

Good morning everybody!

Over the course of the next 30 minutes, I'd like to share with you the answers to four of the most perplexing questions that have permeated the hearts and minds of educators, philosophers and theologians since the dawn of time.

These four questions are:

Who am I?

Where did I come from?

Why am I here?

And **where** am I going when I'm finished?

(Pull out envelope which reads in big, bold letters '***THE ANSWERS***', open & read...)

And the answers **are** (DEEP BREATH):

Who am I? Doug Torkelson. Isn't that what we usually say when asked this?

Where did I come from? Oklahoma, where the wind comes sweeping down the plains...and spawns an occasional tornado. Why did they leave **that** out I wonder?

Why am I here? To tell my story, and unfortunately for you, you have to **suffer** through it!

Where am I going when I'm finished? Well, unless you all stone me to death with cell phones for heresy for what I am about to share, we'll all have lunch! And tomorrow, I'll head back to Tulsa!

Not what you were expecting? Well, hang around. I still have 29 more minutes so please here me out, and keep in mind that what I am about to share with you, I have found to be true for me. You may not agree with what I say, and I could be wrong.

I've had two 'Awakenings' in my journey, and in sharing them, I'll tell you **who** I thought I was in each, **where** I thought I came from, **why** I thought I was here, and **where** I thought I, and most everybody **else**, was going when we were finished.

I was born in 1960, or what the Chinese call *'The Year of the Rat*'. I was raised in a small conservative town by small conservative parents (my dad is only 5'6" and mom is a towering 4', 11" ... **and a half**). I had a seemingly normal childhood and a gentle Lutheran upbringing. We believed the bible, but we didn't run around the house quoting bible versus like other fanatical fundamentalist Christians. I chose that route later of my own accord.

Pre-Awakening

In 1975, at the age of 15, I started to medicate, dabbling with alcohol and diving into pot. Within a year I was at war with my parents and before I graduated from high school, I had been dragged through two treatment centers and was thrown out of the house at the age of 17. I was obviously hurting and trying to escape from pain. It was 30 years before I understood why...

My 1st Awakening

In the fall of 1978, when I was 18 and a full-blown pot-head, I began devouring the bible. A few weeks later, on a cold Minnesota night on December 23rd, I had a very real, tremendous experience with God. I was enveloped with a deep sense of acceptance, peace and love. I actually trembled with power and wanted to tell everybody about this experience that night. Later in the evening I learned, literally by opening the bible and letting it fall where it may, which happened upon John chapter 3, that I had been 'Born Again'! I was short on doctrine, but long on knowing

that I had been touched, loved and accepted by God. I knew that God wanted everybody to have this same experience, this same knowing of being loved and accepted that I had felt. This was what I now call my 1st Great Awakening. **Who** was I now? I didn't have a clue, to be honest. **Where** was I from? I didn't know, and it really didn't matter. **Why** was I here? I had no idea, but I did want everybody else to experience this! **Where** was I headed? What's with all the questions??? I was already in a state of **bliss**! There was nowhere I could go that would have been better than where I was right then, that night, in the loving arms of God.

Unfortunately, within a couple of weeks I slipped back into my old pattern of smoking pot. But eventually I met a wonderful fellowship of fired up spirit filled believers, you know the type: bible-toting, tongue-talking, rapture-ready saints, who prayed for me and helped me get back on track. I felt in some way called by God to teach and preach 'the gospel'. Wasn't that what I was supposed to do so others could share the same experience that I had? Shortly thereafter, I met my wife. We married, and within weeks we knew without a doubt we 'had the calling' to attend Rhema Bible Training Center, a charismatic, fundamentalist institution in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. We packed our bags and headed to Oklahoma to immerse ourselves in the word of God and to equip ourselves to go out and save the world!

Attending a fundamentalist institution was simultaneously one of the most exhilarating and **frustrating** experiences of my life. I was getting filled with 'the word

of faith' and the wonderful knowledge of scriptures. Learning to 'know with certainty' the will of God was empowering...and yet... I wasn't able to do the things I was told I could do. We believed the bible was the complete, absolute, infallible word of God, and the promises in the bible were as sure as God himself. This meant I had absolute power over the devil, demons, and the things of life such as poverty, sickness and even death! I could name and claim prosperity and healing. I could lay hands on the sick, and they would recover. I could cast demons out of people. I could even bring the dead back to life! There was however one little problem with all of this; I couldn't do any of these things, nor could my wife, nor could our friends, nor could anybody else we knew. The truth was, we couldn't even rebuke the cockroaches in our apartments. In fact, they seemed to be the ones blessed of the Lord for they were multiplying and taking dominion over us. **I was starting to live in a make believe dream world. I was falling asleep from the reality of the love that had touched me.**

Since I was a youth, I was taught to believe in Satan, evil, sin, and punishment. I believed that those who didn't believe exactly as I did were going to suffer in an eternal lake of fire. God loved them, but unless they accepted the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, where God '*poured out his wrath*' upon Jesus as atonement for our sins, their destiny was misery beyond their wildest nightmare.

