

ADAM BURNS'

Draft

|draft|

1 prepare a preliminary version of (a document): I drafted a letter of resignation.

You know how when you're writing an assignment at school, you don't always get it perfect the first time? Often you have to write a few drafts. With each draft you correct grammar, you tie together different thoughts, you get closer to that final perfect version. Discerning is a bit like a draft: it's not about getting it perfect first time up, it's not about having all the answers. What it is about is really thinking about your life, your faith and your calling and making decisions that impact more than just your own life.

In this book are reflections from my life about discernment. In many ways, my life is still a draft, still a work in progress. I don't have all the answers, but maybe in this book you'll find some worthy questions.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome

It's tempting for me to write here about why I put this booklet together. But I think a far better question to answer is why you should read this book. I won't claim that you'll find the most interesting, captivating or entertaining stories in these pages - but I do promise you that these reflections and poems will be real.

There's a lot of people out there who claim to have all the answers. I have more questions than answers; and I hope this resource will help you ask the BIG questions about faith, life and calling.

This is my story, and I share it with you not to feed my ego; but to encourage you to think about what your story is and where it is leading you.

DEFINITIONS

The theme of this book is "discernment". For me what that word refers to is the search for meaning: who am I, where am I going and how does God fit into that? Discernment is more than just about thinking though, it's a daily decision to live out those questions through your actions, words, relationships and interactions. Discernment is about living your life on purpose.

What is it that we are discerning? That would be our "vocation". We might be familiar with that phrase, we might have heard it used in reference to a job or occupation. Here in these pages I'm drawing on a broader definition. Sometimes we use words like destiny or fate to describe the experience of feeling called to do something - this is what vocation is about: a call from God to which we respond. That call can take many shapes, so discernment is important in figuring out what shape our vocation will take.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adam Burns grew up on the south side of Brisbane, attending high school at Trinity College in Beenleigh. He is a mad basketball fan and a lover of music. Since finishing high school he's worked with and amongst young people; helping them to know, understand and articulate the concepts of faith, life and calling. Adam spent time training to be a Catholic priest, and though God has led him in a different direction, he is still passionate about understanding God's call and sharing about vocations as part of Vocation Brisbane.

ABOUT VOCATION BRISBANE

Vocation Brisbane is a team working within the Archdiocese of Brisbane responsible for promoting vocations. The Vocation Brisbane team creates opportunities and resources to help young people discover God's call in their lives. To learn more about these opportunities or resources, please connect with Vocation Brisbane:

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INTRODUCTION

Content

THE ART OF DISCERNMENT	<i>page 1</i>
TAKE A BREATH	<i>page 4</i>
DETERMINATION	<i>page 5</i>
STILL	<i>page 6</i>
SENSE	<i>page 7</i>
MISSED THE TRAIN	<i>page 8</i>
DISCONNECTION	<i>page 9</i>
AUTHENTICITY	<i>page 10</i>
OXYGEN	<i>page 12</i>
HEROES	<i>page 13</i>
LAZINESS	<i>page 14</i>
DOES MY BUTT LOOK BIG IN THIS?	<i>page 16</i>
SLOW DANCING	<i>page 17</i>
PROVERBS	<i>page 18</i>
IN GOD'S TIME	<i>page 19</i>
WHO AM I	<i>page 20</i>
UNTOLD STORY	<i>page 22</i>

A person wearing a black beanie, a patterned sweater, and dark pants is sitting on a concrete ledge by a river. The person is looking down. In the background, there is a bridge with a railing, a multi-story building with many windows, and some green trees. The scene is outdoors during the day.

DARE TO ASK THE QUESTION:

“God, what do you call me to do?”

MORE IMPORTANTLY, DARE TO LISTEN TO THE
ANSWER. GOD ONLY KNOWS WHERE YOU’LL

END UP.

REFLECTIONS

The Art of Discernment

I've read lots of really great blog posts and articles about how discernment has become trendy. I think it is true that often discernment is used as an excuse to not make a decision about life, however I think there's a lot of stuff we need to battle with during the discernment process. I want to share an insider's perspective to discernment, from my time discerning priesthood in the seminary and now as I discern what's next for my life.

Let me start with an analogy. See, I think our lives are like a story (I know, cliche right?) and our vocation is the part where our story gets wrapped up into history/His-story. Discernment is the bridging chapter, the part where our plot line gets drawn into the plot of history. I think the problem a lot of people face when discerning is that sub-plots can arise; sub-plots which are often distracting, destructive or restrictive. These sub-plots can take our focus away from the main plot.

What are these sub-plots? Some of these sub-plots are things we need to work through before making a deeper commitment: family breakdowns, past relationship hurts, abuse, trauma, even all of the above. However, there are a lot of the sub-plots that come up that are lies or perceptions which just aren't true. These are blockages to discernment that need to be removed. Let's take some time to look at these lies.

Lie # 1 - "BUT, WHAT IF I'M CALLED SOMEWHERE ELSE?"

Before I went to seminary I used to ask the question, "but what if I go to seminary and I'm called to married life instead?" The grass always looks greener on the other side! The word discernment actually comes from the Latin "to separate apart". We discern to cut away options, either I am called to this, so I don't need to discern anything else; or, I'm not called to this, so I can cut this option away. My time discerning priesthood became far more fruitful when I focused in on that vocation. Now I can say peacefully that I discerned that vocation well and was able to cut it away. Instead of asking "but what if I'm called elsewhere?" ask: "but what if I am called here?" It's a far better question.

Lie # 2 - "MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS WILL THINK I'M CRAZY!"

Another big road block in discernment is how our family or friends will perceive our decision. These are important relationships and a decision shouldn't be made without considering the impact on these people. However, we shouldn't be off-put by their potential disapproval. Remember, even Jesus' family thought he was crazy (Mk 3:20-35) and while he was teaching one day they came to take him away! Often, families and friends disapprove because they don't understand (especially in the case of priesthood or religious life). We can help them to understand by involving them in the discernment process: explain to them about why we feel drawn to a certain vocation. They might not come around immediately, but give them time. There are many great stories of families and friends growing more supportive as they saw their loved one grow in their vocation.

But ultimately what vocation is about is relationship with God. And I mean a real relationship, not this "I heart Jesus" rubbish, but a relationship where we're honest with ourself and God; that relationship is all that matters. Plans, careers, states of life - they can all go out the window; because an authentic relationship with God brings meaning even to the most challenging of situations.

