

A dangerous life: Thoughts from a bi-polar Christian

By Steven Wright Clarkson

I can't promise that this testimony will flow perfectly or that all of it will have meaning to you. What I can promise is that it comes from the heart and that the good Lord is with me when I write it. Is this writing inspired? I believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. This story and narrative comes from a sinner to a world of sinners. We each look for understanding in unique ways and hopefully my story and some of what I write will reach you in a way God can use and that makes Him pleased. My writings are much like my music – the direction is meaningful, but I have a tendency to ramble a bit. Some of my favorite authors growing up used stream of consciousness writings – I hope that this narrative is less confusing than some of theirs, but still maintains a bit of spontaneity and freshness. I don't consider myself a great writer, but where there is heart, there is at least some truth. This book started as a dialog with my psychologist where I would spend an hour each week pondering my heart with her. It is also the result of many years dealing with a bi-polar disorder. I am writing it in the first person because these are experiences that I have personally gone through. I hope that you can identify with some of it and that it will somehow help those who maybe have shared similar experiences. I also don't mean to sound preachy – I am not in the pulpit and I don't want you to ever feel like I am speaking down to you – I am just sharing my views and experiences. My sincere hope is that this book somehow helps people that have had similar experiences with mental illness. I also hope it opens those who do not have ailments to the incredible sufferings of those with psychotic disorders. This book is very personal and is only my attempt to further God's kingdom in the way He sees fit to do so.

I am not writing this book to pump myself up or make me seem like anymore than what God made me. I am writing this book for the sole reason that it might pull someone, at least one person, out of the depths of despair. That it might help people with similar problems see a light at the end of the tunnel. For as much as I live a lot of my life in darkness, I see Jesus at the end of my line – and that will be the beginning (even now) of an eternal relationship, which will be perfect in Heaven. I am not trying to be too preachy, though I have some definite views on things. I am trying to write in a way that any reader can gain some insight into how a Christian with bi-polar disorder might perceive things. That bi-polar disorder warps things and can lead to a lot of mistrust between family and friends. I have had a really hard road and I don't see that my life is going to get too much easier – but maybe it will get fuller – maybe the more people I help, the more people will enter our King's Heaven. I know I am not the provider of Heavenly grace, but maybe, somehow, the body of Christ of which I am part of are messengers and conduits for God's great power.

I wanted to start by saying that I know that God doesn't need us. That he created us for his pleasure. As far as my meager mind can relate to a force as awesome as God, I know he made us in his image. So, as we get mad, he can get mad. As we feel elation and joy, he feels those same things. And as he walked the earth for 33 years, he knows how we experience these things first hand. I also think we are living in a time where many

believers in Christ and non-believers don't really believe in miracles or the awesome nature of our Creator. This is based on my circle of friends, some of whom have not accepted Christ yet.

We are living in an age of self-reliance – everything is “I” ordered – the Iphone, “my” space, ipod, etc. I compare this to the beginning of man – the Garden of Eden. Where Adam and Eve were in constant communication with God and where every experience had was shared with our Creator. Imagine a world where we were far less self reliant and much more dependent on our Savior Jesus – that's the world I like to contemplate. But this begs the question, is writing this book just another “I” themed adventure? By sharing my experiences, am I just doing the same thing that most of the world is doing now – wanting to be heard. Web sites like Facebook and Myspace are probably doing so well because we live in very different times with a number of new challenges. Most people want to be heard and share their stories, music and desires with the rest of the world. I guess my point would be that the Internet is not the best way to connect with people. If you look to Jesus Christ as an example, he positively affected the world one person at a time. Each person that He came into contact with dealt with him on a very personal level. I think it is very difficult to reach people and change people in a world full of text messaging and posted tidbits about yourself on Facebook. The real connection is when two people sit down face to face and look into each other's eyes and have a real conversation.

What is love? Besides our human minds and God-given hearts relating this word to Jesus and God himself, it's hard to grasp the meaning of the allusive idea of love. This is a fundamental question that probably few ever answer fully this side of Heaven. I remember after years of recovering from my psychotic break (and still living in some of my wound to this day), that I fully didn't understand love. During this time, I was a Christian and knew Jesus was in my life. Like many Christians, bi-polar or what our world would consider normal, I struggled and still struggle with my salvation daily. It really wasn't until I had children that this elusive word started to make sense. My unconditional love for them and my wife has taught me in some ways how God loves me. That I can make mistake after mistake and my Lord still accepts me the way that I am – It is just amazing to ponder this monumental side of Grace.

I am bi-polar. I am up as much as I'm down. Sometimes the ups are out of this world tests. I can only relate to these by remembering what the prophets dealt with during their wilderness period. The cycling in and out of deep despair to then find myself face to face with infinite wisdom (as I see it at the time) is not an easy journey. My family suffers, my loved ones are confused, and it's something I don't feel that I have under control. It's a battle for my mind as I see it – and as a follower of Christ, I find that I always come back to that reality. It's those I've hurt dearly in the process that adds to the list of shame due to angry, self centered, I want to be perfect episodes.

I'll say it again – I am bi-polar. All the doctors say it's a chemical imbalance to be treated with medicines- actually most of the world says this. I see it as battle after battle, with my mind acting like a cycling gladiator – pushing out the bad and patiently waiting for the

light. I see it as attacks from the enemy (this will be one of the only times I mention the devil or demons in this book. A well respected Catholic priest who spent his life in the mission world once told me that the enemy was mentioned so infrequently in the Bible, God was sending us a clear message – don't worry about him) I am a Protestant and a believer in God using all different situations, medications, doctors, etc. to help me lead God centered life. I don't believe in labels even though the world is full of them – rich, poor, smart, mentally challenged, white, red or black. When can we get past our personal labels and realize that we are all children of God. I also don't deny the realities of other Christian faiths whether they are cult like or not. It is not my place to judge – Christian Scientists don't believe in medicine or doctors – who am I to judge that? Many of them have read the same scripture passages that I have. It is not my reality but it is the validity of their belief systems.

I have been on a number of medications since my original breakdown and have been almost militaristically devoted to taking each medication on time. I firmly believe that God has successfully used my medications to help. I know some Christians don't believe in man-made medicines (as I just mentioned), but if you look throughout history, many of the significant scientific breakthroughs have been accomplished through the work of devout Christians. If a brilliant scientist can come up with a way to cure or lessen the impact of any physical or mental ailment, then I believe that work is God centered. I would think that the Lord smiles when affliction is conquered using the tools he has given to us. Our spirit is a completely different situation. There is no scientist that is going to cure our spirits – that is God's work through the Holy Spirit and it is free to all that embrace His truth.

I have increasingly been finding myself uncomfortable in new situations involving a lot of people. I am terrified of what people will think of me sometimes. It's definitely a social anxiety that my doctor doesn't want to treat. The reason for this is that the social anxiety medications raise your baseline psyche and, in my case, it could lead to another manic episode. Manic episodes can be much more vocal and violent than depressed times. My experiences with how a manic episode can affect family members are just this way. My last manic episode almost ended my marriage to my wife who I love dearly. This wasn't always the case. I was second in my class in middle school, an active group leader in high school, a fraternity president in college, and an Army officer. With my psychiatrist's hesitancy about prescribing anti-depressants, I am spending many days in a doom and gloom state. This coupled with a deeply troubled world have placed me in situations where I understand why someone would want to end his or her life.

Suicide? Do I really consider it – I can honestly envision that feeling like ending things would bring relief to present agony sometimes, but my faith in Jesus Christ keeps me going. Also, the unrequited love of my wife, family, and children give me a lot to live for. When I think I am going through another down time, I just have to think about the awesome family God has given me – It usually brings me to tears. When God created the rainbow after the great flood, I see this awesome display of nature as a representation of family – the interwoven love of the people in your heart – the church, your wife or husband, your family, even your household pet.

I don't always feel like going to a worship service at our church, but I stay connected to other Christians and participate once a month in a prayer service. My prayer life is full and I enjoy reading Biblical based books – I do see considering another Christian's perspective on the Bible as a Christian church study in and of itself. The church began with Christ appearing to the two men on the walk to Emmaus, so in reading another Christian's interpretation of the Bible in essence brings two Christian minds together.

Why isn't my life easier? The Bible is clear that being a follower of Christ is not for the faint of heart. It is a daily struggle where one has to continuously give his or her life over to Christ. Martin Luther's interpretation of faith is what I prescribe to. God is doing the work in our lives – it's not us – he doesn't need for us to bring anything to him – Christ is the sole reason for our purpose and His purpose is always perfect. It is our unwillingness to listen and meditate on His Word and respond in action that keeps us from the joy that is Christ.

I think the hard thing for me in this response to His call is that I want to be ahead of the game. I am so eager to please my Heavenly Father that waiting for instruction is difficult for me. Like many people with mental disorders, it's hard to sift through all the things going on in our minds. What is real? Real meaning the things that God intends for others and us. I have gone through psychological battles that seem like spiritual ones and probably the opposite is true as well. I spent about 10 minutes without a lifeline to God in one of my wilderness times. It was the worst feeling of my life with the exception of my breakdown. The difference being that during the breakdown I was out of my mind. When God showed me what hell was like, I felt so terribly alone. I wasn't burning; I just didn't feel connected to anything or anyone. I would never want this for anyone. I think that's one of the reasons, actually the main reason, I am sometimes so vocal about my relationship to Christ. I do believe the only way to the Father is through Christ and I really want everyone to experience that relationship. And it's for eternity – a time frame I cannot even conceptualize. I have even been in prayer asking our Father to spare those who don't know Jesus in the last days. He made each of us and that there must be something within each of us that he adores. Our spirits are so unique and so multifaceted that each of us, believer or non-believer, would have worth in His kingdom.

I don't understand how anyone could know Jesus and not want to please him in every waking moment. And it is even harder for me to imagine how someone could be a non-believer. Jesus' story is so simple and so perfect. It brings me to tears thinking about what Jesus went through for each of us – and to not accept it is really hard for me to understand. But I know some people have a hard time imagining that God really walked on this Earth, or that he went through the same hardships we have gone through --- felt the same pain, the same doubt, and the same tears.

We are not in Eden. This is not a perfect world. But I have a strong faith that God is interwoven in everything and everyone on this planet. The six degrees of separation, in my opinion, is a reality - that we are all interconnected and working for His good. I am a realtor and was showing a client and his brother a property in Austin. A homeless

gentleman approached us as we were walking the grounds. He started wiping down my car, without asking first. My initial impression was one of distrust. I didn't know what his intentions were or whether he was somehow causing more harm than good. I wondered if I could die as a result of his intentions. I then thought that if he could enter the Kingdom of Heaven as a result of my death, then it would be worth it. Was this my bi-polar side of me in action --- definitely. His actions were not hostile; he was just trying to earn some money. He has probably had a hard life and just wanted enough money to buy some dinner. When he finished wiping down the car, my client gave him a couple dollars --- he sang out "I believe". The combination of my positive intentions (though somewhat absurd in reality) and the feeling of worth he got by working for a of couple dollars, probably changed his life dramatically.

Wanting to live or wanting to die is a daily struggle for me – I think a lot of people with bi-polar disorder feel this way. There is hope one minute and then it's gone the next. With the promise of Heaven right around the corner, it's easy to understand why someone in a tremendous amount of pain would want his or her savior to return for them. I don't think normal individuals experience this on the same level as the mentally ill. I think those not afflicted with a mental or debilitating psychological disease get more comfortable in this world in varying degrees.