Oh how my story had changed! Who was I now? I was an indoctrinated, somewhat judgmental, all-knowing, *'I've got God in a box,'* fundamentalist Christian. **Where did I come from? The kingdom of darkness...? **Why** was I here? To tell others that they too were born into sin, were by nature children of the devil, and deserved the punishment of God, but Jesus took this punishment for them and they could escape the lake of fire by accepting his sacrifice. **Where** was I going when I was finished here? Lucky for me, I was going to heaven, but for most of the people in the world, they were doomed to suffer in **hell forever**. And so, I had finally learned the '**Good News**' that I thought was what the world of 'lost souls' needed to hear.**

On the outside I was becoming a confident, knowledgeable man of God. But on the inside, I was becoming more wounded, insecure, confused and conflicted, but not aware of it. **I was falling further asleep, and afraid of waking up.**

Eventually, I began to question some of the doctrine I had learned, starting with, *'Did Jesus really suffer in hell when he was dead for three days?'* I researched the bible, and the answer was **no**. But this is what was taught by many of the mainstream fundamental churches and ministries. How could these well-versed, scholarly theologians be wrong? It also bothered me that nobody seemed to be really getting healed when Christians prayed for them. So I decided to reread the Gospels again as though I had no knowledge of them whatsoever and I was amazed. Virtually **everybody** Jesus prayed for was healed **instantly**, or as they went, or within the **same hour**. In fact, he really didn't even seem to pray for them. He just healed

them. I did notice that he was a man of great prayer. Why couldn't we heal like Jesus? As I shared this with others, it was as though I was a 'doubting Thomas'. How could I question 'the truth'? As time went by, I was becoming sad and lonely, as though walking through a dry desert, wondering, 'Where is God?'. One day while reading a book, something triggered a wave of emotions in me. Through my tears, I felt God gently impress upon me something like, '*You opened your heart, searched for the truth and listened. Thank you for persevering. This is your diploma.*' It was like I was a dehydrated camel gulping down cool water at a bottomless oasis in the desert. I felt like a little kid that had graduated from kindergarten, and I wept with gratitude and joy. I'll never forget that experience, as it taught me that no matter what, I must ultimately look to God to reveal the truth to me.

My experiences were compelling me to begin to question things that I had been taught and strongly believed. The seeds of the next phase of my spiritual journey had been sown, but where would they fall?

Wandering in the Wilderness

By the time I was 22, I was married, had two children, had graduated from a bible training school, and was anticipating a ministry. Who I **really** was running from, was an adult child from a dysfunctional family, and the symptoms were everywhere.

While my 'born again' experience, or '1st Great Awakening' as I now call it, was real, I was struggling in many areas of my life, including laziness, lust, fear and depression. My character defects were surfacing in several addictions, including religious addiction. Over time, I drifted away from the idea that I was going to be the

great teacher-evangelist that was going to save the world, and then sit at the left hand of God the Father (the right hand was already spoken for). I was frustrated with myself, but didn't realize it yet. I had issues, but I was good at projecting these issues onto others. This kept me from looking at both the source of my problems and the solutions to them...they both were within me.

Around 2002 I was disenchanted enough with the 'word church' doctrine that, to the dismay and protest of my wife, I quit going to church where we had attended for over 20 years. Some might think this is where I became open to deception, but I really believe this is where I started acknowledging my blindness and searching internally for the truth. For many years I had no longer believed in the 'prosperity and healing' doctrine, the pre-trib rapture, tithing, or other various 'name it and claim it' teachings that came with the 'word-of-faith' movement in the 1980s. My belief, or rather disbelief in much of this doctrine flew in the face of almost everybody I knew, including friends, family, and even my wife. I was beginning to smell ever-so-slightly of a backslider. Ever been there? This was a very difficult period for me since nobody I knew believed, or rather questioned or even doubted as I did. Three years later, one night sometime in 2005, I was sitting at my desk. I sat back, frustrated at the whole 'big church, tongue talking, bible-quoting, tithing, itching ear teaching' mentality and I said out loud, '*I wonder what **else** the church is teaching that's not true?*' I didn't realize then that I had uttered a genuine prayer that God heard and would answer.