Lie # 3 - "I OWE IT TO GOD OR TO THE CHURCH, IT'S MY DUTY."

I come from a culture where the eldest son has a lot of responsibilities, the idea of duty resounds strongly within me. So when I began to grow in my faith and I began to fall more in love with the Church, I began to feel strongly a sense of duty towards the Church and I thought this had to be as a priest. But, as someone pointed out to me once: a) you don't owe God or the Church anything, they'll be fine with whatever choice you make; and b) if you're so passionate about serving God and the Church, you'll fulfil that duty as a priest, religious or lay person. Now, this isn't an excuse to not discern priesthood or religious life! Rather, I highlight this lie because it frees up the discernment process. When I realised that God didn't expect anything of me, it allowed me to discern freely. It took away a lot of the pressure I perceived and I was able to be excited about a life of service to God, however that may look.

As someone said to me when I decided to apply for the seminary: "*Discerning a vocation is an exciting time in one's life. Enjoy it!*" The discernment period isn't just a means to an ends, but is an experience in itself. It can be an interesting time full of self-revelation, when one's faith and knowledge grow substantially. It can be a time of figuring things out and letting things go. Some days it can seem clear where God is directing us, other times you just don't know. It is always a time of grace: when God becomes more present in our lives.

Dare to ask the question: "*God, what do you call me to do?*" More importantly, dare to listen to the answer. God only knows where you'll end up.

Take a Breath

POEMS

Once heard it said
That we breathe in the oxygen of the dead
That the air that filled their lungs
And fuelled their heads
Is recycled back into the air
And we now share it
To me, that's a comfort
Because before me there were leaders, kings and prophets
There were warriors, fighters, beauties and academics
The oxygen that fuelled them
Is now systemic
Inspiration isn't just a spark
It's an epidemic
And when we catch it the symptoms are epic
Like King(s) we affect on the world righteousness and justice
Like Mother(s) we learn charity isn't just about dollars and cents
With each breath we taste the presence

The very essence
Of transcendence
The rising of our ancestors chests
Will lead to the rising of revolutionary quests
Will we allow ourselves to be coalesced
To speak blessings into all we detest?
Let not your victory call be suppressed
Instead
Release the stress
Which has you wrenched up in a complex mess
And inhale, breath deep
Intake the wisdom of those who have fallen asleep
And leap above the cheap lies
Realise sheep serve only to count you to your dreams
And with each breath released
Exhale achievements
Exhale bereavement
Exhale beliefs so great
They cause disbelief
Exhale decency and reason
That someone else might breath it in and
Start truant treason against blind appeasement
Let's cause a diaphragmatic boycott of convenience
And breath relevance
Be breathing testaments
That inspiration isn't just some nice sentiment
It's a definite
The only prerequisite is the eloquent:
Take a breath.

"I'll show you, you (insert word that I'm probably not allowed to publish here)"

These were the words my step-dad gave to me and my younger brother when we were kids playing basketball. It was a mantra to remember in those games when we felt the ref wasn't calling it fair, our teammates were being losers, or when our coach wasn't giving us a fair go. We'd complain or whinge after the game and our step-dad would just tell us to show them. None of this *"try your best and just have fun!"* business.

Show them what exactly? Resilience. Never say die attitude. Determination. Basically, what our step-dad was saying was this: if you really care about the game so much, then go all the way. *"Don't give up just because things aren't going your way!"*

Those words came back to me one chilly, Wednesday night during a basketball game. I used to play for a social team with some mates. During this one night we were involved in a brutal, physical, hard-fought game that went down to the wire. After building a solid lead in the first half, we began to tire and run out of steam and the other team began knocking down three pointers all over us (in layman speak, we were getting our butts handed to us on a platter, and they were doing it with style). By the end of the third quarter, the other team was up by eight points.

I thought it was game over. Even though there was still the final ten minute quarter left to play, the other team had the momentum and we were run ragged. My legs tightened up and it felt as if my feet were glued to the floor. I looked at my teammates, I looked at the opposing team, I saw their star player grinning like a Cheshire cat. I'll show you...

Something special transpired over the next ten minutes. It was as if the whole team thought the same thing as me: we're not going down without a fight! Suddenly, concrete legs sprang to life, we were moving with grace and speed, hounding them on defence, outrunning them on offence. An eight point deficit turned into a one point lead. The final buzzer sounded and we looked up at a scoreboard that read 53-53. A draw. Even though we didn't come away with the win, there was still a level of satisfaction with our effort in the fourth quarter.

My point is not about the theatrics and drama of competitive sport; but that the old cliché of hard work and determination is so true. Sadly, they're qualities that are too easily relegated to sports or competition. After the game I was exhausted, battered and bruised; I pushed myself until that final buzzer (as did all my teammates). But I had to ask myself the question: I'm willing to push myself so hard for a game, do I give everything in my life this sort of effort?

Admittedly, no. That level of determination doesn't extend to all areas of my life. If I put that sort of effort into my study, my work, my relationships, my faith..... These are the hardest battles in my life but how often do I just cruise through them? My relationships and my faith are the most important, most treasured things in my life - should I not be as determined for these as I am a basketball game?

As a young person too often I'm confronted with the messages like *"don't care/don't stand out/don't worry"*. Too often I'm told to just fit in. But why fit in when you were made to stand out? What my step-dad was teaching me as a kid was to care enough about my life to do something with it. Society would say to me *"why care so much?"* Well, turns out at the end of our game on Wednesday night the scoreboard was wrong. It should have read: 52-51. Guess we showed them.