Part of me wants to live like the saints of old. Patiently waiting for the stranger to show up at the door to provide the evening meal. I want to rely wholly and completely on the grace of the Lord in everything. Is this kind of thing possible in this age of fast food restaurants and the Internet? I do believe there are Christians all over the world that rely on Christ for every moment and for every blessing. But there also Christians that want to point to their own power and their own action as the reason for miracles. Action is important and to allow God to work in our lives, we need to respond to His call --- but is filling our lives with the next movie or the next music release really responding to His message? Some of us are called to the front lines and some of us are support , but we need to actively search our hearts for where Christ wants us to be. I think this is a process though and we need to be patient. By rushing through life, we can't stop and realize just how much each of us is blessed.

I don't know if it's my Army experience and training or whether I am just not hard wired to be a patient person. I need to be around people that I trust. But I also need constant reassurance that I am doing the right thing. I think that works against being a patient person. And maybe I'm not putting my full faith in the good Lord. I am looking for the next mission or the next challenge. I want to live dangerously but I also like the security of home. I think a lot of people are like that. Maybe in that sense, we are all bi-polar. Many of the things we want are in direct conflict with something else we want. Battling priorities keeps us in a state of inaction. So in this sense, it is really important to continue to seek the Lord's guidance. This has been true with my musical website. I have deleted it as many times as I have built it again. I wonder from day to day if it is something the Lord can use. As soon as I have deleted it, I feel compelled to rebuild it. I have finally come to the realization that it is good – that the Lord can use it- but part of me still wonders if it is the right thing. I met a gentleman on my son's soccer field. I was his

coach so I had arrived earlier to prep the field. I started a simple conversation with him and asked him what he did for a living. He said he designed military explosives and rockets. I thought to myself that I just met a man whose expertise and business was defending our country. At the same time, I wondered how many people were killed indirectly by his efforts.

I am not a conscientious objector, meaning that I believe that some force is necessary to bring order to an ever-changing world. Until Christ returns, I feel that it is each person's responsibility to protect their families and those they love. But when I signed up to be an Army officer, I chose the one specialty that I thought wouldn't be on the front lines and one where I wouldn't have to shoot anyone. I don't even like the thought of hunting animals let alone shooting someone else. But I look back at history and it is easy to see that without bloodshed, we would be in a much darker world or Christ would have already returned to establish His kingdom.

Since we are under Grace, we don't really need to worry too much about making mistakes. It's our intention and the root of our actions that make the difference. If we second-guess every action we make, it will drive us crazy. I think that's the root of many bi-polar manifestations. That we are never comfortable in the Grace God has provided. It's there, it's never going away, and we are under Christ's perfect hand for eternity. This should be enough to keep us centered. But instead we decide to battle conflicting priorities and it ends up causing confusion, which is not of God. We ignore the subtle nudges of the Spirit. I know I do it. I would sometimes like to feel more comfortable than face my responsibilities and the Spirit's calling. I know God is patient, but for how long.

To effectively listen and quiet our hearts and minds, the bi-polar Christian needs to spend more time in silence – spend less time reflecting and meditating and more time just open to what God wants us to hear and experience. More time listening. Your mind could be blank or filled with garbage, but just try to quiet it. Listen intensely for God's message to you. Also be aware of the world around you. God usually uses other people or events to reach his children. And if you are in the midst of scourging, realize that God is right there by your side and will use all things for His good. I think that immediate action when you know that the Lord has given you a clear directive is imperative. We just need to be sure that it is the Lord that has spoken, not the many other voices in our head. That's why we call it heart knowledge or heart directive.

There are many different denominations and agendas within the Christian community today. I have heard pastors saying that the reason for this is due to the watering down of the church and the original teachings of the Bible. I would have to disagree with this. Each man, woman, and child in this world is wholly unique. The way we respond the Bible is also unique. I would argue that there are many denominations because of God's perfect intent for us to be individuals with different tastes, or different interests. The same is true on how a non-believer will come to Christ. Whether you are baptized at birth or immersed in water, it is your heart that counts. And giving your heart completely over to God is the objective.

Why do Christians suffer? Why do we carry our own cross if Jesus already paid the price? As a Christian who suffers daily with bi-polar disorder, I am more apt each day to call this one of the mysteries that we will know in heaven. I like to think that my suffering has purpose. Whether it is to refine my spirit or whether my sufferings somehow help others is for God to decide. When Rick Warren said, it is not about us, that truth resounded universally in my life. I was created for God and if part of my walk on this earth is to have a lot of bad days, I think Heaven will be even sweeter. The fact that I continue to struggle gives me that much more to look forward to. And with my two beautiful children, who will help God bless the next generation, and my lovely wife what do I have to complain about.

It is hard not to complain and feel sorry for myself sometimes – when you are in the middle of a depressive state or your mania has interfered with your loved ones peace, finding truth or calming your spirit is sometimes next to impossible. It is easy for someone not going through this to say ride the wave or it will get better. Many say to live in the present and hope for the future. When your mind is burning and your trials are fiery, hope in deliverance from the hell you are going through is just about all you can think about. But I have found that the more I concentrate on others and realize that Jesus actually went to hell for me, my situation seems much simpler. Having patience in times like these is not easy, but we must realize that if we believe in Jesus as our savior, that there is purpose in these times. The Lord takes no pride or pleasure in seeing his loved ones suffer. We can take solace in the fact that there is purpose in patience.

I had a conversation with a Christian friend the other day. I had the same conversation with my almost 5-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son. I asked them where they would like to be right now – the resounding answer was Heaven. I think all Christians deep down wish they were in Heaven right now. The toils and troubles of this fallen world are hard to bear. And as the salt of the earth, that the body of Christ holds a lot of it together. My daughter thinks she will be able to climb Mount Everest in Heaven and then spread her wings and fly down from the top. I play the mandolin and I think that will be one of the things I will get to do in Heaven. I think that Heaven will be such an awesome place especially because I will be reunited with my Lord and savior there.

After my initial breakdown, which happened when I was 24, one of the first things I said to my Dad in the hospital was that I wanted to visit Tibet. Prior to this wish, I don't think that I had ever contemplated visiting the rooftop of the world. I truly believe that it was the Holy Spirit that prompted that wish. After about a year of depression and recovery, my Dad and I set out to accomplish this wish. We spent 6 weeks touring Nepal, Tibet, and India. Probably the most amazing experience I had on the trip was in a small village somewhere between Katmandu and Lhasa (our tour had us drive from the Nepalese capital to the former Tibetan Capital). I ventured out one night with a woman from our tour. We came across a number of young Tibetan children. Before we knew it, we had joined hands with these children and had formed a circle. We sang children songs as we danced around in the beautiful night that God had made. And this happened at 16,000 feet I might add. Also of interest was that same night we slept in a Chinese army barracks full of stench and bed bugs. The polar opposites of this experience comes very close to

explains the ups and downs of being bi-polar.

I can't imagine a better life than the one that I have led on earth. Fully knowing the promise of Heaven, I think that I continue to lead my life with love. Every blessing I have received from the Lord has been wonderful. I have been married for 12 years and have two wonderful children. I have had a wonderful education and have many close friends. Despite my struggles, I am able to look constantly to God's never ending Grace and His incredible love for my family and me. I wish more people could have the same sense of awe I have when I look to the Heavens. I hope more people realize that we are not our own and that we were preciousely made and are cared for by the most majestic force in the entire universe. When we feel bound by our disabilities, I hope more of us look to them as blessings as God uses all things to work out his purposes.

We are not perfect. God is perfecting us. Not in our time, but in His. He knows everything about us – past, present and future. His perfect care was completed on the cross through Jesus Christ. With that in mind, why should we complain? Why should we question His authority? He, and only He, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit know what we really need. It is not about our agendas – it is not about our dreams – while we are on this earth it is about loving others as deeply as we can and continually looking upwards in praise, worship, and awe.

I am bi-polar – this is a condition that the world has given me. Not my Heavenly Father – it should not define you either - neither should cancer, Down's syndrome, dyslexia, etc. As Christians, we are whole – yes, we continue to strive forward with a mission to bring the gospel to others and to serve in the way that God determines. We were each made for a purpose – but don't let this world define you – you are not your job, or your talents, or your various ailments – you are a child of God – a God that paid an extremely high price for you – a God that continues to delight in you and a God that feels your pain- but our Lord also loves our curiosity, our songs, and our hearts.

My salvation came at a very peculiar time – I was always scared of the Grateful Dead musical band in high school. I did not like the skeleton faces and strange artwork on the covers of their albums. I would quickly move past their section in the record store when I was looking for a new tape or album to buy. When I got to college, a friend in my dorm gave me a tape of their music – I can't say I just loved the music or that it spoke to me in some special way. I went to my first "Dead" show completely sober and I truly did not get the experience. The next time I saw them it was a completely different experience – later in the show I felt like I was diving feet first into hell – I cried out to God to save me, and he did – I reflect often on how David in his psalms had similar experiences - I felt better than I had ever felt in my life – every thought was about Jesus and my soul and spirit lit up with brilliance with just the thought of Jesus. I have had a few transition experiences since then and each strengthens my bond with Christ. I am sometimes scared of losing myself but in essence isn't that the point. In order for Christ to be fully in your life, don't you need to lose your very identity and take on Christ's identity?

So, recently when I decided to get rid of all my Grateful Dead tapes, I had feeling that I

should just throw them away. I was looking back at my life blaming the music for years of pain. But in reflection I think that God used all of that to reach me and if all this suffering brought me grace and a relationship with Jesus, then every bit of it was worth it. So what did I do with the 500 plus bootleg tapes I had – I gave them to a Christian friend who said he had a friend who would like them – it was a huge step for me – that my walk, though I share it with others, is unique. That one person's experience with something, which turns out a certain way, will not necessarily be someone else's experience. If I had thrown those tapes away, I would be judging something that only God can judge.

The same thing happened recently with a friend whose wife went to a psychic. I called my friend and told him that psychics, though some may have good intentions, didn't always give good advice. I think that psychics often get advice or "hear voices" that don't come from good places. I thought to myself, as I often do, that if this were my last day on earth, what would I do. I thought that telling my friend that God probably doesn't agree with using psychics would be something I would do if I couldn't tell him that tomorrow. Was I judging these friends actions by telling him what I thought? He didn't ask my opinion. I am not his pastor or priest. So why did I do it? The only thing I could think of is that the Bible calls us to protect those we love – and I love him and his family.

I also recently told a friend's brother, who is gay; that I believed the being gay was a sign of demon possession. I had never met this man before and may never meet him again. Why did I feel this need to tell someone I had never met something that he most definitely did not want to hear? Would Jesus have done the same thing? Was I acting out of love? Did I plant a seed of redemption or did I hurt a relationship that could have grown in love and trust? In reflecting a lot on this, I think I did more harm than good. I was trying to tell him something that he has probably heard a number of times from Pharisee like pastors on the television or on the radio. If I really had his best interests at heart I would have validated him as a child of God and then prayed for him. By telling him what I did, I was judging him. It was not my intention, but in the end that was the way he felt I am sure.

There's a lot to be said for C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity. His ideas are not of a passive Christian. They are ones of always leading in love. Prayers instead of outwardly judging. I may not remember every story about Jesus healing the sick, but I think in most instances, the sick approached Jesus and asked for his help. I am not sure that Jesus would walk up to a demon possessed man and tell him he was possessed and needed Christ's help. From my memory, Jesus only got mad when people were not respecting the Temple. Our bodies are a Temple, so we should respect our bodies.