The 2nd Awakening

In March of 2007, I came across the idea that God would eventually save everybody. A guy named L. Ray Smith had written lengthy documents showing where the bible really does teach that all will be saved. He was convincing and shined the light on the many scriptures that back this up! That night, I had another wonderful experience of love and I wept with joy and great relief in realizing that eventually, nobody would be left in hell forever, but all would eventually repent, accept Jesus as their Lord, and join us in heaven. I was ecstatic! Knowing what I know now, I suppose right then, in some way, I had become a 'Christian Universalist'. If Jesus' mission was to come and save the world, he would succeed! The price he paid on the cross would save everybody! And to answer everybody's question, 'yes', this includes Hitler and your mother-in-law! **I was beginning to wake up to the reality of the unconditional love of God for all.**

In May of 2008 I came across an excellent book called '*Destined for Salvation*' by Kalen Fristad, a renegade Methodist from the Midwest. I eventually bought 50 copies and gave them away to my Christian friends and relatives. I figured they would surely see the light as I did and rejoice with me in the ultimate salvation of all people! The collective response I got was incredible; incredibly silent and incredibly resistant. Of those that responded, the general consensus was that I had been deceived by Satan. Some even suggested I had better revert back to my original belief system, lest I lose my salvation! Can you imagine that? What do you

do if you've 'Lost your Salvation'? Put an ad in the *'Lost and Found'* section in the paper? Or maybe you go and dig in the Lost and Found box in the back of the church... *'Let's see, there's a mitten, a left shoe, a comb, a broken watch, SALVATION...oh wait that's Mrs Jones' salvation. Mrs Jones I found your salvation! Now, where did I put mine...*

Anyway, this was **not** what I expected, but I did **not** give up my belief in the unfailing, unending, unconditional love of God. This was the most **freeing** concept that I had **ever** experienced. Then I found some other books, such as Thomas Talbott's *'The Inescapable Love of God'*, and Gerry Beauchemin's *'Hope Beyond Hell'*, as well as a wonderful website - tentmakers.org, all of which, along with Kalen's book proved to me **convincingly** that the message of *'All Will Be Saved'* is indeed the truth and that it **is** taught in the bible. I was still struggling with the tone of certain scriptures, but I knew deep in my heart that in the end, mercy would triumph over judgment.

Although I was still slightly conflicted within, I was continuing to wake up to the eternal, unconditional, all-powerful love of God.

All the time this was going on, I was bottoming out in my personal life and marriage.

Codependency

In Kalen's book, he gives a good description of what codependency is, in part, calling it, *'an unhealthy perception of oneself, and relating to others in a detrimental way'*. He goes on to explain how codependency can thrive within a church

environment. This was the first time I heard the word 'codependency'. In the summer of 2008, our youngest son said that he was 'Codependent', and that to help him recover, he wanted us to read a book by Dr. Charles Whitfield called, '*Codependency: Healing the Human Condition*'. I read that book, among others, and it was like scales falling off of my eyes. I was beginning to see how many 'issues' I had, and how many of them stemmed originally from being verbally and physically abused as a child. I read other healing books, such as '*How to Really Love your Child*', '*Love is a Choice*', '*Healing the Child Within*' and the fictional book '*The Shack*'. In all of these books, I saw that the basic foundation of healing was the unconditional love and acceptance of God! In November 2008 I found a 12-step group in Tulsa called 'Codependents Anonymous' (or CoDA) and I have been going ever since. The only requirement for membership is '*A desire for healthy and loving relationships.*' Who doesn't want that? This has been one of the most healing things I have ever experienced. It would be wonderful if everyone found a 12 step group that they could relate to, whether it be Alcoholics Anonymous or Overeaters Anonymous or Nose-Pickers Anonymous and attend a few meetings to try it out.

The God of Whose Understanding?

In my prior experience with 12-step programs, I really didn't like their reference to '*the God of my understanding*'. I thought this was nonsense, since I **knew** that Jesus was God. The God of **MY** understanding, Jesus, was really God. I figured that if they were genuinely seeking the truth, they would eventually come to my truth.