REFLECTIONS

Determination

Still

POEMS

I find myself always moving
Always thinking
Always doing
My life has become about verb - ing
Filling each day with as many doing words as I can
To the point where the success of each day is measured
By the number of activities ending in I - N - G
Don't get me wrong, I do see the importance
In living a life full of significant moments
Alas, should every moment be filled with so much significance
That such a life becomes a significant hindrance?
See, I summited a mountain
But my mind was clouded
By mountains of paperwork
And the amount of ink required to sign them.
I delved into a tropical rainforest
Immersed myself in this billabong bliss
But there was a persisting, building amount of bank-related interest
Building like a rainforest mist
Seeping into my mind
Twisting and distorting my perception of time
Until I can only perceive there is no time left
Then begins the stress
What was meant to be an escape
Left me bent up in a powerless state
Because even away from it all
To stop "doing" would be a waste.
We've become a resume'-ic society
Obsessed with measuring sticks and valuing life
By what you've done, said or seen
Your list of accomplishments

Describes the sort of person you've been.
Education will give you knowledge
Employment will give you skills
Travel will give you unforgettable moments
But to find real value I challenge you to be still
For just a moment
For when you're still
That's when you hear you're breathing
Your lungs expanding and contracting
Your heart beating
And you sense that pulse thumping
Is the reason you sleep in a bed and not in a grave.
All those experiences may add value to your existence
But we have to remember the only objective value
That humanity has been given
Is the gift of living.
In the stillness we're reminded
That it's being, not doing
Which supplies us with the life blood
To keep seeking, adventuring and learning
And being.
Life is an adventure, the world must be discovered
But as we uncover the very mysteries by which we're enveloped
Let's remember to take time to recover.
I AM regardless of what I do, done or will do
And as I continue to do
I remember to be aware
Aware of the very precious gift
Of firstly being able to live.
You can climb mountains, traverse oceans
Even stand at the edge of creation
Peer over the abyss where an end suddenly begins,
But that means nothing
Absolutely nothing
If you don't stop to breath it in.

REFLECTIONS

Sense

Have you ever had that experience where something makes no sense whatsoever, yet it makes complete sense to go ahead and do it anyway? Let me explain. A couple of years ago I returned to study after a gap year that lasted five years. So it was that one morning I found myself with my head buried in the books, my fingers furiously pounding the keys on my keyboard as I powered my way through the dense forest of a Certificate IV.

My motivation was a free afternoon. I'd decided that if I could get my work done I could go down to the beach and have some desperately needed chill time. Cue the ominous grey clouds. As the rain clouds came sweeping in, so did a lack of motivation and I found that I wasn't motivated about studying or going to the beach. Mood killed. By the time I got my work done it had started raining and it didn't look like letting up anytime soon. Defs not beach weather.

So what did I do? I went anyway.

By the time I'd driven down there my right arm was noticeably more tan than my left, my petrol tank was significantly lower than when I started and the beach was closed. So I sat there and just watched. I admired the melancholic way the heavy grey clouds hugged the surging waters. It was mesmerising. Nothing could draw my attention away, not even the deliriously giggly tourist group or the strange, lonely man scouring the beach with his metal detector. As I sat there, pelted by piercing rain and swept up in the chilling wind it made perfect sense for me to be there.

I want my life to make sense. Reason makes sense to me. Driving into the middle of a storm (ok, so it was only a bit of rain) to sit on a closed beach, being pelted by rain and wind doesn't make sense to me. But things don't always make sense in God's plan. Sometimes I need to get away from what makes sense to me (as discomfoting and unsettling as that is for me) to be where I actually need to be: where God wants me to be. It can be messy, but God calls the whole person - even the messy, stormy, hidden, uncomfortable, unsorted parts. A bit like driving to the beach on a wet, windy day.

**SOMETIMES IN LIFE THINGS
DON'T MAKE SENSE, BUT I BET IT
MAKES SENSE TO GOD. THE KEY,
I THINK, IS TO NOT BE AFRAID
TO SEEK MEANING EVEN IN THE
CLOUDY PLACES OF OUR LIVES.**

Missed the Train

POEMS

You're running hard
Arms and legs pumping
Heart jumping
Lungs bursting out of your chest
There's no time to rest!
You're testing the limits
Sucking in each breath
Gasping for air
Grasping the rail as you summit the stairs
Arriving at your platform only to find
It's been 30 seconds since your train was there
Missed it
You were late
Or perhaps delayed
Dismayed
Thinking of all the things you'd trade
Just to have made that train
See, this wasn't just any train
Transporting you from A to B
This carriage would have carried you
To your destiny
You missed it
And what was meant to be will never be
You sense your dreams slip away
In the slipstreams of a departed train

The platform is barren and abandoned
Its painfully obvious you stand alone
And you don't have any change to use the pay phone
You try to shift the blame
On all the people who got in your way
Refusing to admit that perhaps they were put in your way
Because you'd then have to admit the train you just missed
Was the wrong train
And that your desired destiny was a fallacy
No, that train of thought requires too much effort and humility
Its far easier to miss that train
And stand on the platform of your own egotistical brain
And project your hurts and regrets
On everything and everyone else in the world that could possibly stand in
your way.
When your angry seething subsides
You realise there might be a bus line
That you could ride to your destiny
But that line of thought requires realignment
Consignment to a different schedule
And confinement to a different vessel
Which all in all doesn't seem worth it
For a destiny perceived in your world of thinking
So you return to that thought
What if I made up that destiny?
How, in the midst of this missing-ness
Do I draw a sense of meaning?
Surely this is not meaning-less
Unless, the meaning is outside of my own head
So your search for meaning leads you outside of your own mind
You open your eyes
And realise
That the platform is fully occupied
And rolling to the platform
Is your true destiny's ride.

A couple of years ago we had extreme weather in Queensland. We were swamped with flooding rains and swept up in high-speed winds. The results were disastrous for many, with many homes being destroyed.

In suburban Brisbane we faced mass power outages. Now obviously having no electricity means many household appliances simply shut down: fridges, freezers, washing machines, etc. For a young person like myself this is devastating: I couldn't watch television, couldn't play Halo on the xbox and couldn't use my phone or computer once their batteries ran flat which meant I couldn't access facebook (GASP!)

