You Cannot Know the Ocean from the Shore

Why Truth Requires Curiosity, Peace Requires Surrender, and Life Begins Beyond the Familiar

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There is something fascinating about human nature. We are willing to form strong opinions about things we have never experienced, dismiss possibilities we have never explored, and defend conclusions about subjects we have only observed from a distance. We call it knowledge, sometimes even wisdom, yet much of what we believe is based on what others have told us, what we have been taught to accept, or what our minds have decided must be true.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in conversations about God, spirituality, consciousness, and the deeper meaning of our existence.

The skeptic often stands at a distance, watching, analyzing, questioning, and demanding evidence before taking a single step closer. There is nothing inherently wrong with skepticism. In fact, healthy skepticism is essential to science, intellectual honesty, and personal growth. It protects us from deception and encourages us to examine our assumptions. But skepticism becomes its own limitation when questioning turns into permanent resistance, when the observer refuses to become a participant, and when the demand for certainty becomes the very obstacle preventing discovery.

Imagine someone standing beside a swimming pool, studying the water. They can measure its temperature, analyze its chemical composition, calculate its density, and observe how other people move through it. They might read hundreds of books about swimming, watch Olympic champions, and become extraordinarily knowledgeable about hydrodynamics. Yet there is one thing they will never truly know until they enter the water: what it feels like to swim.

They may understand swimming intellectually, but they have never experienced the water holding their body, the sensation of floating, the rhythm of breathing, or the remarkable freedom of moving through an entirely different environment.

And no amount of observation from the pool deck can replace that experience.

The same principle applies to love. Imagine attempting to understand a relationship by observing two people from across the street. You might study their body language, listen to their conversations, and draw conclusions about their compatibility. But you would never know the intimacy they share, the vulnerability they have experienced, the forgiveness they have offered, or the quiet moments in which words become unnecessary.

To know someone deeply requires closeness. It requires trust, openness, vulnerability, and a willingness to participate in the relationship.

Perhaps the same is true of our relationship with God.

The Difference Between Knowing About God and Knowing God

For much of my life, God was not an important part of my conscious reality. I was baptized Catholic as a child, but religion played little role in my upbringing. My understanding of life was shaped largely by education, science, personal achievement, and the experiences that followed. As someone trained in healthcare and science, I learned to appreciate evidence, observation, and the remarkable power of human intellect.

Yet over time, something began to change.

Through meditation, breathwork, personal challenges, moments of profound surrender, and experiences I could not easily explain through my existing worldview, I began questioning whether the reality I had accepted was the whole story. I discovered that there is an enormous difference between accumulating information about life and experiencing its deeper dimensions.

My spiritual journey did not begin because someone convinced me that I needed to believe in God. It began because I became willing to explore what I did not yet understand.

That distinction matters.

Faith does not have to begin with certainty. Sometimes it begins with curiosity. Sometimes it begins with admitting that our current understanding might be incomplete. And sometimes it begins with a simple, sincere question: *What if there is more?*

Jesus offered an interesting invitation when He said, "Come and see" (John 1:39). He did not merely present His followers with an intellectual argument.

He invited them into a relationship, into an experience, into a different way of living.

And in Psalm 34:8, we encounter another remarkable invitation: "Taste and see that the LORD is good."

Taste and see.

Not merely study and debate. Not simply observing from a distance. Taste. Experience. Participate.

Of course, personal experience does not automatically establish the truth of every interpretation we attach to it. Human beings can misunderstand their experiences, and sincere spiritual seekers can reach different conclusions. Discernment, reason, and humility remain essential. But refusing every possibility of experience while insisting that nothing exists beyond one's present understanding is hardly an expression of open-minded inquiry.

Perhaps the question is not whether we have enough evidence to believe everything. Perhaps the first question is whether we are genuinely willing to discover something that might challenge what we already believe.

Heaven, Hell, and the Stories We Take Literally

One of the greatest obstacles to spiritual exploration is the way religious teachings are sometimes presented and understood. Throughout history, profound spiritual ideas have been communicated through stories, metaphors, symbols, poetry, and imagery. These forms of expression can reveal truths that are difficult to capture through literal description alone.

Yet we often approach ancient spiritual texts as though every passage was intended to function like a modern scientific report.

Consider hell.

For many people, the word immediately suggests a terrifying underground location filled with flames, where those who fail to believe the correct things are punished forever. This image has become deeply embedded in popular religious imagination, reinforced by centuries of art, literature, preaching, and cultural tradition.

