I don't know what I'm doing, I'm just a lazy old man that talks about you cause it's too late to find another career... help me, help me, help me..."

Sometimes, I imagine what is already true—we go to the tree together, we get nailed to the tree together, we die together, and then we begin to rise together... in peace and the deepest joy.

Who's talking in Psalm 131? Is it David, or is it Jesus... in David?

2 I have calmed and quieted my soul

The Soul is the Spirit of God breathed into a temple of dust. Maybe David is Jesus' Soul. And Jesus has calmed and quieted his soul. Maybe you are the Body of Christ. And Jesus calms and quiets our soul.

If you would, close your eyes and imagine what's true. You are in the presence of God. Every subatomic particle that comprises your body exists solely because God observes it and continually wills you into existence. Every heartbeat is a gift of infinite love given to you.

You are in the presence of God.
Don't intend anything.
Don't promise anything.
Don't say anything.
Don't hide anything.

He sees everything: your deepest fear, your darkest regret, your most embarrassing sin... he sees absolutely everything.
Don't do anything, just sit there.

Communion

Now listen to his judgment:

He's looking at you, and he says, "This is my body given to you...take and eat.

"This cup is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins... Drink of it all of you."

"I have earnestly desired to eat [this meal] with you" (Luke 22:15), this communion of life in my Body, my Bride, my Temple, my friends.

Benediction

You're always standing in his Love, for in him we live and move and have our being. And the garden is in your soul.

If you like, stay and sit in the garden. Wade in the ocean. Soak in the river...

And when you go, remember that you are walking out into a world that is confused, and deranged, and full of people who are lost. And they maybe get offended by the fact that you're found. That you're happy. That you are at rest.

And God will provide obstacles. God will provide challenges. I'm just saying that, as that happens, which is part of the design, remember that the garden is in your heart. And you can go there any time you like. In fact, you can really live from there. Strive to enter his rest and live from that place. In Jesus' name, amen.

Endnotes

- i 2nd Thessalonians 1:9, 2:8
- ii Peter did something when it looked like Jesus was blowing it.
He denied Jesus three times...
But then, he just sat there as Jesus looked at him.
He was repented, and then, changed the world.
- Paul did something when it looked like Jesus was destroying his religion.
He persecuted the Church...
But then, he just sat there as Jesus asked, "Why are you persecuting me?"
He was repented, and then, changed the world.
- iii *"Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love (hesed),
for his wondrous (marvelous—same word) works to the children of man!"*
—Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31 (This line is repeated four times in just this psalm.)
- iv Rick Joyner, *The Call* (Charlotte, NC: Morning Star Publications, 1999), pp. 32-33
- v See Deut. 1:39
- vi *The chief thing that separates us from God is the thought that we are separated from him.*
- Father Thomas Keating, *Open Mind Open Heart, 20th edition*, Bloomsbury, London, 2006, p. 33
- vii *"Faith," says theologian James Whitehead, "is the enduring ability to imagine life in a certain way"*
-*The Religious Imagination, Liturgy* 5, 1985, pp. 54-59, quoted by William Willimon, December 21, 1997.
- viii The ego needs time (chronological time) for it cannot exist NOW in the presence of "I Am." The ego is not eternal.
- ix This is offensive to a proud soul, but Jesus is attracted to our place of shame. He is the bridegroom, after all. And we are his bride.
- x *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.* —Romans 8:26-27 NRSV
- xi Have you ever held a hungry newborn? I once made the mistake of holding my newborn son without my shirt on... It was a bad experience for him and me. Well like newborn infants we naturally try to suck the life out of everything around us.
- xii *You must utterly believe that the circumstances of your life, that is, every minute of your life, as well as the whole course of your life—anything, yes, everything that happens—have all come to you by His will and by His permission. You must utterly believe that everything that has happened to you is from God and is exactly what you need... Abandonment is being satisfied with the present moment, no matter what that moment contains. You are satisfied because you know that whatever that moment has, it contains—in that instant—God's eternal plan for you.*
-Jeanne Guyon, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus*, p. 32, 35
- xiii *Centering prayer may open up over time into various kinds of inner experiences and nonexperiences. In either case, it is a training in being content with God as He is and as He acts. There is tremendous freedom when that disposition is finally established because then you will not look for any form of consolation from God. [In other words: you will stop sucking]*
-Keating, p. 42

xiv Your ego needs a problem, so it can pretend to be the solution: the savior.

xv The word “garden” doesn’t appear many times in Scripture, but when it does it is deeply significant. More than any of the others, John appears to have picked up on this theme. See: Gen. 2-3, Song of Solomon 5:1, 6:2, Mark 14:32, Luke 22:42, John 18:1 (&26), 19:41, Rev. 22:1-2.

xvi Y. Chan was imprisoned for his faith and forced to work, neck deep at times, in a human waste cesspool, surrounded by disease and breathing an intolerable stench. His captors thought it was the best place for a Christian leader, *“working in the human wastepit, shovel in hand.”* My friend Ed got to hear his testimony in Manila. Chan said this:
“But I enjoyed working in the cesspool because I loved the solitude. You see, in the labor camp all the prisoners were under constant surveillance. None of us could be alone. Only when I worked in the cesspool could I be alone. Then I could pray to our Lord as loudly as I wanted. I could recite the Scriptures and Psalms of the Bible that I still remembered, and no one would ever come close enough to me to protest. That’s why I loved to work in the human waste cesspools. I could pray loudly, and I could recite the Scriptures. I also sang hymns as loudly as I could. In those years, one of my favorite hymns when I worked in the pit was, ‘In the Garden.’ When I sang this hymn in the cesspool, I understood the meaning of the garden. For I knew where God was. I met my Lord in the garden of the cesspool.”