Our minds are part of our bodies so we should do our best to fill our minds with things that Jesus would approve of. As an ex Army officer, I have been in really good shape through the years – I have let this slip over the last 10 years or so. Exercise in one's life is taking care of the body, so I am sure this is something God would want for every Christian. I guess if we get our mind, body, and spirit in better shape, Jesus can use us more fully. This is a no brainer – but what about all your friends that are not Christians. Is it God's will to do more than just pray for them?

I feel compelled to pray a lot for the world. I imagine rings of light radiating in circles around the earth. I imagine these rays of light being Christians holding hands around the world. I also like talking about the Lord and Heaven. I talk a lot to my kids and wife about Jesus. But I also like talking about him to friends – and not all of these friends are believers. Do I do more harm than good by bringing up Jesus to non-believers? Should I wait until they ask a question about him or see something different about me? God is the one that changes hearts, not us. So what is our role in this? I think always open to the Spirit's direction is a big one – that when we lead with our own agendas it can be very dangerous.

I was on a trip with a group of families to a river in Texas last year. I brought up the lack of prayer at our dinners to a couple of people. One of my friend's responses was that we are all believers here. Would it have been more appropriate for me to just initiate the prayer or to just pray silently myself? What if people are drawn to you, but never ask where you get your spiritual strength? I know the Inquisition era was trying to force Christianity on non-believers and was extremely violent. Are we not doing the same thing in Iraq? Trying to force our values? So, is there a happy medium? Can you mention your faith to a non-believing friend from time to time? I really struggle with this one. I know it is God's timing and that He is sovereign – that non-believers will always be given multiple chances to hear the gospel – but as the body of Christ, we each have a unique personality and probably a unique way of sharing a personal testimony and the gospel. If we don't try and share it – my personal journey of accepting God's grace has been very painful as I mentioned before – I would rather not have anyone go through what I have gone through – I treasure every second I have spent with Jesus – part of the reason I share the gospel with others so often is that I don't want people to be at the end of their rope before they make the commitment – I also would like new believers to be surrounded with other loving Christians who can disciple them and nurture their new belief. I never had that until recently.

During my last manic period, I had to be hospitalized for a night. While at the hospital, the patients went outside for a smoke. It was an organized deal where most of the patients, whether they smoked or not, went out for some fresh air. I sat down next to a woman who probably has had a much harder life than I have had. The lines on her face and her lack of teeth were sure signs of this. She leaned over to me and told me that the Devil had complete control of the world. I, without hesitation, told her that was not the case – that our good Lord had it under control – she immediately snapped out of her trance – I saw her a week later and she was still filled with the Spirit. I sometimes wonder if that manic period of my life came on just so God could use me to reach her. That my suffering somehow bridged the gap between her and our Father in Heaven. And I have no idea how many people she has been able to reach given her background and God given personality.

I also contemplate fairness a lot. I know that God is fair and just in whatever he does. And I know that most Christians try to follow God's lead – I just sometimes have a hard time sitting down to my dinner table, enjoying an abundant meal, when I know that more than half the world's population is going hungry. I know that each of us has a sphere of

influence and a position that God has enabled us to carry. I know that besides being a Christian, that my position as head of my household is paramount. That raising Christian children is one of the most important things I can do. But I always yearn to do more for Christ. My music is one way I hope that I am bridging gaps. I use Indian classical instruments along with spoken word psalms and poetry in a lot of my music. My hope with this is to bridge the gaps between Christianity and the Indian culture. I truly feel that music is a powerful tool, which can be used in both ministry and evangelizing.

Can a Christian with a disability like bi-polar have overflowing joy? I guess that would be a question on the definition of joy. For me, joy doesn't necessarily denote elation or some kind of emotion. Though the times when Heaven has opened that kind of joy for me, I have both enjoyed it and wanted to share it at the same time. I think that's the main drive of my music. I have had Christians and non-Christians alike say it brings them peace and joy. An American Hindu told me he had a really positive emotional response to my music. I have had many Christians tell me that they feel a restful peace when listening to some of my psalm inspired music. I certainly do not write and produce music to gain popularity or acceptance, but it brings me joy to know that others find joy in it.

Getting back to overflowing joy – the joy knowing that I will be spending eternity with my savior and Lord brings me an incredible peace of mind even through my darkest moments. When my spirit is extremely downcast, I set my mind and thought on the promise of Jesus – it doesn't necessarily change my emotional or spiritual mood – often it is hours or days before I feel whole again – but it does reassure me that my salvation is secure – that is overflowing joy.

As I mentioned previously, my prayer life is full. I believe that my spirit is continually praying and I find that most of my personal prayer is either the Lord's Prayer or visualization. I know that many people talk about visualizing world peace – I envision that fully, but at a time when our savior returns. In the meantime, I feel that Christians have work to do – in our communities and throughout the world. I really feel that loving your neighbor in these times extends to every corner of the world.

I have a wonderful extended family – I know a lot of married couples have problematic relationships with their relatives. I can honestly say that I am blessed in all categories when it comes to family. I dearly love my wife's parents, her brother and family, my parents, and my brother and family. I have had conversations with most of my family about my faith. Because so much of my faith is routed in hardship with my family, it is a hard subject to bring up. The times I have had spiritual awakenings have often left me in a manic or depressive mood – these times are just as hard on family as they are on me.

I have mentioned to my mother that my faith is in Jesus and not any specific religion or practice. She seemed to understand this fully. At a recent family gathering, a family member mentioned that she thought that Jesus and God were two separate beings. In some respects, I don't think she is wrong. If you believe in both God and Jesus and what each of them did – God creating Jesus and Jesus bearing the cross for our sins, being raised from the dead, and joining God in heaven – these are truths. Where she probably

needs more guidance from believers is the essence of the Trinity. That Jesus was fully God on earth – that every moment he walked the earth, he was fully connected to and fully part of God – I began to understand this with my own son – from the first moment that God blessed me with him to this present day, my son is part of me – we are connected relationally and spiritually – he has already made the decision to walk with Christ – this was his decision – I believe that Jesus had the option to die for our sins or to stay in Heaven – he picked the road less traveled – of course He is and was God, but still I believe He had a choice – and His choice was to follow his Father completely. I take incredible comfort in this fact. And now, that I have accepted the fullness of God which is in Christ, I too, along with countless other Christians, have picked the road less traveled.

Each of us has freewill and that is part of the wonder of it all – it keeps the mystery alive – it keeps the Lord's blessings in us complete and full – if we had no choices, life would be meaningless – to have the completeness of a faith chosen is remarkable – I am a bipolar (this world's aimless label), mandolin playing (by choice), husband (I couldn't have a more remarkable wife), father of two beautiful children, and the list goes on. I wouldn't trade my experiences for any others. I wouldn't want to be a rock star despite the fact that I love playing music. I wouldn't want to be known as a great artist or writer or scientist. I do the things, for the most part, that I think God wants me to do. But there are plenty of people out there that dream big – that want to be heard, recognized, and adored by the world. I think they are on their own personal path and I can't and will not judge that.

I met probably 400 new people at my wedding – all very nice individuals with a desire to meet me and my beautiful wife – to see us and celebrate with us on this wonderful day. I believe God made Eve for Adam and I believe that God made Becky for me. I can honestly say I could have easily not had the expensive rehearsal dinner or reception after the wedding – these things were for my wife and family – these are things that are common and wonderful for the woman in our lives. For me, the ceremony at our church was the most meaningful part of the whole weekend. To be united in flesh with my beautiful wife before the only and most incredible God and His son was tremendous – I could and would not imagine a more perfect union. She is part of my heartbeat and my soul. I would lay down my life today or tomorrow to ensure her safety. I would do the same for my children. But getting back to the wedding – the most commonly asked question was about my occupation and at that time I had really only had one – that of a military officer. My work life since my time in the military has been treacherous to say the least. Jumping from one job to the next, never really feeling at home in any occupation. I feel at home laughing with or serving my family. I feel at home playing mandolin sometimes. I feel at home writing these words at this point in my life. But I have never felt at home working since my time in the military. I know there are a lot of veterans out there that feel the same way.

I wonder if my lack of foundation in a working situation has to do with our fallen world. That no Christian can fully feel at home without our Savior at our side and not just spiritually. Our bodies (flesh and mind) are subject to negative forces. Things that we cannot completely understand. Can a Christian man feel fully content and centered in a

fallen world? Can there be Heaven on earth before the second coming of Christ? These are questions not easily answered. I talk to and listen to Christians all the time that say they are wonderfully happy, content, and whole on this earth. I don't doubt that they have found this. I primarily wonder for myself and other Christians that can't find rest on this planet. Is it that others have finished their work and that we still have work to do? How can any Christian fully rest while the gospel has not been spoken throughout the world? How can one Christian feel rest when other Christians are suffering? My Stephen Minister the other night said that his group email from a Christian group was inadvertently being sent to a Satanist. He said this individual was sending very hateful responses back to the Christian group. This all happened without the knowledge of the original Christian senders. He said that by the end of the email exchange that the Satanist was having second thoughts on his beliefs- the seed of truth, power, and our beautiful Lord had been planted.

In this same vain and I know I have mentioned it before, I feel that my music is a powerful ministry tool. There are many newly converted Christians in India that are hesitant and in some instances weary of the traditional Indian classical instrumentation. India is also a country that has deep rooted spiritual beliefs. But I see their classical music as cultural – the rhythms and their use of a stringed drone instrument dates back many years. I don't believe the instrumentation to be negative or even Hindu inspired.

Many of the Indian practices, particularly yoga, were developed as a way of life. A means to enhance and enrich one's life on earth. Mind, body, and spirit have always been a primary concern of yoga practices. I don't see how this runs contrary to any Western Christian belief. People who play Indian instruments or teach yoga are trying to find a way to center themselves in a world full of conflict. Many people who practice yoga, including my wife, see it as a way to strengthen their muscles and add to flexibility. This only enhances and adds flexibility to the body. She does not see it as spiritual other than developing and strengthening the body that God blessed her with.

I often play along with tabla and tanpura samples. Tabla is an Indian drum and the tanpura is a stringed drone instrument used as a backdrop in Indian music. These are cultural and found in both secular and religious Indian music. There are newly formed Christian bands in India that use both of these instruments in their performances and recordings. I feel that honoring the Indian culture by using these instruments and incorporating the mandolin and Biblical spoken word that great cultural and religious gaps can be bridged. I think some will call it weird and others won't understand it, but at the end of time I can rest assured that the Lord was able to use it.

Getting back to my sporadic work history. I am a realtor now and started my career in real estate about 5 years ago. The company that honed my skills and taught me the rights and wrongs of the business is still thriving. I left the company for a number of reasons, but one that stands out comes to mind. I have nothing against anyone in the company and they were only good to me, but they began embracing a new age philosophy built around a book called "The Secret". This book beckons the reader into a world where each person builds his or her own universal order and the sky is the only limit. They say that most of

the successful folks in the history of the world understood the process of positive affirmations. If you think it, it will come. And when it comes be grateful for it.