Christian traditions, however, do not all understand the imagery of hell in the same way. Some emphasize eternal conscious punishment, others emphasize final separation from God, and still others explore interpretations centered on

destruction, purification, or restoration. The biblical language itself includes images of fire, darkness, judgment, and exclusion, which have been interpreted differently across Christian history.

But there is another dimension worth contemplating, one that speaks directly to the way we experience life today.

What if we can begin experiencing something resembling hell long before physical death?

Consider a life dominated by fear, resentment, jealousy, pride, bitterness, guilt, and the relentless need to control everything. Imagine waking up every morning imprisoned by yesterday's regrets and tomorrow's worries, constantly comparing yourself with others, defending your identity, and searching for peace in circumstances that never remain stable.

Is that not a form of suffering we create and repeatedly reinforce?

When we live disconnected from love, forgiveness, compassion, and the deeper spiritual qualities that Jesus embodied, we may experience an inner world that feels remarkably like separation from God.

From this perspective, hell is not merely something to fear in the future. It is also a powerful way of describing the suffering that emerges when we turn away from love and become trapped within the limitations of our own ego.

And this interpretation raises a question that has troubled believers and nonbelievers alike. Imagine a serial killer who has committed unimaginable acts of cruelty, destroyed innocent lives, and caused suffering that can never be undone. During the final days of his life, he sincerely repents, surrenders to God, and accepts Christ. According to a common understanding of Christian salvation through grace, even this person may receive forgiveness and eternal life. Now imagine a woman who has spent her entire life loving others, caring for those in need, forgiving those who hurt her, and living with extraordinary humility and compassion, yet she never consciously believed in God. Does she deserve eternal punishment while the murderer receives paradise? Is salvation simply a matter of declaring the correct belief before the clock runs out? These questions deserve more than a convenient religious answer. Christianity teaches that grace is not something we earn through good deeds, and different traditions understand the salvation of nonbelievers differently. But perhaps these examples also expose the limitations of treating heaven and hell merely as destinations assigned after death. What if we consider the spiritual reality

unfolding within us right now? The murderer may have lived in profound separation from love and goodness, yet genuine repentance could mark the beginning of an extraordinary transformation. The loving woman, meanwhile, may already embody many qualities associated with God's nature, even without consciously recognizing their source. Her life should challenge us to approach the mystery of God's judgment with humility rather than assuming we know her eternal destiny.

For me, this brings us to a deeper understanding of heaven and hell as realities we may begin experiencing here on earth. Hell can be understood as the inner condition we perpetuate when we choose separation, ego, fear, resentment, and control over surrender to God. Heaven, in contrast, begins to reveal itself through reconciliation, love, trust, and the peace that comes from opening ourselves to His presence. This does not mean that everyone who does not believe in God lives in misery, or that believers never experience suffering. Nor does it mean we can determine another person's relationship with God from the outside. Rather, it suggests that the fullness of spiritual peace is found not in controlling life but in surrendering to the divine love that gives life its deepest meaning. In my own journey, I have come to understand that peace not merely as the absence of conflict, but as something increasingly available through surrender and relationship with God.

This does not settle the theological question of what happens after death, nor does it erase the seriousness with which Christianity approaches judgment. Rather, it invites us to recognize that our spiritual choices have consequences in the present.

Likewise, heaven need not be understood only as a distant destination. Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was near, and in Luke 17:21, He spoke of God's kingdom in language often translated as being "among you" or "in your midst."

What if the peace we associate with heaven is something we can begin to experience here, through a life increasingly aligned with God?

Not because suffering disappears, but because our relationship with suffering changes. Not because the external world suddenly becomes perfect, but because we no longer depend entirely upon that world for our inner stability.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (John 14:27).

He did not promise a life without difficulty. He offered peace that could exist even in the presence of difficulty.

Perhaps finding God is not simply about securing a destination after death. Perhaps it is also about discovering a radically different way of being alive.

The Two-Dimensional Life We Mistake for Reality

Most of us live within an extraordinarily narrow version of what life could be.

We are born into a family, a culture, a language, and a collection of beliefs we did not consciously choose. We attend school, learn what society considers important, pursue careers, establish relationships, accumulate possessions, and organize our lives around responsibilities, expectations, and routines.

None of these things are inherently wrong. Education, meaningful work, family, and community are beautiful parts of human existence. The problem begins when we mistake this familiar structure for the entirety of life.