In treatment center, when I was a teen, there was a counselor who told me that an Oak tree in his back yard was his Higher Power. I told him that if he didn't believe in Jesus, he was going to go to hell when he died! Here I was, not even a Christian really, telling other people how to believe in God, and boldly damning them if they dared to differ with me. Talk about a codependent! In CoDA, I learned over time that my idea of God had been very limited, judgmental and selfish, and that I was unconsciously putting myself in a 'greater than / less than' role over everybody else. I was 'special', because I was saved by believing a certain way. I was doubly special in that I was '*filled with the Holy Spirit*' and spoke in tongues. I was the few, the proud, the chosen. I...was...ignorant. One day in a CoDA meeting, I said I finally realized I had decided to 'fire God'. I could sense gasps. I still believed Jesus was God, but God the Father simply wasn't the hell-breathing angry mobster, **or monster**, I had made him out to be. I knew I hadn't actually fired God, but rather I had fired '*the God of **other people's** understanding*' that had been taught to me as a child and thereafter.

Courageous Pursuit of the Truth

As time went on I realized I was taking almost everything I had been taught, and believed about God, and was willing to place it on my internal sacrificial alter to be consumed. If it was of God, it would eventually rise again and come back to me. If it was not, I would let it burn to the ground, regardless of how painful it was to lose it. I felt as though there was a knife cutting and carving into my belief system. At times

this was very painful. I struggled with many bible passages, such as, “*If anyone comes to Me, and does not **hate** his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters and dog and cat and hamster, yes, and even his own turtle, he cannot be My disciple.*” (Luke 14:26 – Doug Torkelson translation). The idea that this was just, “*hating in comparison*” didn’t help. I simply could not believe that these were the words of Jesus. By now, I was sincerely beginning to question the infallibility of the bible, and if you have ever been there, done that and got the T-shirt, you know what I am talking about, and what it’s like to go through this scary, then painful, and finally liberating process.

Bring Forth the Butcher Knife

Of the several books on Codependency I read, I found Dr. Whitfield’s writings to be the most revealing, partly because he teaches more at times on the spiritual aspect of our nature and the healing process. He says plainly that we all came from God and we will all be going back to God, and that in realizing this during our healing process, we discover that all along we have been safe in the love of God. As a Christian Universalist, this was music to my ears. In his books, he sometimes quotes another book called ‘*A Course in Miracles*’. He said this was a somewhat advanced, modern-day holy book that contained many great spiritual truths that could help in our recovery from codependency and other issues once we were stabilized. I got this book and started reading it on January 6th, 2010. It is the most illuminating and nourishing spiritual book I have ever read, the culmination of my

quest for truth so far. I believe it contains answers for religious fundamentalists and atheists alike. In the 25+ years I spent reading the bible, my mind has never been put through a renewal process like reading this book is doing. Some people consider this book the 'Third Testament'. Why? The author is none other than Jesus, the living Christ. That's a bold statement! In the 1970's, a critically thinking, academic, Jewish woman, atheistic in her beliefs, kept hearing a voice saying, '*This is A Course in Miracles...please take notes...*' Eventually, and at times reluctantly, she began scribing these inspired words, just like many of the books of the bible came into being. Seven years and 1,300 pages later, it ended. In this book he, Jesus, says some of the most profound, mind-blowing things imaginable. One thing is that the world we perceive is not real, that this is all an illusion, as if we are dreaming, and that our own egos, which are false creations, have made up. He says that it would be impossible for God to even conceive of creating anything that would or could fall into a state of pain, suffering and death like we experience here. He says that he, Jesus, was the first to fully realize this. He **woke up** to the fact that he, along with everybody else, are actually by nature the perfect Sons and Daughters of God, and cannot be threatened. He knew that pain, suffering and death were illusions, and that life transcends the body. He proved this by his resurrection. In a nutshell, the Course teaches that God is love, love is all that is real, and being created by God and of God, we are like him and cannot be threatened. The biggest eye-opener to me was the idea that the '*sacrifice for sins*' is our own projection of our own shame-based, blame-others-first, false egos. Our false ego (or as the bible

calls it the carnal man, or carnal mind) has us believing that we have separated ourselves from God, that God is extremely angry about this, and therefore somebody (us or Jesus) has to be punished in order for God to be appeased. This, the Course teaches, is madness and simply is not true. God is love, and cannot be threatened.

The Fruit of the Awakening

Almost immediately upon my 2nd awakening, starting with Christian Universalism and eventually migrating to simple Universalism or ‘*All Are Already Saved*’ thinking, I began to have significant changes in how I perceived the world. After being a right-wing conservative militant Republican Christian fundamentalist for years, almost overnight, I became a pacifist and libertarian. If all of the people of the world are my brothers and sisters, I could never kill anyone. A Course in Miracles also taught me that the ‘Scarcity Principle’ (the idea that there is not enough love, joy, or things in life), was a lie and is part of the dream we all have concocted. This I saw was a major reason why we all seemed to be at war with one another. I’m not just talking America fighting other nations, but fighting amongst ourselves. One political party is against the other, the rich versus the poor, elites versus the common folk. I could relate to all of this. I was once a ‘Godly Republican’ resisting the ‘Evil Liberals’ who wanted to take my ‘hard-earned money’ and distribute it to those ‘lazy, good-for-nothing Democrats’. The nerve of them to say that I was a heartless, money-grabbing, tax-evading, war-mongering, earth-scorching Republican! In applying Course principals, I could see all of this as the rotten fruit of our egos on all sides of