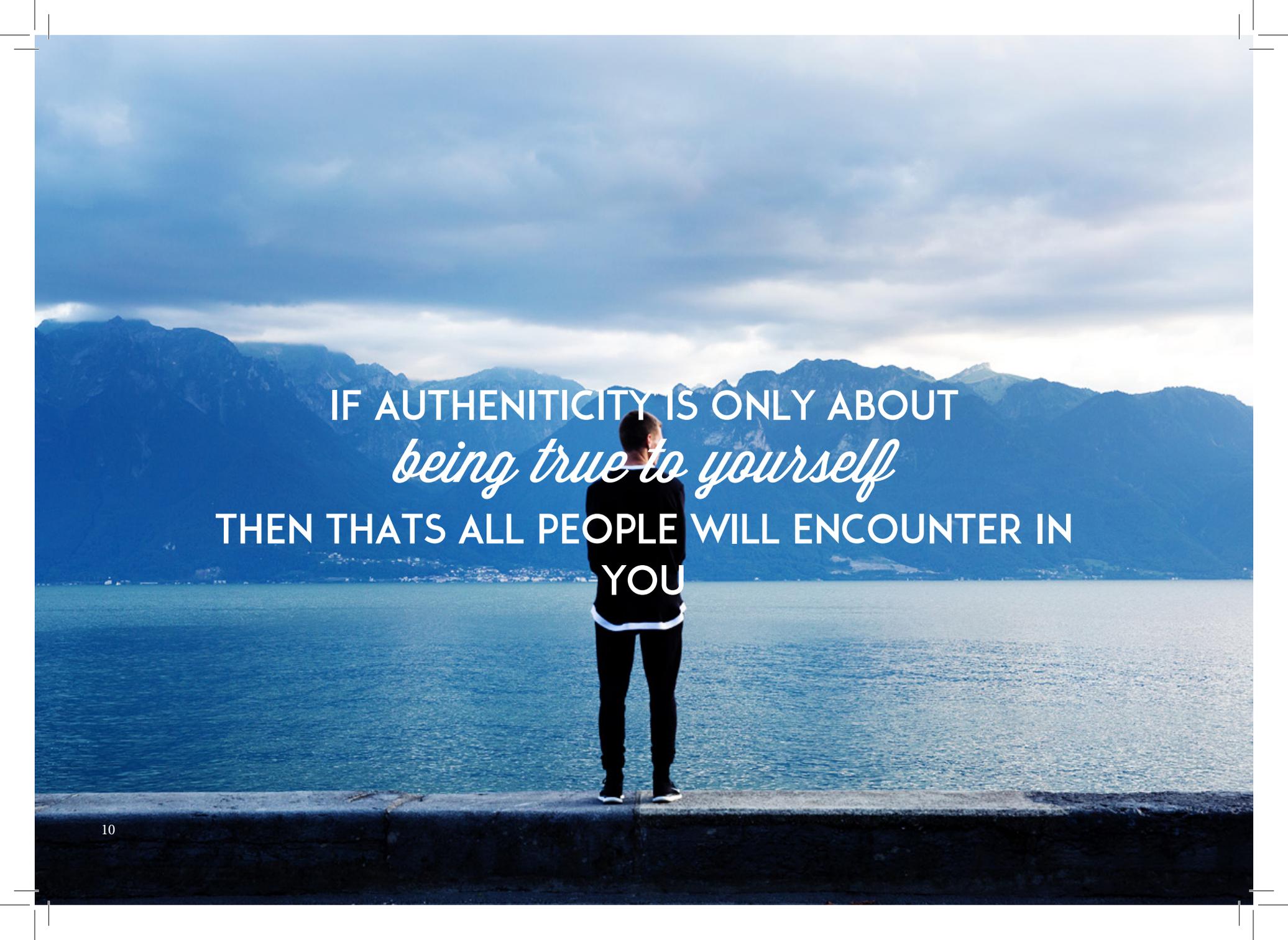
It felt like the apocalypse! I had no access to the rest of the world, I was deprived of connection with the rest of humanity. It made me realise how much I take for granted access to technology and social networks. It's the reality of the world we belong to: we have instant connection to the world via facebook, twitter, smart phones and/or iphones.

It's often said that Gen Y and Gen Z lack social skills because we are only adept at facebooking or tweeting, but what our generations have achieved is limitless networking with the rest of the world. Our generation is about connections -just take a look at how many facebook "friends" you have and how many you actually would connect with on a regular basis. It's not a bad thing, but it's important to recognise that young people want to belong to something; be it a social network, or a band, or a sports team, anything: if you're like me you want to feel like your existence means something to others.

That is what vocation is all about: connection with God and with the Church community. You ARE meant for something, you're called to that connection with God and with the world. So next time you log into facebook, let it inspire you to think about how you want to connect with God and with the world - or how God might be calling you to connect.

Disconnec- tion

POEMS



IF AUTHENTICITY IS ONLY ABOUT
being true to yourself
THEN THATS ALL PEOPLE WILL ENCOUNTER IN
YOU

REFLECTIONS

Authenticity

When I was in high school I was the hip-hopping, basketballing, wannabe gangsta rapper. I was passionate about being true to that image. You could say in high school, I was like Will Smith's character from the early 90's.

I didn't look exactly like the Fresh Prince of Bel Air, but I did wear the baggy clothes, listen to hip hop music and walk around constantly dribbling a basketball. Fast forward seven years to now and my image is drastically different. My clothing has changed, my music tastes have sophisticated and I only occasionally walk around with a basketball - I'm having an identity crisis!

Ok, so maybe I'm over dramatising a little bit, but it's a question I've been reflecting on: what does it mean to be authentic? Authenticity is a word that gets thrown around a lot, but I don't think we really understand what it means. Is authenticity about staying true to who you are and ignoring what other people suggest? Is it about sticking to your guns? While "being true to yourself" and "sticking to your guns" are nice sentiments, I think these are narrow definitions of authenticity.

I think authenticity is actually about being true to the journey God calls us to.

Along my faith journey I encountered God in others; and it made me question: what do people encounter in me? In high school I think people encountered a hip-hopping, basketballing, wannabe gangsta rapper, who had no interest in the way other people did things. I don't think my school friends encountered God in me. I was authentic to my personality, but not authentic to my faith - which I value more than any of my likes or interests.

I guess what I'm getting at here is that we all have personalities, we all have quirks, we all have labels which we use to define our identity. These things aren't necessarily bad; but they can be a distraction or a barrier to people encountering God in you. If authenticity is only about being true to yourself, then that's all people will ever encounter in you.

I've kept this pretty surface level so far, but let's go a bit deeper. If we look at our church and our world and we're brutally honest, then we see there's still a lot of discrimination and prejudice out there, there are factions and cliques, there is a lot of unjustified hurt. We're at a point in history when technology and resources have never been so sophisticated, yet people are still suffering in our world - it's absurd! Are we as Christians responding to God's call?

If we're going to talk about being "authentic in our faith" or being "authentic Christians", then we need to get real about that. Authenticity needs to translate practically into our daily lives. I think what it comes down to is we all need to act on the question: how am I being God in my school/workplace/family/wherever?

When we reflect on that question honestly then we might have to make some changes in ourselves. That doesn't mean we're not being authentic to ourselves. But it does mean we begin to live more for others; and I think that is what authenticity is all about.