We follow a narrow lane because it is the lane everyone around us appears to be following. We measure success according to standards we inherited, adopt opinions from the communities to which we belong, and often spend decades repeating patterns we have never seriously questioned.

Our lives become almost two-dimensional, a story unfolding along a predictable line between yesterday and tomorrow.

We wake up, react, work, worry, consume, sleep, and repeat. We experience the world through the filter of our memories, fears, attachments, and expectations, rarely noticing how much these internal patterns influence what we perceive.

And because everyone around us appears to be doing the same thing, we call it normal.

But normal does not necessarily mean complete.

Imagine living your entire life on a single road, convinced that the road represents the whole world. You become familiar with every turn, every building, and every obstacle. You know exactly what lies ahead because you have traveled the same route thousands of times.

Then one day, someone invites you to leave the road and climb a nearby mountain.

From the summit, you discover valleys, rivers, forests, oceans, and entire landscapes you never knew existed. Your road is still there, but you now recognize it as one small part of a much larger world.

The road was never necessarily false. It was simply incomplete.

I believe something similar can happen in our understanding of human existence.

When we become willing to question our conditioning, explore unfamiliar ideas, examine our inner world, and consider perspectives beyond our own, life begins to reveal possibilities that were previously invisible to us.

We do not necessarily need to abandon our responsibilities or reject the physical world. We simply need to stop confusing the small portion of reality we habitually experience with everything that might be possible.

Curiosity Is the Doorway; Surrender Is the Key

There is a beautiful irony in the human pursuit of truth. We want to discover more, yet we often insist that anything new must fit neatly within what we already know.

We want transformation without uncertainty, spiritual growth without vulnerability, and a deeper understanding of life without surrendering the beliefs that make us feel safe.

But genuine discovery requires the possibility of being wrong.

A scientist who refuses to reconsider a hypothesis when new evidence is available is no longer practicing good science. A person who refuses to listen to unfamiliar perspectives is not expanding understanding. And a spiritual seeker who insists on controlling every experience may never discover what becomes possible when control is loosened.

Curiosity asks, *what else might be true?*

Humility asks, *what might I have misunderstood?*

Surrender asks, *what becomes possible when I stop insisting that life unfold according to my expectations?*

For years, I approached many areas of my life through achievement, discipline, determination, and control. Those qualities helped me accomplish

extraordinary things, particularly in athletics and my professional career. But they could not provide every answer I was searching for.

I eventually began recognizing that the very strategies that helped me succeed externally could sometimes limit me internally.

Control relies heavily on what we already know. We analyze past experiences, predict outcomes, identify risks, and attempt to arrange the future according to familiar possibilities. Our minds often present us with two choices: this or that, success or failure, safety or danger.

Surrender changes the relationship.

Instead of demanding a specific outcome, we become willing to respond to possibilities we had not previously considered. Instead of treating uncertainty as a threat, we begin recognizing it as part of discovery.

This does not mean abandoning responsibility, discernment, or intelligent decision-making. It means releasing the illusion that we must control everything before we can trust life.

In Christian language, surrender becomes something even more meaningful: learning to trust God rather than relying exclusively on our own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5 invite us to trust in the Lord with all our heart and not lean entirely upon our own understanding. Jesus expressed the deepest form of surrender in Gethsemane when He prayed, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

That is not passive resignation. It is an extraordinary expression of trust.

And perhaps that is where peace begins: not when we finally control every circumstance, but when we no longer need to.

Learning to Listen Beyond the Noise

If we want to experience a larger reality, we must also become willing to explore different ways of knowing.

Read books outside your usual interests. Study philosophies that challenge your assumptions. Explore the teachings of Jesus rather than relying exclusively on what others have told you about Christianity. Learn from science, history, psychology, and contemplative traditions. Spend time in

nature. Engage in meaningful conversations with people who see the world differently.

And perhaps most importantly, create moments of silence.

Our modern lives are saturated with noise. We are constantly receiving information, reacting to notifications, comparing ourselves with others, and filling every quiet moment with another distraction. We have become extraordinarily skilled at gathering external information while often remaining unfamiliar with our own inner world.

Yet silence can reveal what constant activity conceals.

Through prayer, meditation, contemplation, and honest self-inquiry, we begin noticing the patterns that influence our thoughts and behaviors. We recognize fears we have carried for decades, attachments we have mistaken for identity, and beliefs we have never consciously examined.