the fence. We perceive 'physical needs' and think that there is not enough to go around, which is the scarcity principle in action, so we either try to hoard resources for ourselves (Republicans) or expect that others share with us what they have hoarded (Democrats). To me, many of the solutions by corporate, government, and religious institutions are the collective ego trying to enforce the idea that 'we all have needs' and 'by God they must be met...at the expense of somebody else!' Another thing the Course implies is that everybody chooses everything in their life, including the painful parts of their journey. The more I have learned, the more I tend to agree with this. To jump in and rescue others from their trials, most often would actually be robbing them of their own process of waking up. I know this from personal experience, through my own struggles, and the trials and tribulations of family members and friends alike. This is also taught in 12 step concepts such as '*Let go, let God.*'

Stop the Insanity

A Course in Miracles, gently yet forcefully, described my overall belief system as nothing short of insane. It says that we have dreamed up this whole nightmarish world, and think it is real when it is not. Have you seen the movie '*The Matrix*' and more recently the movie '*Inception*'? These movies are telling us something about the reality of the world behind the world we seem to live in. While we live in this dream, it does seem very real and at times painful, but from God's eternal perspective, beyond space and time, it is an illusion.

Doesn't this sound crazy? Does anybody else here feel like it's almost time for me to slip back into my straight-jacket, hop in the van and get back before they've realized I've escaped? This sure seemed nuts to me at first. Yet in many ways, it made sense, especially in the light of what I had been reading about Quantum Theory and other scientific and metaphysical theories, along with mystical concepts other religions have taught for thousands of years. The Apostle Paul even said, '*The things that are seen are made of things that are not seen.*' The **spirit** world is real and eternal. This world is not. As Jesus implied, the kingdom of heaven is not of this world, but is within you. It still sounded crazy, but as I read, listened and pondered, I have eventually concluded this: it is more insane, to me, to believe that an all-powerful, loving God would create a world where, through whatever story you want to believe, became infested and dominated with Satan, demons, sin, pain and death. What God creates is perfect and remains so. I am still, therefore, exactly as God created me, and so are you. We are all created by love, and are love at the core of our being. **That** is **who** we are.

Why are we here?

To save the planet? To conserve our resources? To redistribute goods so that everybody has enough? While these are charitable and worthy goals within the dream, the Course says repeatedly that our only real task here on earth is to accept the Atonement, or 'at-one-ment', for ourselves. Through this process, we see Christ, or holiness, or goodness within us and in everybody else, just like Jesus did.

From a place of both enlightenment and humility, we can start letting go of our ego and all of its baggage. We begin to release everybody and everything and every circumstance to God. We become, simply, the light of the world. Life becomes all about love and forgiveness, both for ourselves and others, and through that process we rediscover the love of God that has been there all along. Seeing the righteousness of all, in all, always, is what we ultimately seek and what we already know. It is the ancient truth that we are beginning to remember. It is the serenity we miss and long for.

In Summary

Let me answer the four questions I asked at the beginning, based on what I now believe, but this time, from an eternal time frame, and the perspective of 'us', instead of 'me'.

Who are we? All souls, **right now**, are the unified and perfect Child of God.

Where did we come from? The heart and mind of a loving God, who created us in His perfect image.

Why are we here? To awaken and remember who we are. This helps others awaken from the dream that we have separated from God and from each other, and as we wake up, we rediscover the joy and peace that are actually ours.

Where are we going? When the last one awakens, and everybody will wake up in their own time and their own way, God takes the last step, transforming us into a love-fest of One, which Jesus talked about and prayed for the night of his crucifixion.

This will be the second coming and the full revelation of Christ, where we shall remember and know, as we are known. When we all awaken, we will all be home.

I believe our individual paths can be summed up in two quotes from the Course. One is:

“The journey to God is merely the reawakening of the knowledge of where you are always, and what you are forever. It is a journey without distance to a goal that has never changed.”

...and the other is...

***‘...the opposite of love is fear, but what is all-encompassing can have no opposite. This course can therefore be summed up very simply in this way:
Nothing real can be threatened.
Nothing unreal exists.
Herein lies the peace of God.’***

That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it...for now. Thank you for listening.

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