I don't see life as a tool by which I can control my own universe. I see life as an opportunity to serve my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I put my dreams, beliefs, ideals, etc. aside when I decided to follow Jesus. He is the commander, I am but a follower. He is my Mount Everest, my Promise, and my Hero. I often meditate on Jesus to the extent that I completely lose myself. As Paul often quoted in the New Testament, I am a slave to Christ. I will live for him and I would die for him. I died once to self when I accepted him as my savior and I do it every morning when I wake up. It's not about my priorities, but his. On the other hand, I am called to live in this world. And as a Christian, this is a pretty tall order. I openly wear my Christianity on my sleeve. I don't try to cover it up. So when I go to the corner store to buy a bottle of wine or to support my 20 plus year long nicotine habit, I often wonder if the cashiers are looking at my cross around my neck wondering how someone who believed in a perfect God could be hurting his bodily temple – I struggle with this too – I know I can't be perfect and I know I am being perfected – I know I struggle with addictions just like the guy on the street corner or behind the pulpit. Do I just give in to a few desires and let the ones I think are ok slide? Do I spend all my time worrying about what I eat? Does God get real disappointed when I use chewing tobacco? I know that I will be given a heavenly body without blemish someday, but in the meantime, am I doing all I need to take care of my fleshly temple.

I read a book recently which was God's version of the Secret – it was called Secret's of the Vine – instead of a meets all your needs study on how to direct your own universal order, the Secret's of the Vine spoke more about the Trinity and how it relates. It was definitely a once saved always saved book. It talked about the fact that no matter what we do once we are part of the Body of Christ, we are still part of His body. It reminded me of a local church logo that said "Come as you are, but don't stay as you come". I don't think anyone could have a salvation experience with Christ at the center without wanting desperately to change. I renew my mind daily – or in other words Christ renews my mind daily. I am definitely a less of me more of Christ kind of guy. Some of the things I have done in my life have gone way past my comfort zone and I still came out on top. Christ has a way of nudging us just enough to get going and He lets us go until we can't go any further and then he nudges us again. I have given speeches at jobs in the past where I had no idea where the words were coming from. It is comforting to know that Christ will involve himself in even the most mundane of our tasks. And our willingness to do these tasks is one way we are defined as Christians.

I don't like being too close to people that I don't trust. I mean relationally and psychically – I think that each of us has a soul that has boundaries and comfort levels. I have been to concerts where the person next to me makes me feel cold and uncomfortable. I have been to Christian gatherings where the same thing has happened. It seems to be happening more and more these days. My tendency and reaction to these situations might astound you. I feel the urge to talk to the people who I feel this way about. I have a desire to get to know them and find out what makes them tick. More often than not, the strange "energy" if you will was just a stumbling block- often times I think this may be a way that negative

forces try to keep Christians from passing along the light or planting a seed.

I haven't talked a lot about my breakdown or manic experiences. After I had accepted Christ and was baptized in a friend's Baptist church, I resumed my life in Columbia South Carolina. I had one friend in our hanging out group at the time that also worked at Fort Jackson, the main military post in the city. When I had my conversion experience, the most discipleship I had was a friend's dad saying he would send a book. The book never arrived. With no home church and really no Christian friends to rely on, I started fasting and reading the Bible. I started to center in on Jesus' sufferings and felt that I needed to experience these as well. One night, while at my computer typing up a military newsletter, I thought to myself, "I can't pray on every thought" – this sent my mind into a tailspin and before I knew it, I was on the way to the hospital in an ambulance. I remember one of the paramedics saying that they were losing me and I thought to God that I would like a family. God had kept me from certain death a second time. The next two months were probably the hardest of my life.

I had a sort of rebirth in the Army hospital. God brought me down to a baseline level. If I were a computer, I would digitally be a zero. I felt the original sin – I had been quite the womanizer before my conversion experience, and a lot of the breakdown dealt with no wanting to have a penis anymore – there were also a lot of paranoid thoughts that the nurses were out to get me. They fed me through an IV as I refused to eat. I was truly out of my mind and all of my thoughts came from the disorder I now had. At one point of the breakdown, I prayed to the ultimate good and the ultimate evil and I felt secure in the middle. That is kind of what Eastern religions believe today – the middle ground. I can tell you that I never want to be in the middle ground – I want to fight everyday for our good Lord.

I came out of my daze the day my parents came to see me. I had been given massive amounts of anti – psychotic medication to bring me back to this Earth. I felt lost and thought that Jesus had abandoned me. I had none of the beautiful feeling I had experienced before I was hospitalized. I cried a lot and I think it was the love of my parents and God himself that brought me back. It took me 5 weeks in the hospital before they released me. They had me on a large dose of Haldol which had really negative side effects. I had a hard time resting. I had no hope. I went to a church service in the hospital and felt withdrawn and disappointed that my savior didn't give me a word or a feeling that things would be ok.

When they finally released me, I went back up to my apartment in Columbia, SC and the wound I had received was fresh and "bleeding" without cease. The Army Captain that had been my psychiatrist in the Army hospital had told me that I might never have the capacity to work again. I pretty much took this as an "I am now worthless". Without an ounce of faith or hope to back me up, I thought that my rebirth and baptism were in another life. That they were not real or that they had not changed anything about me.

I was able, after about a year of being depressed, to finish my MBA with the help of a lot of people. Completing this degree, despite what I had been through, brought me some

sense of hope. I had recently met my future wife while visiting friends in Austin, Texas. Little did I know that a year later I would move to Houston to be with her and that we would solidify our relationship in her childhood Methodist Church.

During part of the time, before I moved to Texas, my Dad and I ventured to Nepal, Tibet and India. It was a really fascinating trip and I became more interested in Eastern culture and religion. I had already spent a year in Korea with the Army and 4 months in Japan teaching English. During this trip with my Dad, I know believe that I was a Christian during that experience, without even knowing that I was one. We met a lot of really colorful people – we hiked in the Himalayas, we spent a day at the Taj Mahal, we met an Indian friend of mine and spent a week with him in Goa. Despite the fact that a year earlier I had been out of my mind in a mental ward, the time spent on this trip with my Dad was delightful. A big part of it was probably because my dad had been so absent in my middle school and high school years.

During the next few months, I read everything I could get my hands on concerning Buddhism – I meditated, I fixed my eyes on Eastern idols, and I started thinking that this strange, mystical form of religion was the answer to my problems. I still had a really broken view of Jesus. I had a really hard time believing that a loving savior would allow me to go through so much pain. I knew that he experienced pain on the cross – I still believed that – I just didn't have any faith that he died for me – I was a “baby” Christian without even knowing it. I continued reading Buddhist texts and trying to find my path that way for quite some time. But for reasons I fully understand now, God had a different path for me.

So after my trip, I started spending a lot of time on the phone with Becky, my future wife. She acted very much like a lifeline in my Christian walk. Becky was raised a Methodist and she really can't remember a time she didn't believe in Jesus. She doesn't talk about it openly, but in much of her life, she walks the talk. She is optimistic, caring, loves to laugh, etc. She is a beautiful person inside and out. She has a lot of inner strength and I think that comes from her faith. Though I continue to be a somewhat difficult person to live with, Becky spent the first 3 or 4 years of our marriage putting up with my deep depression. I would spend days on end lying in bed, hoping for relief. I would drink heavily at night to help lift my spirits. The medication took away my sex drive, so our relationship did not have that bonding component to it.

When Becky finally decided that she really wanted to have children, we had a lot of obstacles to overcome. First of all, the medications I was on depleted the amount of active sperm in my body. After changing medications, we tried to have kids for almost a year before going to a fertility doctor. We tried one method after another until Becky finally got pregnant – she could not have been happier – I couldn't have been more scared – here I was, 5 or so years into a time where my wound was still fresh and I was going to be a Dad. Looking back on it, it was really my lack of commitment to Christ that kept the joy out of the process. When Holden was finally born, he rolled over on the examination table. A feat that the nurse said she had never seen. At this point, I immediately took to fatherhood. If my memory serves correctly, I was helpful and

enjoyed all the elements of being a father at that time. I can tell you honestly that it has just gotten sweeter. I enjoy fatherhood now more than ever. It is getting harder, but I am getting stronger.

I feel things at a real deep level. It's like the veil to the spiritual world in my mind has been compromised. I think that I hear things that others don't and that I feel things at a very complicated place. But as life gets harder and harder, my faith gets stronger and stronger. I have taken much more responsibility on concerning my daughter and son. I have coached their soccer teams, helped them with their homework, and given them countless baths. It seems that the more I lose myself and concentrate on their needs, the better I become – losing my personal focus leads to gaining a Heavenly focus.

Where my son's birth involved a lot of man's science to finally get Becky pregnant, Harper's conception and birth was almost effortless for Becky and me. And she has been a more difficult child to raise. I sometimes worry about my children's future- not just because so much of our world is in chaos. I worry that one of them might end up being bi-polar. I wouldn't wish this condition on anyone and I constantly raise this up to the Lord. That my kids find Christian believing companions, that they stay away from drugs, and that they have solid foundational lives based on Biblical values. As I mentioned previously, both of my children, like most, have incredible imaginations. They also have a deep faith in God and Jesus. I think that Holden understands much more than Harper – he is older, but he also thinks deeply like I do.

I wonder sometimes if God delights in the way I search him. I spend a lot of time thinking about who he is, what he thinks of me, what His real will for me is, etc. I sometimes wonder how much of my life is spent in synch with what Jesus wants for me. Sometimes I feel that I am a lot more important than I actually am. That I have some special secret mission that I am carrying out. That I am privileged to information and Heavenly truths that many are not. I often wonder how much of this is my disorder. How much of it is my flesh and earthly bound mind. I sometimes also feel bound – I also wonder if other Christians feel this same way – that functioning in this world is so difficult, because this world is so fallen. It seems that so much negativity and forces working against God's message of love fill this world.

Our pop culture is a reflection of how we as a culture think. Have you been to a video store recently? There are far more horror films and other filthy films than ever before. You can't even look at the video wall without seeing scary images or reading a video title that you would never want to subject your children to. I have sometimes dreamed of being a cowboy on a large ranch – live off the land and not have to worry so much about how my children are affected by so much negativity in this world. Our news networks worry more about scandals, murders, and the stock market than the homeless or ways to help society. Sometimes I think that we are living in the days of Noah – that the second coming is around the corner and we should be greatly anticipating the return of Christ.

What would you do if it were your last day on earth? I ask this question to myself a lot. I guess that since I get to spend eternity with my family, that I should be spending more

time evangelizing or worshipping or petitioning God for more time. I don't feel useful in the sense that I think that everything I do has meaning or purpose. I do feel that God, during certain occasions, has been able to use me to plant seeds or deliver someone from lets say an addiction. But the question still remains, am I useful? I love deeply – I love my family, the non-believers of this world, and even my enemies. Like I said before, I would be very happy to see everyone go to Heaven. Am I overstepping my boundaries with our Creator for wishing and praying for this? What kind of part can I play if this is a possibility? God is sovereign and all knowing, so He already knows the answer to this. The Bible is clear that not everyone will be with Christ in the end. How is this decided? What would cause someone to really hear the gospel and not respond to Christ's call? I sometimes feel like it is not my right or place to search God like this. But part of me thinks that he likes the searching. He likes a good question. And the Lord always answers in his time.

My wife keeps on telling me that this story doesn't really even scratch the surface of the pain that I have suffered. It is hard to explain in words the kind of suffering I have gone through. And I know that my family has suffered a great deal due to my illness. How can someone explain their pain – one person's loneliness is another's solace – there are degrees of pain, but how do we measure them. Most of my pain has been spiritual in nature. I have been blessed not to have many physical ailments in my life. But how would I compare my downcast spirit to someone's fight with cancer. How is the pain my Dad is feeling after his hip replacement similar to feeling like my spirit was being ripped apart in Hell.

This is probably the only way I can explain my original breakdown. That every part of my Spirit was being burned, ripped, and shredded. This is the main reason it has taken me such a long time to rediscover my Christian faith. I still have a hard time imagining why God would put me through this. But I can tell you this, though I feel that I have been to Hell and back and that everyday is a monumental challenge, ever ounce of pain I have felt has been worth it. It has led to a faith that can't be broken. I trust in my Father in Heaven more now than ever. My understanding of what faith really means cannot be shaken.