We also begin developing a more intimate relationship with what many call intuition.

Intuition should not be confused with infallibility. An inner feeling can reflect wisdom, but it can also reflect fear, habit, or wishful thinking. Learning to discern the difference requires patience, self-awareness, and humility. In a Christian context, this discernment also involves testing our impressions against the character and teachings of Christ.

Nevertheless, there is something valuable about learning to listen rather than constantly react.

When the mind becomes quieter, we may begin recognizing possibilities that were previously drowned out by our habitual thinking.

And as our awareness grows, our relationship with the world begins to change.

We become less interested in proving ourselves right and more interested in understanding. Less attached to winning arguments and more willing to ask meaningful questions. Less threatened by differences and more capable of seeing humanity in those who disagree with us.

Perhaps spiritual maturity is not measured by how confidently we defend our beliefs, but by how consistently those beliefs transform the way we live.

The God We Debate and the God We Encounter

One of the most remarkable things about Jesus is that His teachings repeatedly direct our attention away from mere appearances and toward the condition of the heart.

He challenged religious authorities who knew the scriptures yet sometimes failed to embody their deepest moral meaning. He questioned the tendency to value outward correctness over compassion, mercy, humility, and love.

He did not dismiss truth. He insisted that truth must transform us.

And that brings us back to the skeptic standing beside the swimming pool.

It is entirely possible to study Christianity for years, debate the existence of God, analyze biblical history, and develop sophisticated arguments about theology without ever sincerely attempting to live the way Jesus taught.

One can know the vocabulary of faith without experiencing its transformative possibilities.

But the reverse is also important. Spiritual experiences alone do not establish that every belief we form about them is correct. A meaningful encounter should invite greater humility and discernment, not make us immune to questions.

The invitation, then, is not to stop thinking. It is to allow thought and experience to work together.

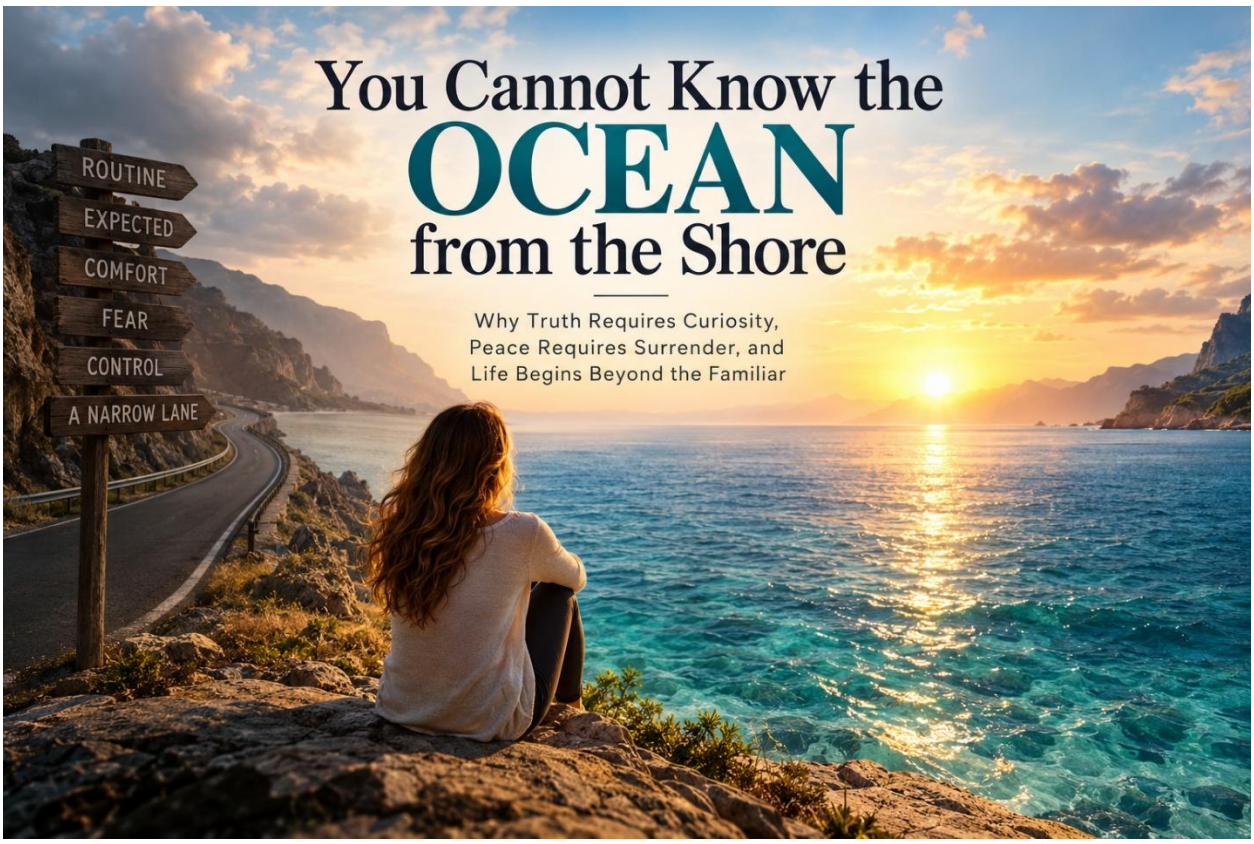
If you want to explore whether forgiveness changes your life, practice forgiveness. If you want to understand the power of compassion, begin acting compassionately. If you wonder whether prayer can deepen your relationship with God, approach it sincerely and consistently rather than judging it only from a distance.