Oxygen

POEMS

I feel like our society is taking oxygen for granted
We've become so disenchanted with guaranteeing our finances
That, per chance we've
Become more than a little bit distracted.
I'm getting the sense that dollars and cents
Represent a greater percentage of our mental content
To the extent that we're discontent
With a minimalist maximum spend.
If you ask me I think we need to get back to valuing existence
By the way in which our lungs expand and contract with some level of consistency
I mean, in the instance that they should resist this process
Well, you won't have to keep worrying about your finances.
I had an asthma attack once and it was the closest I got to suffocating
I was fading fast, my lungs betraying my trust
In my head I was debating whether Heaven or Hell would await me
And whether I was satisfied that in the end a soccer game would take me away!
That feeling, that most dire needing, I will never forget
It was the point that I realised my life was under constant threat
Of being repossessed because of my building debts
There was so much I could give to life but it was being withheld
Held in the selfish recesses of my head
Where it would never escape lest I should experience regret.
Ah, regret!
So many experiences forgone because of one, frightful word
It deceives us to think that any risk, great or small, is absurd

That the surest guarantee of survival is to remain within the herd
Straying away simply attracts labels: weird, strange, anti-social, nerd.
But what if the herd has got it all confused?
What if the sense of "living" has been abused
Or infused with unimaginative amusement
Diffused or, dare I say, completely removed?
Because I look around and see a whole bunch of hustle and bustle
The suits and the ties and the phones of the morning business shuffle
The over-the-top concern and fuss with working out muscles
And the complete disengagement of society, like we're in individual bubbles.
These things aren't bad in themselves
Sure, we need money to provide food and shelter
We need to ensure our bodies health
But...
Shouldn't our priority be breathing?
Start with that and then move to feeling
The feel of the breeze on your skin
Then let your eyes be opened
See, really see, the awaiting grandeur of creation
And every now and then screw your routine, it's overrated
Go sit on the beach, on the edge of a cliff, take an hour long vacation
And realise there's more to life
Than the guarantees of death and taxation.
All we need to do to exist is eat, drink, breath, sleep
But we can do so much more if we would just dig deep
If we would laugh til our sides split, or weep rivers down our cheeks
If we would steep ourselves in the sweet "how's" and "why's"
Striding forwards into wisdom with giant leaps.
You owe it to God, to this world and to yourself
To be fully immersed, engaged and even overwhelmed
Not by paperwork, bills, or small printed conditions and terms
but by the thrills of living beyond the cards you've been dealt.
There is more, always more to be experienced
So get desperate
Because unless you yearn for more, life will always be stagnant
So stop taking your oxygen supply for granted.

REFLECTIONS

Heroes

My favourite superhero of all time is Batman. Unlike other pumped up, freakishly strong, spandex wearing heroes; Batman's heroics seemed attainable to me, a mere mortal. Plus, he had a cool car, cool gadgets and a cool costume. I wanted to be Batman.

Have you ever seen Batman and I in the same room? Didn't think so.

As kids we have those heroes or role models that we look up to and emulate. Whether they were real or fictional, we would copy their every move. Often when we grow up we can lose this sense of admiration: our heroes fall, or we grow disillusioned with their limitations (or our own limitations).

If we lose our heroes, where does our inspiration come from? Without heroes how do we develop a sense of daring? Can you gain the inspiration to challenge your limits if you don't look up to someone who is stretching their limits?

Heroes are necessary. In fact, heroes are crucial. When I was 16 I was a young man, fresh in my faith and trying to figure out what it meant to be a man and a Christian. Then I met someone who inspired me greatly. He was a man who was a little bit older than me, further along the journey, a man who had discovered his vocation and was living it faithfully. He was someone I could look up to, someone I wanted to be like when I grew up. He took me under his wing, mentored me and taught me how to follow God. He gave me opportunities to grow and learn. He was my mentor and hero, a sort of "Holy Batman". Seven years later I find myself in that man's shoes. Though I'm still seeking my vocation, I'm in a position where I now walk with others as they seek God.

We need mentors and heroes if we want to figure out where God is calling us. We need older role models to show us the ropes, to share their wisdom and to give us the courage to test our boundaries. My advice to young people is think about where you want to be in the next ten years, find someone like that and follow them. For those a little bit further along the journey, make yourself available as a hero or mentor.

Heroes don't always wear costumes and masks or have super cool gadgets, but there are men and women around you right now who are writing a far more epic script than any superhero movie. Be inspired.

**THERE ARE MEN AND WOMEN
AROUND YOU RIGHT NOW WHO
ARE WRITING A FAR MORE EPIC
SCRIPT THAN ANY SUPERHERO
MOVIE. BE INSPIRED.**

Laziness

POEMS

Sometimes, I just get so lethargic
And I wish I could say I try to get over it
But the reality is I get so lazy
And it sounds a bit crazy but
Sometimes I just stay there because its so damn easy.
Please, don't judge me
I'm trying to change trust me
But change is hard when this couch is so comfy
Couch? Heck I mean bed: I only get to the couch if I'm lucky!
Besides, why should I try?
When my phone has the ability to run my life:
Calling, texting, facebooking and selfies
Emails, apps, bank accounts, pizza delivery
Movement isn't even necessary
My iPhone has the capability to perform all of my activities
See, this McDonald's mentality,
This Kentucky Fried mid-life crisis consumes me
Like a cheeseburger with extra meat and cheese
Driving me further and further, still I'm never pleased
And it never ceases
To decrease
The amount of energy I have to unleash
Until I'm tethered here like a dog on a leash
Tied up until I get my next hot and greasy feed.
What was once a convenience has turned into a need

Though my hunger is satisfied, I still need to feed my greed.
Greed
Its not ambition
Its ambition lacking nutrition
Ambition lacking motivation
Its ambition that has become stationary
Because I'm not ashamed to pay for delivery.
So you see, I'm a slave to lethargy
And really lethargy is just a big word for "easy"
This "easy" world we live in with ads so sleazy
That I feel greasy every time I turn on my t.v.
It feels sleazy because I feel like I'm cheating on life
Because I'm living through my stomach and my eyes
Consuming cheap food and cheap thrills until I've gratified my mind
Gratified now, but really I'm cheating myself out of time
"Satisfied" now, but it won't count by the time I die.
My stomach may be full
But the whole of my soul is a deep, voided hole
Wholly shunted while I'm hunting for likes on my Facebook wall
I've stunted my growth into a fulfilled life while I've lusted after the Fall
You'd think I'd have learned my lesson
I've even read the lesson plan but still I'm indulging
Indulging my cravings for easy options
Still not satisfied with degrading and gorging
Still not moving, yet I gorge on
My muscle memory has memorised the fibres of my reclining throne
And I've realised I don't even need my eyes to use my phone
Which means I'm blind to the consumerism to which I have succumbed
This is what I've become.
Yet I question even that, because by definition to become you must have gone
And I haven't left this throne since I was young
When I got a Nintendo 64 and grew addicted to James Bond
Goldeneye, the ultimate workout for thumbs