I still have moments of fear, but those are more directed at God and His son Jesus. I see them as my Father, Daddy, King, Friend and Savior. If I had to go through all of this again just to have the Faith I have now, there is no question that I would. It has been really hard – but I know that every Christian has had their struggles – I know there are many that have lost loved ones at an early age. We have had close family friends whose children have died at a very young age from cancer. These children suffered greatly before they even had a chance to start their life. Their parents have to spend the rest of their lives mourning the loss of a child. How do I compare my personal struggles and suffering to this?

It is a very cruel world – the Bible calls the days evil. I personally can sometimes only hold on to the love that God has given me and the promise of Heaven. I think that for me to compare my suffering to someone else's would be judging in nature. All I know is that

I wouldn't want anyone else to go through what I have gone through – in essence, raped by this world. And I know that my Father in Heaven through Jesus Christ has felt my pain as well. This is one of the things that I feel comfort in. That I am not alone and that I will never be alone again.

God has afforded me a wonderful family and a strength that I never thought I could have. Each time I look at my kids I think about how blessed I am. Abraham was promised by God many generations of family. God has blessed me with a new generation of family. I will hopefully get to see my children marry and have children of their own. My hope is that I get to walk my daughter down the aisle at her wedding and see my first grandchild born. I hope to see my son grow into a man full of delight for the Lord. I hope my children do not have the same pain and suffering that I have had. Maybe somehow my pain has helped my children. I sometimes imagine that generational sin can be erased by suffering, Strange idea and it's probably just the bi-polar side of me talking.

The Jehovah Witnesses and Seven Day Adventists and other fringe Christian groups like those continuously call for the end of the world. They pick a date and a time that only our Father in Heaven knows. They rewrite the Bible in a way to warp the original meaning of God's word. It is almost like their sole purpose is to rush Armageddon. I think that God probably doesn't like this. I think he took His time and great pleasure creating this world. I also think that he wants to give the body of Christ time to reach each non-believer. I don't profess to know anything special or different. My disorder has certainly skewed my reality and I have had some pretty way out thoughts. Thoughts that still haunt me to this day. But I can say in truth that most of what I pray for is good in nature. That I want to best for all people. And that best is a relationship with Christ. I don't pray against my enemies – I am sure I have them, but I spend time lifting them up.

I try to be a good neighbor both in my city and in this world. I try to stay focused on God and His will in my life. I try to be patient even through the darkest of my hours. I try not to think too much of myself even though God made me unique and special. I meditate on how each person I meet was created by God and loved greatly by God. I have terrible thoughts sometimes, but I push them away and try to center my thoughts on love for others. I try to protect my family and also serve others.

Patience is the long way home - kind of like baseball. Love is not rushed. Love is not forced. Love is always patient. God's timing is perfect in every aspect. From the day we are born until the day we die, He has a plan for us. And that plan is perfect.

We lost our family border collie, Josie, just last month. She taught me a lot about patience. She loved to play ball – though she would fetch anything you threw for her, she would never bring the ball or stick all the way back to you. You had to put in a little more effort to walk up to her to retrieve the ball. But it was never a long distance – just a little more effort on your part. I sometimes wonder if that is what God calls Christians to do with non-believers – meet them half way – make a little more effort to do something special for them. Don't force the gospel down their throats – lead with Love and understanding – more listening and less preaching- wait for the invitation – let them open

the door and when the opportunity presents itself, gently explain how ultimate, powerful, loving, and patient Jesus is. Josie also taught me about the small pleasures in life – she really enjoyed my family’s lake house. She loved being splashed – the intensity of her play when you would shower her with mounds of water was awesome.

I had mentioned earlier that my son, Holden, is a Christian. I believe that he had a transformation experience while we were camping with our Cub Scout troop. It was after a day working and playing together when we finally got into the tent for bedtime that he had the indwelling of the Spirit. Looking back over our conversations in the last few years, it is delightful to see how God used our family, our church, and his Christian school to mold him into the young Christian he is today. He still is all boy – loves to complain, likes his toys, and loves to get dirty. But he is often the one who reminds us to pray. He is also really concerned about friends of his that are not Christians. He writes about God in his journal at public school and has already begun to talk to our neighbor’s boy about Jesus. Amazing!

My daughter is a work of art as well – she is strong willed like her mother, but is tender hearted and loves animals. She wants to be a zookeeper when she grows up. She loves dolls but also loves playing with legos. She often times sings praises to God and Jesus during our dinnertime prayer. She is adventurous and really funny when you get right down to it. She takes things in stride and doesn’t like to clean up after herself – I should call her my little “tornado” – the funny thing is she is already telling her dolls to clean up there mess.

My wife, Becky, is the dearest human on this planet. We have gone through some tough financial times and she keeps a good attitude and wants to buy gifts for people despite our not having a lot for ourselves. She is eager to spread joy wherever she is – she is a strong woman who can do anything if she sets her mind to it – she is a great parent that always places her family first. She is patient and kind – beautiful and full of grace. God really created something special when she made my family. And I really believe that Becky and I were destined from the beginning of time to share this life together.

Music was and is an important part of my life. I practice my style of mandolin playing each and every day. I often lull my children to sleep at night with my playing. I have listened to a lot of music, both secular and Christian based, over the years. I like the spontaneity of jazz, the heart of country, the pulse of rock, the innocence of pop, and the message of contemporary Christian. I just find that I can’t listen to many secular bands today due to their lyrics. I find hidden meaning in a lot of popular music today. Instead of being joyful and uplifting, it wears me down. Maybe be it is just their spirits screaming for recognition – maybe they are lost souls bound by negative forces – maybe their music can be used for the good of the Lord.

My own playing style was developed through years of noodling on the mandolin. I am sure that I have been influenced by the other music I have listened to, but I believe in my heart that the Holy Spirit taught me how to play. I know this may sound absurd, but it is simply what I believe. As a result of this mindset, I think that instrumental music can

have as much impact as music with lyrics. I don't take this fact lightly. I try to use my music as an outreach tool to both believers and non-believers alike. I don't have a motive in my music other than honoring my Father in Heaven and His Son Jesus. On the other hand, I am often frightened when I play in front of large groups of people. I feel that I am fully opening myself up when I am playing. That the instrument is an extension of my soul. And I am not completely comfortable in my own skin. I have faith in Christ, but not a lot of faith in myself.

I hear preachers talking about opening the gates of Heaven and asking for abundance in all areas of one's life. I know that God doesn't like debt and I have a mortgage and two cars my family is paying off. Other Christians are probably in a far worse state financially than I am. The only problem I see with the prosperity gospel providing a lot of wealth is that if the two billion Christians on this planet all thought they would get extremely wealthy, where would all that wealth come from. I can see clearly that the prosperity gospel in terms of the fruits of the spirit being a reality. That a person can be at peace most of the time. But how can we expect to have all this wealth in spirit and in money in a fallen world. If we had completeness in all areas of our life, wouldn't that be Heaven. And doesn't Jesus need to come back to claim this world as His own before we have Heaven on earth.

Another thing I have been thinking about is the role of sports in our world. I fully enjoyed coaching both my son and daughter's youth soccer teams. Watching the kids develop their skills and having downright fun in the process was just awesome. What I do see as a problem is the money associated with High School, College, and professional sports. I think people put too much emphasis on sports – especially men – it seems that sports takes the place of a lot of the adventure of life for many men. I personally have a real problem with High Schools that cut their fine arts programs to funnel more money in their football teams. I also have a problem spending hundreds of dollars on one sporting event. I understand that the competition is fun and I can see why people like sports, I just don't get why players are paid so much – why teams are worth so much – and why our society puts so much time and energy into sports.

Women get caught up in another kind of drama - the People magazine kind of frenzy, the tabloids, the soap operas, etc. I don't understand why seeing the newest fashion or owning 50 pairs of shoes makes sense – I know this is a generalization and I am not pointing my finger at one person, man or woman. It is just a comment about society. It's hard for me to stomach the amount of money a signed picture of this certain celebrity is worth, or why we are so caught up in what we wear in which season – why matching a belt and shoes is something that men need to worry about.

I have run into personal situations that I feel are absurd as well. Why did I need to buy a new car every couple of years when I did not have the money for it? Why did I spend 5 years trading for a new mandolin every six months? What is our fixation on new? Why can't we just be happy with what we have? I don't think that Adam was in the Garden of Eden constantly asking God for more. He had everything that he could ever need. Our society feeds this frenzy and that is why we are in the trouble we are in now. My father's

generation was a group that thrived on solid investments and saving. My generation reaped the benefits of his generations' diligence. We live in a time now that is really hurting because everyone needed the new iPod even though they had just bought the previous version 3 months prior. We live in a time where many Americans live past their means. Our government is getting into so much debt, that many don't see a way out anytime soon. And it's going to be our children's generation that suffers.

I read a book when I was in fifth grade called "A Wrinkle in Time". There are scientists and theologians that believe in such things. That time as we know it can warp or change. I think that I experienced that in my lifetime. I know that God is not subject to what we establish as time – whether it's our calendar or watch, our Lord works outside of those parameters. I think that positive or negative intentions can warp time. Again, I am getting a little absurd, but it is just something I believe. So there is a start and a beginning to life on this planet. There is a human element to how time works between these two things. Through prayer and action, I feel that humans aided by Heavenly forces can change the course of history. Does God know this is happening? I believe He does. As I believe he is completely sovereign. But this doesn't change the fact that the body of Christ can have a dramatic impact based on good intentions.

I feel that most of my life since my initial breakdown has been a life of catch up – that I want to serve the good Lord everyday of my life, but for some reason I either don't know how or I am somehow scared of the outcome. If I have this really strong faith in God, why can't I have a really strong faith in myself? Do the two necessarily go hand in hand? If I trusted God completely, why wouldn't I trust myself completely? This goes back to the fact that the days are evil. That not all of intentions can be pure. That we have flesh and negative forces to deal with. It is how we deal with them that set us apart. It is in the shortening of the rope between Christians and Christ that strengthens the body of Christ and Jesus himself. This might seem odd, but Christians are part of Christ. As we get stronger through prayer, fasting, and good works, I believe He gets stronger.

For this reason and many more, I am somewhat concerned with our new generation. The economy is suffering right now and many Americans are losing their jobs and even their hope. I understand this, but should we be looking to an earthly leader to solve our problems? I think that these are the times we need to be on our knees praying for our country and our world. That leaders come and they go, but our Lord and savior wants to be by our side constantly. I worry that our present administration doesn't have their priorities in order. They are looking for quick fixes, which will only endanger future generations. If America is being called to help bare the cross for the world, then we need to face this crisis head on – we need to pull together as communities and stop the madness. Throwing more and more money at a broken society is not the answer. In crisis times in the Bible, prophets turned first to God for salvation and direction. Our forefathers that founded this nation believed this. We, as a nation, have lost sight of this very simple premise. I think God and His son are in Heaven wondering why we won't turn to him collectively as a nation. Instead we sit back, watch the stock market lose points, watch our native industries get outsourced to other countries, and watch countless Americans lose their jobs and homes. Maybe some of this is necessary to get our country

back on track.