If you want to understand the peace Jesus described, explore what happens when you begin releasing resentment, loosening your attachment to control, and living according to His teachings.

You may discover something unexpected.

You may also encounter questions, doubts, and difficulties along the way. That is part of an authentic search. Faith need not demand the absence of questions, and honest inquiry need not require the absence of faith.

The important thing is to remain open enough to continue exploring.



Embodiment: When What You Know Becomes Who You Are

There is another important step in our journey from intellectual understanding to genuine transformation, and it is something we call *embodiment*.

Embodiment is a relatively simple concept, although its implications are profound. It means that something we have learned, understood, or experienced becomes so integrated into our daily lives that it is no longer merely an idea we think about. It becomes part of how we feel, respond, behave, and interact with the world.

Consider the difference between reading a book about riding a bicycle and learning to ride one. You can study balance, momentum, steering, and the mechanics of pedaling. You may understand every principle perfectly, yet the moment you climb onto a bicycle, you discover that intellectual knowledge alone is insufficient. Your body must learn what your mind already

understands. Through practice, repetition, mistakes, and adjustments, something remarkable happens. Eventually, you no longer need to consciously calculate your balance or coordinate every movement. You simply ride.

Knowledge has become embodied.

The same is true of swimming. At first, you consciously think about your breathing, body position, arm movements, and kicking. But as you practice, these separate instructions gradually become one coordinated experience. Eventually, you stop thinking about swimming and simply become a swimmer. Your nervous system, muscles, breathing, and awareness begin working together naturally.

Now consider how this applies to our emotional and spiritual lives.

Most people understand intellectually that forgiveness is important. We know that holding resentment can damage relationships, disturb our peace, and keep us attached to painful experiences. We may even read books about forgiveness, attend workshops, or listen to spiritual teachers explaining its benefits. Yet the moment someone criticizes us, betrays our trust, or reminds us of an old wound, our familiar reactions return. We become defensive, angry, resentful, or withdrawn.

We know about forgiveness, but we have not yet fully embodied it.

Embodiment begins when forgiveness becomes more than a belief. It becomes a practiced response. We learn to recognize the emotional reaction arising within us, create enough space to respond consciously, and gradually release the need to retaliate or remain attached to the injury. Over time, forgiveness becomes less of an intellectual exercise and more of a natural expression of who we are becoming.

The same applies to love, compassion, gratitude, courage, and surrender. It is relatively easy to talk about these qualities when life is comfortable. Their true depth becomes visible when life challenges us.

You may believe you are a peaceful person until someone insults you. You may consider yourself compassionate until you encounter someone whose opinions you strongly oppose. You may speak beautifully about surrender until circumstances refuse to unfold according to your expectations.

These moments are not necessarily evidence that we have failed. They are opportunities to discover the distance between what we believe and what we have integrated.

And this is where embodiment becomes especially relevant to our relationship with God.

Jesus did not merely ask people to memorize His teachings or agree with His ideas. He invited them to live differently, to forgive their enemies, love their neighbors, serve others, release their attachment to possessions, and trust God even when circumstances appeared uncertain.

In John 13:17, Jesus tells His disciples, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

Notice the distinction. Knowing is not the same as doing.

And doing something occasionally is not yet the same as embodying it.