I was firing animated guns
But I might as well have been shooting myself in the lungs
Because breathing real air was no longer fun.
Just hook me up to my iPhone if I need life support
I mean, it contains my whole life, all I'd need is a chord
According to Siri one could be bought
It's not like Apple hasn't already bought my life out
I haven't fought back, perhaps I ought?
Perhaps I should seek more territory than my bed, my couch
My bedroom, my house
Perhaps I should interface with more than my keypad
My keyboard, my controller, my mouse
Perhaps I should face up to my facebook friends - is that even allowed?
Perhaps living life would make me more than this lazy, disengaged coward.
Parody and satire aside, this is what is at stake:
A generation that is more inclined to "face up" in cyberspace
And laced with that is a fear of mistakes

**A GENERATION THAT IS MORE
INCLINED TO "FACE UP" IN
CYBERSPACE
AND LACED WITH THAT IS A
FEAR OF MISTAKES**

A fear of becoming disgraced
So strong that we've misplaced a sense of adventure and replaced it with
Laziness
Sheer, unadulterated, indulging bliss
The only mountaintops we see are at the top of plates
And on National Geographic
And that's it.
That's all you'll ever amount to.
Even though you were bound to
Conquer mountains and valleys
Have your wind swept by gail force storms
And dance through graffitied alleys
To risk rabies feeding dancing monkeys
To risk falling in love singing lullabies to babies
To charge and leap and bound and get sweaty
To get stains on white clothes eating home-made spaghetti
Washing those clothes and getting sunburnt hanging them out to dry
Not knowing how things will turn out but still giving it a try
You could risk giving a crap about how amazing your world could be
If you entered that world in more ways than posts, pics and tweets
If you engaged reality
Confronted the atrocity of mediocrity
And showed your soul just how awesome life can be.
And maybe, just maybe
This might sound a little bit crazy
But these are just a few of the ways
You could attempt to not be so lazy.

Does my butt look big in this?

This semester at uni I'm studying Old Testament Narratives. I've always had a head for literature, reading, writing, for story; and there's something about that word narrative that really captivates me. "Your life is a story" is my throw away vocation/life-journey line; but actually there's something profound about this definition.

1. A NARRATIVE IS AN "ACCOUNT OF CONNECTED EVENTS; A STORY..."

That seems pretty straightforward and obvious, but substitute "narrative" with words like "life", "vocation" or "faith-journey". Sometimes the connections between events in our lives aren't that obvious, it might take some prayer, counselling, mentoring or time to join the dots. Establishing those connections and the story that they tell will give flesh to your understanding of your life and your place in the world and the Church.

2. NARRATIVE IS "THE NARRATED PART" OF A STORY.

A story has an implied narrator. The big question is who is your narrator? If the answer is God, how do you follow the story he sets out before you? How do you respond to the story line, the plot and the other characters? Ultimately the overarching plot belongs to the Narrator, are we listening and aware to the story God is telling?

3. NARRATIVE IS THE "ART OF TELLING STORIES."

Your story and the way it becomes enveloped into the greater story of Creation isn't meant to be kept to yourself. Your life has been impacted by stories artfully lived, whether by your parents, a friend, a teacher or a random by-passer. How do we "artfully live our stories"?

4. NARRATIVE INVOLVES REFLECTING OR CONFORMING "TO AN OVERARCHING SET OF AIMS AND VALUES."

Reflect and conform, listen and respond, discern and decide: the relationship between us and our God is the call that God places on our lives. That call at it's most basic (yet grand) level is to know, love and proclaim God. As we live that storyline the plot escalates as we discover the state of life God calls us to (i.e. ordained, single, married or consecrated life). As we journey through the chapters in our lives we discover vocations within our vocation (e.g. to a ministry, service or an occupation).

We're connected to something much bigger, broader, further and deeper than just our own plot. When we plot our own lives to become part of the greater story of the whole of Creation, not only will meaning seep off of the pages of our own life, but it will also seep into the stories of those around us. "Once upon a time" and "happily ever after" might be corny and cheesy, so let's focus instead on story lines like "for God so loved the world", "He came so we might have life to the full" and "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Slow Dancing

POEMS

I sweep her up into my arms
Sweep her on to the dance floor
And we both let ourselves get swept
Into the movings of the music
But my partner is not human
No, she is far more amusing
And far more consuming
She is no ordinary woman
She is time.
Time's fingers tickle up my back
Tracing my spine until it finds
That tender spot
There she caresses my inhibitions
Releasing my ambitions

Teasing my superstitions
Until I'm left wishing for more
Always more, never enough
Never too much
Always left wanting
That time would keep ticking
Wishing that clock
Would give me just one more tock
But as each time starts
So each moment stops
Locked away in my memory
Remembered fondly, never lost.
I don't want to gloss over another dance
I want to see the whole of Time, not just a glance
Hear this song, it's our slow jam
You have my attention, give me hold of your hands
If this life were an hourglass
I want to dive into the sand
Take hold of each and every grain
And just sway
Slow, steady, rhythmically
I'd stroke each second lovingly
My attention completely and unwaveringly devoted
To this moment
From now on in
I won't lose another second
Because I realise the blessing
Of this slow dance with Time.