We need to start with the small things. I really believe that the pay it forward philosophy works when approached in the right context. We need to spend less effort worrying about our own lives and start putting more effort towards healing the broken hearted. How can we spend a billion plus dollars on a train that is going to take folks from Los Angeles to Las Vegas? That's just part of this current trend of law makers taking care of their own and not seeing that this wasteful spending in the government is just the tip of the iceberg. Christians need an overhaul of our hearts and I would include myself in that category. It is easy to point fingers and say that it is not in our power to change anything. But I believe that our Creator is standing by to hear our prayers and respond as long as our hearts and intentions are pure. I think this book is one step I can take to help those who read understand the severity of our problem.

I think it is hard for the mentally ill population to step outside their disorder and worry about other peoples problems. They feel that they have enough burdens to carry without helping others. I know that I have felt like that from time to time. But it is kind of like the woman that gave her last coin to the church. When we are hurting and spiritually spent, our prayers have even more power. Giving of ourselves when it's hard to focus on others is powerful. It is also healing. No Christian is ever completely whole or ready for the challenges that we face. That's why we have God on our side. We step outside ourselves and do things that we could never do on our own. God uses both the broken hearted and spiritually drained folks just like he uses those individuals who think they have it all together.

Even during difficult times in my private life, I turn my prayers to our newly elected president, our country and our world. I also pray for the lost and for enough strength to carry on. Sometimes I think I have one foot in this world and one foot in Heaven. That I am truly walking in the shadow of death. My daily prayers also focus on God continuing to provide me enough strength for me to carry out the service he demands of me. I can't imagine a more pleasing thought than to know that God listens to His children and that he answers many of our prayers. I hope that we can use this down turn in the economy to lead many to Christ. During rough times, many turn to alcohol or drugs for escape. It is our job as Christians to reach out to our community during these times and explain that the living water Jesus can provide is so much more fulfilling and rewarding than any bottle or needle can offer. And the best part about it is that each time a new brother or sister comes to Christ that is a relationship that is eternal. Keeping our sight on the future kingdom and how awesome Heaven will be is enough for me to keep waking up and serving in the best ways I can.

I don't like fictional books that much anymore. I prefer things that are real or that have historical meaning. My son is wrapped up in his love for Star Wars, and his imagination boggles my mind sometimes. I often plea with him to talk about his love of animals or something he learned in school. I see a lot of me in him. When I was younger I liked scary movies and playing dungeons and dragons. I was basically a good kid, so my parents let me do pretty much what I wanted. I also grew up in a day and age that my

parents didn't need to keep a watch on me whenever I went outside. So they trusted society much more than my wife and I do today. I know I need to give my children space to grow into the spiritual beings that God wants them to be, but I still feel like I need to be over protective. I think that a lot of the non-real, fictional things I subjected my mind to have only brought me pain. I think popular rock and roll music, books on fantasy, many movies, and an overly imaginative mind have left me with a lot of baggage to deal with. Some things that are of the secular world bring a lot of Christian's pain without them even knowing it.

I went to a Bible group study a few years back that centered on cutting your self-loose from parental control. That God can use you the best when you are not dependent on your parents. I was going through a manic episode and while I was at our break out-group table, I laid my head down during the entire discussion. All I could think about was walking in Christ's shoes and heading for the cross. The strange thing is no one even asked me if I was doing all right. It was like I wasn't even there – that I was not part of their group. This alienation from the church has been a thorn in my side. During my first full blown manic episode, I called the “need Him” help line only to have the gentleman on the other end of the line tell me he was old and hurting to. I called a friend who told me he was going to “cover me” and he said that I had called him too early. The only person, until recently, that wanted to help me was a black Pentecostal preacher. I felt drawn to his love and his commitment to help. He asked me specifically what I thought of discipleship, and I told him that was up to God. That my other experiences with Christians had been that they would only help me on their terms and in there timing.

I am now seeing a Stephen Minister from my church once a week. I too had gone through the training to become a Stephen Minister and I was assigned a couple people to help. I do believe that I helped them, but the weight of so much pain and suffering weighed me down. I know that carrying some one else's burden is a blessing, but when you are hurting to the core, it is a hard thing to do. At this point, I am inactive as a Stephen Minister and in essence have taken the role of care receiver as opposed to caregiver. My relationship to my caregiver, my Stephen Minister, is the first time in my life that I feel that someone is listening to me without being paid to do so. My psychologist over the years has been great. She is a good listener and I think she has learned as much from me and I have from her. But I have to pay for it. I understand that she is making a living and I have no regrets or worries about the exchange of money for what she does. It is just different with my Stephen Minister.

I have also realized that a lot of people are praying for me. I recently played mandolin at a prayer and healing service at our church. After the service, a woman that I have always felt fond of, told me that she had been worried about me and had been praying for me. That this friend, who I don't know really well, had a heart to pray for me almost brought me to tears. But I also think there are Christians praying against me – this may be my disorder or just thoughts derived from negative forces, I just don't know. I helped a woman out at our church that thought that her ex husband and some witches were praying against her. I do think these things go on. Another pastor I spoke with at one point said he had left his church because the leadership was using white magic. There are a lot of

things going on in the hearts of man that run contrary to Biblical principles and practices. Nowhere in the Bible are we called to pray against one another. We are supposed to lift each other up in encouragement.

I think there is black magic that has power on this earth along with white magic. I think that many people, when they don't get what they want, will use any means necessary to get it. I think that if you have a good innocent heart and you consistently try to do the right thing, you can still be bulldozed down by the many wolves in your life and in this world. I think character and spiritual soundness grows when you keep on getting up after you are knocked down. As a Christian with a bi-polar condition, I go through this everyday. I think other people with the bi-polar disorder feel the same way. We consistently feel like life is knocking us down – whether its in mania where its hard to determine truth or whether it is in depression where we feel there is no hope – this world is cruel – I will say it again, the days are evil – our only hope is in the Trinity and that includes other believers. God can pull us out of any problematic situation. I know I feel that each time He pulls me out of the pit, my faith grows stronger – and I think that when my faith grows stronger, that the Lord's presence in this world grows stronger – the body of Christ gets mightier and our faith increases. There is nothing more powerful in this world than a group of Christians that are collectively following the Holy Spirit's guidance.

The real pain many of us as Christians feel is that loved ones are lost and we are not sure of God's promise for their lives. I think that if we turn this over to God, and believe fully that our loved ones will be in Christ, that we can let this burden go – Christ knows our hearts and I think honors them at a very deep level. The Lord created our hearts and the more that we turn them over to him, the more our hearts are honored in Heaven and in this life. I worry about today; as this day is the only thing that God wants me to concentrate on. Jesus could come tomorrow so I try not to put off anything that I think the Lord is compelling me to accomplish. I think writing this book is part of it. I don't consider myself a great writer, but I have a very good education and writing this would not be possible without that education.

I think a lot of my pain is due to anticipating the worst. Like every Christian I struggle with my salvation at times. I feel like I am on the front lines of a battle and that negative forces are continuously trying to bat me down. As a result, my mind is a battlefield and I feel that I spend a lot of time in the wilderness. That I am not comfortable in my own skin – but this body and mind of mine are temporary. When I am not questioning my faith, I am fully aware that the good Lord is building a place for me in Heaven. And that this place is perfect and that there are no negative forces that can change that place or degrade it in any way. This does make the painful times easier. I haven't figured out who I am other than I'm a Christian, Husband, Father, Brother, and friend. The rest of it really isn't wholly important. If I lead in faith, and now that God loves me, the pain is easier to except. As I mentioned before, maybe the pain is helping God in some way. It is easier to stomach when I think that. And for the families that have lost love ones, maybe it's easier for them too to know that their fallen friends and families are in a better place.

The only thing that makes living in this world bearable is love. God's love first and then the love that I feel for my family and friends and even for the people I have never met. Love for my enemies and love for the homeless. Love for those people living with bipolar disorders and love for the small children with incurable cancer. Love does make it bearable and it is the reason I get up each morning. I know that every ounce of love in my body, mind, and spirit comes from our Lord. That in loving each other, we can more fully be aware of what God is like. I think I have already mentioned that I think that God and Jesus are hurting. I think they are feeling joy as well. When we overcome the darkness, if just for a while, I think it makes God smile. I was at home depot awhile back and had just finished buying some light bulbs for our home. As I left the building, I looked back at the sky only to see a big smiling face in the clouds. My real home is in Heaven and I have one foot constantly there. It is kind of like our Persian cat that passed away last summer. Persian cats are supposed to be indoor animals. They need a lot of grooming and attention. This particular cat, named Darth for the Star Wars character, loved to be outside of our home, but also loved to be inside our home. He ended up being killed by the garage door. He ended his life partially in the house and partially outdoors.

I know when I die, I will be in a much better place – I love that song by Mercy Me, “I can only Imagine” – honestly, I have a hard time imagining how incredible Heaven is going to be. I just know that it is beyond my imagination. I look at God's creations each day – the beaches, mountains, unique animals, and the stars in the sky – I can't imagine a better framework of a world – it is man that has made this earth problematic – It is man that has made this world unbearable for some.

I have a hard time feeling centered – the times I feel centered I am doing God's work – I feel centered writing this book- I feel centered when in fellowship with other Christians – I feel centered reading Bible studies. I probably can't rest effectively during the days because I know there is work to be done – I know that God has work that he wants his people to accomplish – and the work is lost souls and building up the body of Christ – and I do think the building of Christians, giving each other strength, allows us to more effectively be used by God. I was in Dallas accompanying my wife at a convention. There was a church service just finishing as we checked out. The pastor asked me if I was a minister or the sort. I told him that I wasn't and when I emailed him a week later his response was simple – he just said “serve” – the email just had that one word – and that one word has pretty much summed up my understanding of why I am still on this earth – “to serve” family, friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, and in any way that pleases Christ.

I am scared of being popular. I am scared of being noticed. I am scared of being who I am. I am scared of being what God wants me to be. I don't like people celebrating my birthday anymore. I don't like applause when I finish playing mandolin at church. I want to be a footstool. Unnoticed. Am I scared of being loved? Is the pain I felt after accepting Jesus as my savior keeping my wound from closing? Is the pain I still feel something that honors anyone? I want to be different, but I want to feel included. I want to be unique, but I also want to be part of something greater. I am scared to have others read this book. I am scared to bare my soul only to be hurt once again. I know it's not my fault. I know

that my life, my very being, was wonderfully made.

Then why am I scared all the time? Is it that I think God wants to hurt me? I am so fearful of Him so much of the time. But I love Christ and His Father with all my heart. I also love the framework of this world and every soul in it. But I am also fearful of everyone. I sometimes even fear my family. That they are out to get me – this has to be part of my bi-polar condition. I can't imagine that God would want me to fear Him this much. I can't imagine that God would want me to fear other people so much. Was Christ fearful of others? Was Christ ever afraid? Was the only time Christ really felt fear when he was about to die on the cross and he thought his Father had left him? I don't want Christ to ever leave me. I know he won't and I have to hang on to this with my dear life so much of the time. And I want to be what God has called me to be – it's just so hard sometimes – there is so much tragedy and problems in this world – it's hard to stay focused – hard to feel joy in terms of elation – but no one can rob me of the joy I have in Jesus Christ!

I was just thinking how hard it is for the normal individual to keep up with life – to make enough money to provide housing and food for their families – to keep up with bills and the many creditors we have – put a disorder like bi-polar into the mix and it is just that much harder. Put any life trauma into the mix, whether it's a physical or mental ailment, there is that much more suffering.

Everything seems so bleak sometimes – to stay ahead of the game is so hard for so many people. Now we have people in retirement that have lost as much as 50 percent of their savings – many are going back to work or at least trying to find a job – with so many companies laying off workers, that's even harder. You have people who have spent years working for a retirement goal that may not see that for years. This is not what God intended – but when we have many in this nation happy with the status quo – not striving to find God's will in their life or not even having a relationship with Christ, I can see why America is suffering.