We might attend church every Sunday, read scripture every morning, and speak passionately about Christian values, yet continue reacting to life through judgment, pride, fear, resentment, and the need to control. Our beliefs may be sincere, but the transformation remains incomplete.

To embody the teachings of Christ is to allow them to gradually shape our character, our relationships, our choices, and even our habitual emotional responses. It is the difference between admiring the way Jesus lived and sincerely practicing that way of life until it becomes increasingly natural to us.

C. S. Lewis described the Christian journey in terms of becoming "little Christs." I find this particularly meaningful because it shifts our attention from simply believing something about Jesus to allowing His example to transform who we are.

In my own work, I often explain that awareness is only the beginning of transformation. Recognizing a limiting belief, an emotional trigger, or an unhealthy pattern does not automatically eliminate it. We must learn to regulate our responses, release what no longer serves us, practice new ways of thinking and behaving, and repeat those practices until they become more deeply integrated.

This is where our nervous system also plays an important role. Many emotional reactions are learned and reinforced through experience. Under stress, the

body may respond automatically before we have consciously considered what is happening. Through repeated practice, reflection, and new experiences, we can gradually develop different patterns of responding. What once required considerable conscious effort can become increasingly familiar and accessible.

But embodiment is not simply training the body to behave differently. It brings our thoughts, emotions, actions, and deepest values into greater alignment.

Imagine a musician who has spent years studying musical theory but has never touched an instrument. The musician may understand the structure of a beautiful composition, but the music remains silent until it is played. And even after learning the notes, there is a difference between mechanically reproducing a melody and expressing it with feeling, presence, and authenticity.

Our beliefs are like musical scores. Our lives are the instrument. Embodiment is what happens when the music finally comes alive.

Perhaps this is one of the most important distinctions in our spiritual development. We can know about God, begin experiencing a relationship with God, and gradually learn to embody the qualities that relationship invites us to cultivate.

Knowledge opens the door. Experience allows us to enter. Embodiment changes how we live once we are inside.

And that brings us to a revealing question: If someone knew nothing about our religious beliefs but observed how we treated others, responded to adversity, handled disagreements, and approached those who had hurt us, would they recognize the qualities of Christ in our behavior?

Not perfection, because none of us is perfect. But perhaps a growing presence of humility, patience, compassion, forgiveness, courage, and love.

Ultimately, embodiment is not about becoming someone else or constructing another identity we must defend. It is about allowing the truths we discover to transform the way we live.

Because the deepest measure of what we believe is not simply what we can explain, but what we have become capable of expressing.

Life Beyond the Shore

Looking back on my own journey, I recognize that some of my most meaningful discoveries emerged when I became willing to move beyond what was familiar.

Not when I accumulated another credential, achieved another goal, or successfully controlled another outcome, but when I allowed myself to question, become vulnerable, and surrender.

My understanding of God has continued to evolve. I do not pretend to possess every answer, and I have become increasingly comfortable admitting how much remains unknown.

But perhaps that is precisely what makes the journey meaningful.

We live in a world that rewards certainty, celebrates achievement, and encourages us to defend the identities we have constructed. Yet the deepest transformation may begin when we loosen our grip on those identities and become willing to discover who we are beneath them.

What if the peace we have been searching for is not something we must earn through achievement, purchase through success, or find by arranging our external circumstances perfectly?

What if it begins with a relationship we have neglected, a truth we have resisted, or a surrender we have been afraid to make?

What if the narrow lane we have traveled for decades is not the only path available to us?

And what if God has been inviting us into a deeper relationship all along, not through fear or coercion, but through love, patience, and the quiet possibility of something greater?

None of this requires us to abandon reason, reject science, or accept every spiritual claim without examination. It simply asks us to recognize that intellectual understanding and lived experience are not identical, and that a complete exploration of life may require both.

We can continue standing on the shore, analyzing the water, debating its qualities, and forming opinions about what swimming must feel like.

Or we can become curious enough to enter.

The water may be unfamiliar. We may discover that some of our assumptions were mistaken. We may even realize that learning to swim requires letting go of the edge we have been holding so tightly.

But perhaps that is the beginning of a life we never knew was possible.

You can spend your entire life studying the ocean without ever feeling its embrace. And you can spend your entire life debating God without ever sincerely seeking His presence.

The invitation is not to believe blindly.

It is to stop confusing the shore with the whole ocean.

And perhaps, for the first time, to step into the water.

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