Proverbs

POEMS

Darkness is the absence of light
Negativity is the choice to see with narrow sight
You can't judge the war based on one lost fight
Foresight is knowing that daylight doesn't just precede
But succeeds the night
Wisdom is knowing that three lefts still make a right
It's the journey that adds value to where you finally arrive
Experience is not just about how hard you've tried
But how hard you've learned
And taking what you've heard
Discern that grace is received
But never earned
A tree can become a chair
A rock, the foundation of a house
So imagine how much more you could be
If you ran more than just your mouth
Talk is cheap, integrity is priceless
Your words are empty if the rest of you is lifeless
Take hold of your existence
Your destiny is at your fingertips
But don't hold to it so tightly that it slips straight from your grip

Acknowledge that you are weak
And thus will you discover your strength
That your ability to shape the world
Is not a given but a grace
The greatest gift is to never take
Simply to give and never receive
Because everything you brought when you came
Is all you'll take when you leave
Possessions are the great dictators of our time
Trying to make spectators of our minds
Stating that your needs are not as important as mine
Gravitating our hearts towards "follows" and "likes"
Until our world slowly rotates around the "I"
But it's in the other where we find what is truly precious:
The opportunity to not be so damn selfish
If we each acted breathlessly
Recklessly gracious
There would be no need to be so suspiciously cautious
Take this encouragement:
Don't just point to it
But actually be the difference
It's when philosophy becomes actuality
That reality is untwisted.

REFLECTIONS

In God's Time

When I discerned God wasn't calling me to be a priest and I withdrew from formation at the seminary, I'd established a plan for my life. My top priority was finding a wife. ASAP! Over the course of the next three years I found myself volunteering as a youth minister, travelling around Australia and overseas, then beginning a new job and resuming studies - pretty much everything but dating. My plan had gone out the window.

Have you ever had the experience of things not going to plan? Let me clarify: have you ever had the experience of things not going according to your plans? And I'm not talking just about petty stuff; but things like losing loved ones, missing out on a job opportunity, relationships breaking down, failing subjects at school or uni, getting a serious sporting injury - things that shoot down our dreams.

Most of us can probably name at least one moment in our lives where what we had planned was obviously never going to come to fruition. That moment can be filled with pain, frustration, confusion, and if you're anything like me, you feel like yelling out to God "WHAT THE HECK???"

It might seem childish to blame God when things go wrong but let's be real, sometimes life can feel unjust; and when life begins to go a different direction it can be a painful experience letting go of all the things we had come to expect. Sometimes it feels like the only thing we can do is get angry at God.

I think too often the Christian life is portrayed as the "I found God in my life and I lived happily ever after" story. But God never promised us happy ever after. God never promised an instant fix. Give us this day our daily bread does not mean "spoon feed me graces daily!"

The Christian life is about choice: the choice to know, love and serve God when its easy and when its hard. As hard as it is sometimes, the greatest grace we have in the face of the most challenging and painful circumstances is to keep hoping and trusting in God.

When I left the seminary I thought I had life all figured out - and I let everybody know about it too. I thought I knew exactly what God was calling me to do. My experience over the last three years was exactly the opposite: I had no idea where I was going or where God was calling me. At times it was painful, because it felt like I didn't know God anymore.

IS IT OK TO STRUGGLE WITH FAITH?

Is it ok to struggle with faith? Absolutely! Even Jesus struggled: he had times of confusion, times of struggle, times of frustration, times of anger and even agonised with the Father before he faced his Passion. Jesus showed us that faith isn't about some soft and fluffy, feel good fairy tale. He showed us that faith is about the real and difficult struggle to hope in God in all situations.

As I once told my younger brother: my faith doesn't magically transform my life into a fairy tale, but it does give me something I can lean on and hope in when things get tough, confusing or challenging. And really, that's what vocation is about. We can get so caught up on "priesthood" or "marriage" or "religious life" or even "occupation/career" and how we're meant to figure that out.

But ultimately what vocation is about is relationship with God. And I mean a real relationship, not this "I heart Jesus" rubbish, but a relationship where we're honest with ourself and God; that relationship is all that matters. Plans, careers, states of life - they can all go out the window; because an authentic relationship with God brings meaning even to the most challenging of situations.

"Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you: therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice: blessed are all those who wait for him." (Isaiah 30:18)

Who am I?

POEMS

Who am I?
I am the sum of my failures and successes
The pride of Nations overcoming their oppressors
I am a fiery and passionate message
That says if you want trouble, come mess with us.
I am devotion to an uninhibited lust
For significant existence
You can trust that in the midst of the bustle and rush
I will not be crushed.
Who am I?
I am movement, directed motion
Seeking improvement, spilling emotions
Unafraid of challenging notions
I was made to challenge generations
I'm contagious
You will read my writing in the history pages
Filling up empty spaces
Call it space jamming, I'm jamming your empty head space
With my slams
Because I am
Which means I be, I exist, I live this
Twisted existence with persistence
To make the most of it
I cannot be diminished
Or finished like a sentence
Let me Will Smith this

See, to this stale Air I'll bring the Freshness
Not buying into this Robotic existence
I'll Seven Pound my selfishness down
In my Pursuit of real Happiness
I'm not about to Switch that.

FACT:

{Breathing has no meaning unless you realise with each breath you breath in you receive meaning}.

**I BELIEVE GOD GIVES ME THE
OPPORTUNITY TO SEEK THAT
DEFINITION.
WHO AM I?**

I believe God gives me the opportunity to seek that definition.
Who am I?
I am the dawn soldier
With meaning in my hands and the morning sun on my shoulders
I am a son, I am a brother
And I bear the honour of honouring my father and mother.
Who am I?
I am a fear of regrets
Which may contribute to my lack of immediate sense
My lack of dollars and cents
But my gain of a greater sense of significance

Like Michael Jordan, never give up is in my veins
See, a high school coach once cut MJ
MJ said that's Bull, flew above the rim, won six rings
And proved that coach a fool.
Who am I?
I am nothing without God, my family, my history
My hopes and dreams, these are what define me
That's why you'll find
My family close to me heart
My heart worn on my sleeve
So that I am never apart
From that which I unwaveringly believe.
Who am I?
I am the son who benefits from the shedding
Of much blood, sweat and tears
I have hope for where I'm heading
Because I am done with living in the shadow of my fears.
Who am I?
Moulded from the earth and to the earth I shall return
That's why while I'm walking on this earth I'll make the most of my turn
Because something that I've learned
Is that you shouldn't wait for Heaven
When you can bring Heaven to earth.



A person wearing a blue hoodie is sitting in a field of white daisies with yellow centers. The scene is set at sunset, with a warm orange glow in the sky and dark silhouettes of mountains in the background. The person's face is partially obscured by the text.

THERE IS NO GREATER
AGONY THAN BEARING AN

Untold Story

INSIDE OF YOU

Maya Angelou

Untold Stories

When I was a child, my Grandmother and I would regularly visit the library, borrow a ton of books and we would spend hours together reading stories. I'm sure I frustrated my Grandmother though because often I wasn't content with just reading the stories, but telling many of my own stories as we went along!