As I mentioned before, this is not the Garden of Eden and there are a lot of negative forces working against good people. Sometimes I feel like we are living in the days of Noah again. The news continues to portray our country as falling apart. I think in some respects it is. We are more interested in our laws and our comfort than a personal relationship with God. So I continue to pray that God's perfect will is done in America and the world. I lift up our current President and his family – so that they will be protected and hopefully change the direction of a country that is more interested in money than people.

I really distrust corporate America – bonuses being paid out of government bail outs is just the tip of the iceberg – we are like the Titanic – a wonderfully constructed society that is failing because of our priorities – we liked being the best more than we liked helping others – personal vendettas and making tons of money took the place of helping one's neighbor. I know there are a lot of good people and families in America, and they are the ones that end up hurting because of the messed up priorities of our government and a lot of greed in society.

I have learned a lot about my priorities just living in our neighborhood. My son is a best friend with our next-door neighbor. He is a good kid that just pushes my buttons a lot. Mainly with being over at our house as much as his own. I like the idea of opening our home up to friends and family at any given time, but it is hard for me to have non-believers in our home a lot.

Christ tells us to open our hearts and homes to the homeless and down cast. If I don't feel comfortable opening my home all the time to my son's friend, a neighbor, how could I feel opening it to just anyone. I see the home as a sanctuary from the world. A place of safety in the jungle. I have gone out on the limb multiple times to help others and it brings a lot of suffering into my own life. I know we are called to carry each other's burdens, and I guess I do this to the best of my abilities.

I try to follow Christ's lead in spreading the gospel and loving others. I just find it hard in this day and age. Sometimes I find that I end up getting burned when I go out of the limb for others. And that my family suffers greatly too. Is it worth it? I think it is because that's the real reason this world is still here – why Jesus has not returned – we are here to spread the gospel. Whether it is to a friend, relative, or a complete stranger, God wants to reach everyone. He reached me with a dire situation and he reaches others this way.

I believe he also reaches folks in many other unique ways – as many ways as there are different personalities and people. Sometimes people are just raised in the church and never know anything different than Jesus in their lives. Others have born again moments where the Holy Spirit reaches them in an instance. God is so multi faceted, I think His methods of reaching folks are individual for each life.

Personal accountability is so important in this life. But also allowing yourself to give grace to individuals that make mistakes is paramount. I double-parked the other day when I was picking up some food for my family. A man pulled into the space next to me while I was in the restaurant. He did not leave me enough room to open my door. He was getting out of his car when I approached and he was mad. I don't know what kind of day he had or what kind of troubles he had at home. I told him I was sorry. His response was to tell me he knew I was not sorry. He re-parked his car so I could have access to my car. At no time was I mad at him, but he was furious at me. I knew I had taken up two spaces, but had thought that I would be just a second because I was taking out the food, not staying in the restaurant. He gave me absolutely no benefit of the doubt. I feel that the grace given in this situation was ultimately mine. I didn't fault him for his anger and I to this day do not hold it against him. I also make extra sure that I don't double park anymore, even if I am going to be just a second. I learned from my mistake and also learned to have a more tender heart when it comes to someone else's anger.

I also have had a while to forgive the Christian brothers I was hanging out with after my conversion experience. When I received Christ into my life, the Christians I was spending time with never took the opportunity to act as disciples to me. They did not tell me I needed to go to church or even suggest a book for me to read. As a result, I had no strong

Christian men in my life to teach me what it was to be a disciple. I ended up having a psychotic break and I think my breakdown was a direct result of not having any kind of meaningful fellowship with other Christians. We were not designed to take this walk alone and after I excepted Christ, which is what my Christian friends allowed me to do. It has taken a lot of soul searching to realize that even though they didn't do the right thing, we all fall short of the glory of God and we need to forgive each other. I may still have some resentment but I think I have come along way in forgiving each of them.

The medication I take has caused me to gain a lot of weight. It also is somewhat toxic to my body long term. I know I need to exercise more and I have taken the steps to getting into better shape a few times since my breakdown. But it is so hard. The last time I lost a good deal of weight and was walking everyday I had started using a new medication, which was in its testing phase. I walked everyday and lost over 50 pounds. I actually got into good enough shape to go on a hike in Montana with my brother and father. It was quite an accomplishment given the shape I was in starting the whole program. Within a year of losing the weight and continuing my exercise routine, I had another manic attack. I had to switch back to my previous medication, which causes weight gain. I gained back all 50 pounds within the year. This is the kind of set back the people with chronic mental illnesses sometimes have. Things seem to be going really well and then, bam, your life changes without any warning.

As you can imagine, being bi-polar is really hard sometimes. As I can imagine with many delusional disorders, it's hard to determine what's real and what's not sometimes. It's like you are waking up from one dream only to enter another. Some of the dreams are good and some are really bad. Nightmares are common unless you are one of the lucky ones who can afford sleeping medication. Sometimes the nightmares happen during the day. I feel physically, emotionally, and spiritually drained a lot of the time. I think I'm blessed that I have a family to give me guidance and to look out for my best interests. I am blessed to have a savior in Christ who grounds me. Many of American's mentally ill spend there days panhandling just to get enough money to buy alcohol. I understand their dilemma. Just as we should not be looking to drugs and alcohol for relief, it often helps. I went through a period where I was drinking wine everyday. The wine changed by body chemistry in a way that I felt much better. The burning went away. Now I take zanex to ease the pain. It's better for my liver or at least that's what the doctor says.

I just got back from spending an hour at the fire station with our Cub Scout den. I love those boys. I took the den leader position because I wanted to help. I always want to help. Sometimes I think the more I help, the better the world is. Other times I think my helping hurts others. I don't know how it all works, but my intentions are pure. I had a weird feeling about one of the firemen. He got weird vibes off me as well. What causes these kinds of things? It wasn't my intention to make him feel uncomfortable. He opened up his work place to help our children learn about public service. And then I somehow make him feel uncomfortable. Did our spirits some how connect and they didn't like each other? Or maybe something about our priorities was in direct conflict. It made both of us feel uneasy. I could see it in his face.

Why do we have to live in a world where people feel uncomfortable around each other? Why can't we all get along? I know in Heaven we will and that will bring me great joy. To no longer feel uneasy or no longer make other's feel uneasy. I over analyze every situation I am faced with – is this part of my God given personality or is it just my disorder. I ponder Heavenly questions all day long, not to question God, but to see how I fit into this world – sometimes I feel like I don't have a home here – sometimes I feel like life is too hard, too complicated, and too crazy. Does God think I have a beautiful mind? Does He cringe when I think awful thoughts? Do my motivations dishonor Him in some way. My main goal in life is to please our Father through Jesus Christ. But I really don't have a barometer to measure my progress. Am I patient enough? I thank God and Jesus every night at the dinner table for their patience. I don't like disappointing God but I think I do it all the time. My mind is so confused sometimes and the things I think of make me cringe. But unlike a sociopath, I recognize each sin of my mind and I feel like my actions run true to my faith – I guess at least for the most part – I do spend a lot of time running from conflict – mostly spiritual conflict.

So, I sit here in the comfort of a nice home and continue to worry about the fate of our county and the world. I have food on the table each day. I have resources that allow me the confidence that I will not lose my house. And I see thousands line up in different cities across the country looking for some kind of subsidized housing. Then there are millions throughout the world that don't have enough food to eat and live in shantytowns. In homes that the first major storm of the season will be destroyed. There are children my age going to city dumps each day rummaging through the trash trying to find something of value that they can sell for a small amount of rice. Is life fair? I know this is not what God intended. I don't have a lot of money in the bank. I have a career that pays me enough to get by each month. What else can I do to help these families? Is just spending the effort of writing this book something? Is publishing my world fusion music enough to get some people to realize there are others suffering around the world? What can each of us do to make a difference? I know that a lot of times I don't feel comfortable in my shoes because so many people lack the basic resources to live in any kind of comfort? Even in my darkest days I have something to eat and I have a roof over my head. I thank the good Lord for this every day. I don't take it for granted. I think a lot of people are wealthy enough that they never think about these things. They may give a lot of their money to charity, but they still don't realize or can't emphasize with these third world families.

I guess each of us has a role and a mission once we except Christ. I see writing this book as one of them. I see having my music available to those that want to listen to it as a step forward. I see the mission field of many churches as part of it. I see raising children with strong sense of faith as part of it. I think prayer is one of the strongest actions we can take as Christians. There are a lot of folks in the secular world that have the capabilities and funds to help rebuild places like New Orleans. But those same people probably, if they don't believe in God, don't have an active prayer life. So for every Christian to spend less time worrying about there own situation and instead praying for the world probably makes a lot of sense. I think that when we get out of ourselves and put our energies into others, that God takes care of our needs.

One of the main problems that I have had in my life and that manifests itself in my disorder is my sexuality – I am and have always been a heterosexual – the problem is that so much of my life was spent thinking sex was love – that you needed to have the act of sex in your relationship to have love in it – I never had the male idea that I needed to conquer a woman through sex. I just thought that the act of sex brought you closer to a woman. As a result, I went through a lot of relationships. I was not a one-night stand kind of guy. I was a get into a relationship and starting to have sex soon after kind of guy. Boy has the Holy Spirit changed that for me. I have been with the same woman now for 12 years. I love her dearly and none of that love involves the act of sex. But going through this all, I understand how people can confuse sex with love. When a couples bodies meet in the very special way, there is a bond that few can understand completely. I just feel blessed that I no longer have the urge to act this out with anyone else but my wife. I don't know how masturbation fits into this equation. We are partially creatures of flesh and I have heard that if a man or woman goes three or four days without having sex, that masturbation can be helpful. I guess a lot of it, because men are pretty visual when it comes to sex, is not thinking of anyone but your wife. And certainly not looking at pornography.

What does Paul the apostle mean when he says that we should become like doormats? I know it means laying down our lives, not in physical death but in death of our egos and our selves. It means following Christ no matter how hard it is. It means not worrying about tomorrow and focusing on the troubles of today. It means doing things for others that you really don't feel like doing. It means not complaining and trying to keep a positive attitude in all of our prayers and actions. It means being open and not harboring secrets. It means to lead in kindness and to love everyone, even our enemies. That is a tricky one. Some people in this world hate God. For whatever reason, they have sided with the enemy or just don't want anything to do with our Creator. Do we love them as well? I think Jesus loves them, but I wonder if we are supposed to love them. Maybe they just haven't been exposed to the love of Christ. Maybe their family history is so ridden with pain that they can't even begin to love a Creator that would put them through this. Like I said, I've been to hell and back and my love for God grows stronger every day. What is different about my connection to the Heavens? I could be a beggar on the street and I don't think it would change my love for Jesus. Why do some people just not get it?

I go to a psychologist every other week and to a psychiatrist once a month. Does that make me less of a Christian? I have a world of hurt that I don't want to pass down to my next generation – I believe wholly in generational sin – are the problems I am going through helping my kids directly? Will there be an end in my life time to the suffering? Will I ever feel at home in this world?

I believe I was visited by an evil spirit two nights in a row over 10 years ago. It was extremely dark and vile. I felt raped. I didn't ask for it. I didn't want it. I don't think God wanted it either. Did I somehow bring it upon myself? Was it payback for the years of womanizing? Did another Christian or even a non-believer wish this for me. I don't know the answers to these things. Or was it just a weird part of my bi-polar disorder. I think

that's what the world would like me to think.