Kids are funny like that, right? Between the ages of about 4-12 children seem to think that they must tell you everything, as if every story they have to tell contains crucial information for the rest of their existence and if they don't tell you they will spontaneously combust!

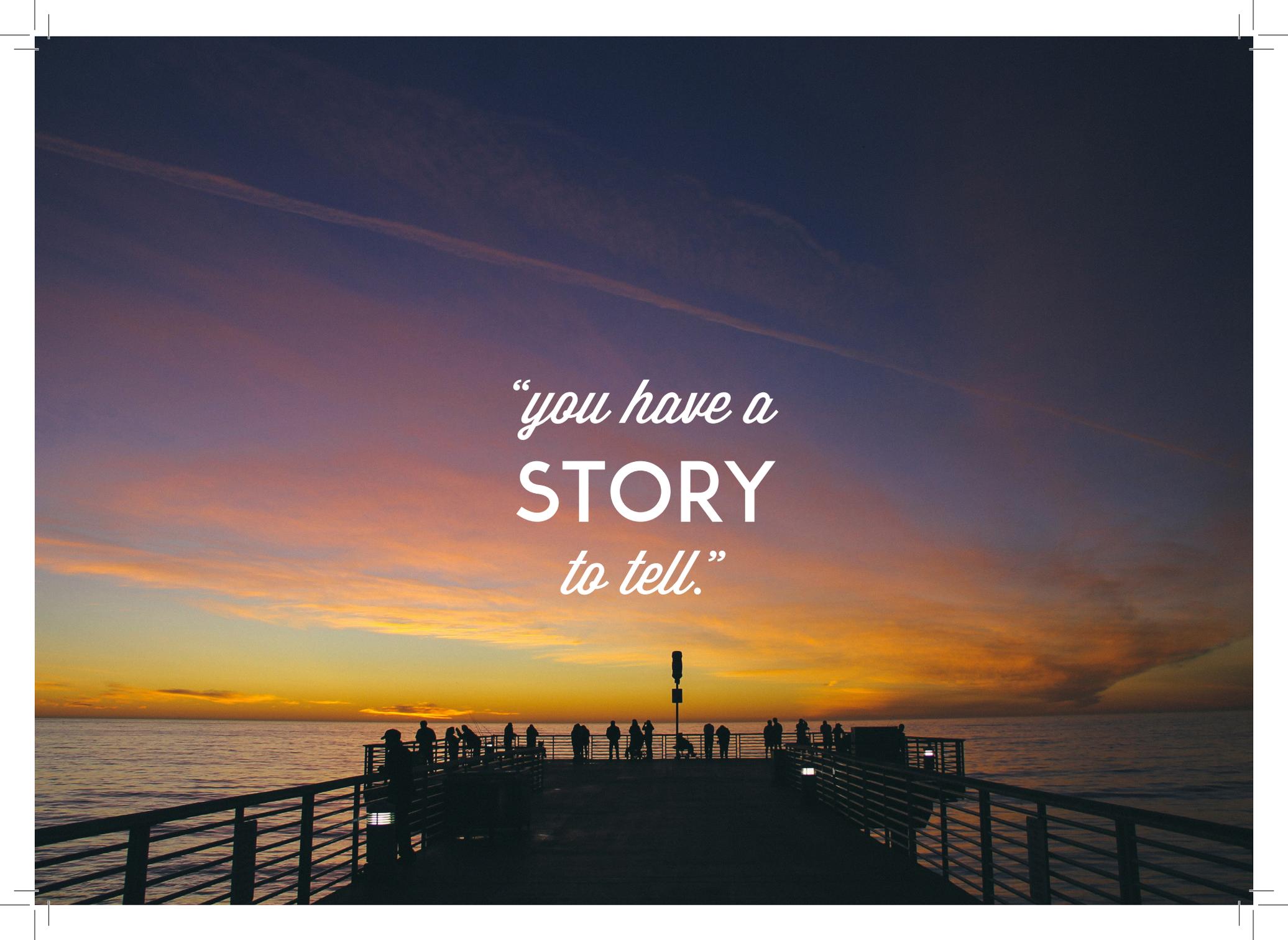
Somewhere along the line though, societal expectations choke out the imagination of story telling. Life becomes less about the narrative and more about checklists. My life over the last few years has become about a checklist: get a car, get a degree, get a girlfriend, travel, get a promotion; pretty much my life became about fleshing out my resume or list of achievements. But when you're confronted with decisions about where you're going next, tick boxes and achievements are little help. There needs to be a deeper consciousness of the story God is leading you through.

I often tell the story that when I went to the seminary to train to become a priest, I would feel an urging or a prompting to go a different direction in life. In faith-speak we'd say that it was the Holy Spirit leading me. But even that can sound a bit ambiguous, and it didn't really explain fully what was going on within me. Then I read the above quote from Maya Angelou, and I think it articulates what was going on in me. For me, as I underwent my formation and training for the priesthood, I had this sense from God that there was an untold story within me.

Let me make this very clear though: it wasn't about wanting to have a girlfriend, or wanting to do normal things like other 19/20 year olds, and it wasn't about needing to get more life experience before I became a priest; it was a calling to engage a story I needed to tell. That story included two years of youth ministry and now one and a half years with the Vocations office. I didn't go back to the seminary to continue my formation for priesthood (it's important to note that many men do leave and return later in life); but I can start to see how the pieces of my past fit together and it helps me to understand where I'm going in the future.

The whole "you have a story to tell" thing gets a bit old, I know. But whichever phrase you want to use - story, calling, destiny, purpose, life, whatever - you have it and its beautiful and powerful and unique; and you will never know it unless you engage in it. And leaving that story untold isn't just your loss; for God would use that story to impact on the world and on the Church. Don't leave your story untold, it is mysteriously necessary to the community of humanity.

**LEAVING THAT STORY UNTOLD
ISN'T JUST YOUR LOSS; FOR
GOD WOULD USE THAT STORY
TO IMPACT ON THE WORLD AND
ON THE CHURCH.**

A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sky is a mix of deep blue, purple, and orange. In the foreground, a wooden pier with a railing extends into the water. Several people are silhouetted against the bright sunset, standing on the pier. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

“you have a
STORY
to tell.”



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