I believe that most mental disorders are generational and caused by negative forces. Do I think this ruins someone's life or keeps him or her out of Heaven? I definitely don't think this. I think my place is in Heaven. I have had some very profound, very positive experiences with the Holy Spirit since I believe the evil spirit visited me. I sometimes wonder though if she is still attached to me somehow. If she has some control of what enters my brain. I fight with this constantly. I wonder if the negative thoughts are from this evil or if it's just something everyone deals with in a fallen world – I know that my joy was complete the day I accepted Christ in my life.

Then why would God allow this spirit to attack me? Was this somehow my wrestling with God? Am I continuing to live in some sin that upsets Him and Christ? I don't know if I will ever have the answers this side of Heaven. I just know that I have been sealed and that God loves me very much.

Someone once told me that a South American culture believes that demons are stacked up on your head. That the most powerful ones are closer to your head and that they sit upon one another in order of power. Our culture talks a lot about personal demons. I don't think any of these demons are part of me, I just don't understand why I have to keep dealing with them. Again, it's probably because we live in a fallen world, and all Christians, bi-polar or not, deal with personal demons. Whether you want to approach this fact from a scientific or spiritual warfare agenda is up to the individual.

I think that a lot of people just want to brush off their illnesses as just of this world and don't want to see them in a spiritual light. I battle with this as well. Are we better off just fully trusting in the Lord despite our afflictions and meet each day as a challenge to have a positive effect on people – to be a doormat – a doormat that opens the world to the completeness and awesomeness of our Lord's kingdom. I believe that God doesn't give us more than we can handle and that He is with us in the darkness and the light. Maybe a lot of it is our own imagination fueled by a past life of sin and unforgiving behavior. Maybe he uses these situations to test our love for Him and our devotion to Christ.

I am wondering at this point that if this writing is just to get things out of my mind or whether it will really help other bi-polar Christians and non-believers. My intention is to write a book that helps heal those who read it. I think that I have said many things that are truths that are obvious to most Christians, but maybe the way that I write them will help someone who has heard the message a 100 times and it has never sunk in. That my way of explaining things is different enough that it reaches someone who is struggling deeply with issues they can't explain. My intentions, I promise, are only good. Like my music – I don't mean to scare anyone and I don't mean to change the world. It's about individuals and if even one person is helped by these writings it becomes meaningful to me.

I think there is hope for this world if we bond together and realize that this world turns not on our efforts but on our faith that God will give us another day. I hope to see tomorrow if there are things that I can still do for His kingdom. I hope in tomorrow

because I love my family deeply and despite my disabilities, I think I do bring goodness to those around me. I hope in tomorrow because maybe God still has work to do in my life. I hope for tomorrow because some days I really enjoy watching a sunrise or taking a hike. I hope for tomorrow to see my wife and family laugh over something trivial. I hope in tomorrow because I am grateful for today. Jesus is my hope and with that hope I don't think there is anything to truly worry about. I have my health to a point and I have a savior who loves me more than I can ever imagine.

What is it like to be bi-polar? It is hard to explain in words. There are times that you feel like God has let part of you into hell – that your spirit is actually burning. When I have gone through these times I have felt connected to God but alone at the same time. That's a hard concept for many Christians to understand. It is like I am being used for some reconciliation – that I am on the cross and my efforts are somehow being used to help others. No matter how hard it gets, I still feel like there is purpose. It's like being sucked into a black hole with a life line – that you fall into the pit and stay there for awhile and then when you can't handle it anymore, God pulls you out – he pulls you out with a kind word of a stranger or with the right mix of medication or with the prayers of others – maybe he sometimes pulls you out himself. The hard thing being bi-polar is that you really cannot expect when these things will happen. There are probably sometimes triggers or events that cause it, but other times it seems so random.

My original breakdown was definitely the hardest for me to go through – though I wasn't myself and had lost my mind completely, I remember the whole thing. I really feel like it was a spiritual rebirth looking back at it. My spirit was torn completely – I remained paranoid through the whole thing. It was such a violent breakdown that they had me restrained the whole time. I kept on wanting to tear my penis off. I felt like I was a prehistoric dinosaur that was full of lust, hate, and anger. Now, the complications of my disorder have become so much more complicated. I have a loving wife and two beautiful kids. My problems don't just affect me; they affect others to a much larger extent. I sometimes fault my wife for not being more understanding, but I wouldn't want to be in her shoes either. She is a blessing on us all. She can't count on my behavior from day to day. She too doesn't know when this vile disorder will strike again. My last full fledged manic attack could have led us to divorce. And I wouldn't blame her. Living with someone that is as up and down as me has to be incredibly hard. I think the fact that I continue to be proactive about my care and make a lot of effort around the house keeps her hopeful that things will improve. When I am at my best, we really have a good time together. We enjoy each other's company and have the best children God could have given us.

My son Holden, who is 7 years old, has asked me the same question a number of times. In his innocence, he has asked me if I had a choice, would I choose God or him. I did not even have to think about it for a second. My answer was on the tip of my tongue before I even needed to fire one synapse – I told him that was never a choice that I would have to make. Because God was my Father and that when he made Holden, he supplied all the love I would need to love him for eternity. And that without God's love, I would have no love. That God is love and the tender and incredible feeling I have for my family is one

of God's many gifts to me. Just writing about this brings joy to my heart. Those family members do not have to take sides because our Father in Heaven through Jesus Christ supplies all that we will ever need – and that promise is for eternity

I met with my Stephen Minister again tonight and I told him that I thought I had never been heard as a Christian as I have been with him. My wife is my better half and she knows pretty much everything there is to know about me. I have had long discussions with my psychologist, also a woman, about many of the things I have written here. But there is something special, divine if you will, about two Christian men sharing their faiths. I have never had that kind of deep experience before now. I have been a Christian for 15 years and I finally feel like I am being heard. Our discussions are sometimes deep and sometimes simple, but it feels so good to finally be heard. I think as Christians we need to be heard. My hope is that many more Christian men get into these kinds of relationships. Not a Bible study or a new seminar where you learn what to do and what not to do – just a time when two minds can become as one for a bit. Where the Holy Spirit is unhindered. A time to reflect and share in each other's suffering and joy.

He also reaffirmed my belief that the music I have on my website that is supposed to be used for reflection and meditation came from a good place. He enjoyed it and said it was very peaceful. I still struggle daily with whether it is ok to have it up for the world to ponder and enjoy. I hear preachers saying that music that is of the Holy Spirit is meant for churches alone – not meant for the secular world. If this was the case, how could we ever use music for evangelical means? Music that is of the Spirit is so powerful. Wouldn't God want us to share it with non-believers? Isn't music one way that God brings people to Christ? I know that he used music to bring me to Christ. It was difficult for me to come to Christ that way, but God used even secular music for His good. I think Heaven cheers everyday a non-believer comes to Christ. I think Heaven cheers everyday when a Christian starts taking God more seriously.

I think my pride gets in the way of progressing in my walk of Faith sometimes. I have been afforded so many opportunities and have been given so much. I am grateful for it all. I just sometimes can't imagine why God has blessed me to the degree I have. I had a wonderful childhood, an incredible education, lots of great friends, a loving and beautiful family, and a savior that suffered more than I will ever understand. I am a good real estate agent and an excellent mandolin player. I am a pretty good soccer coach and I think, a great Dad. I am a loving and devoted husband. But somehow in my sufferings, I feel separate from all this and have some pride in it. That I have been chosen for something different for God. I am not saying better by any means, just different.

I don't like it when I feel better than someone else no matter what the reason. I don't like the attention for one. And also I think it doesn't please God. I am humble a lot of the time, but the pride sneaks in. I don't think I am above any job or place to live. I don't feel like I need a mansion, but also wouldn't mind living in a shantytown. But sometimes these feelings make me feel different. I am surrounded by friends that need the newest phone and a big TV set. I was like that for so much of my life, but these things don't bring me pleasure anymore. Should I celebrate in their joy when they buy a vacation

home or set up a first rate media room? I know I shouldn't judge them – they spend their money the way they want to. And I am not saying that I wouldn't want to remodel part of our home some day or replace the roof next year when it needs it. I guess I just want to take care of what God has given me and not worry too much about the next new thing. I guess this is somewhat a sign of spiritual maturity.

I have an extremely addictive personality. I have had this since I was a kid. Like an emotional roller coaster. I have always given into peer pressure and also have like to try things I have never tried before – that one got my scuba license within weeks of my 12th birthday. But later in life it has affected my health. I have gone through times, especially in college and during my time in the army, of heaving drinking and smoking. To this day I am still addicted to nicotine. What's the old saying – I have quit about 10 times thus far. Also, when I do drink, I have a hard time just having two. I am not drinking much anymore based on the doctor's orders and some reflection alone with Christ. The nicotine is a hard thing to beat – As I mentioned before, I use snuff now as I think it's the lesser of two evils – it's expensive, bad for your health, and nasty for others to see you spit. I don't think it will be long before I have it beat. I have confidence Jesus will provide a way without having cancer or the such.

I tend to get fixed on things and have a hard time straying from them. I probably would have made a great fighter pilot. The army was a good fit for me since I would be given an order and then it was my job to get it done the right way. I am finding that much I learned in the army has shaped my way with dealing with people. There is not a lot of patience in the Army- it's go, go, go all the time. Real life is not like that. Family life is really not like that. Waiting for God to answer a question can take a long time as well. If I think of one thing I would like to start working hard on is patience – patience is kind and keeps your tongue at rest. I know I contemplated this earlier in this book, but with a bi-polar condition, this even more imperative. Mentally ill folks have a lot going on inside their heads a lot of the time. As a bi-polar Christian, I need to sift through what is of this Earth, or negative thinking, or what is from God. My hope is that I have been and continue to be patient waiting on God. I really don't want to rush things. And God has told me a number of times to slow down. Part of it is also I am excited – writing this book has really given me a new zeal and purpose. I hope you are enjoying reading it as much as I am writing it. The words seem to flow effortlessly, though my wife commented tonight that it's riddled with spelling and grammatical errors. She is an English major, so hopefully she will be able to set me straight.

I want you to understand that all of this is very hard to write and even harder to imagine others reading it. I am laying my life open for anyone who wants to know who I am. My life in the last 15 years since my initial breakdown has been much harder but much sweeter than the first part of my life. Things for me were easy before I found Christ and had my breakdown. I didn't worry about much. I was a hard worker and did well throughout my schooling. I enjoyed leadership roles like being fraternity president at my college and then working as an Army officer. There is something in my mind that says I am still a leader. A leader of my household for one – I don't think there is a job in this day and age that is more important than that – keeping ones family together and not

having your relationship with your wife end in divorce is something that I think makes God very happy.

And it has been both my wife's and my efforts that have kept our relationship together. She is just a wonderfully strong and independent individual. I think that if she lived in Old Testament times, God would have included her in the Bible. I am sure she draws this strength from the Holy Spirit. Reading this must have been hard for her as well. Bringing up past pains can be helpful, but never easy. As I said before, I am still living in my wound – I don't know if I will get past it as a lot of that is up to God. But I think Becky has her own wounds and she doesn't nearly have the time to confront them as I do. She is busy shuffling kids around, going to the grocery store, etc. I find that when I am active with "things" to do, that I do feel better. But part of me thinks that puts off dealing with the hurt. Writing this has been helpful only in that I think others may find similarities in their stories to mine – is it misery loves company or do we actually find peace in knowing that many others have similar experiences? I would attest to the later.

I am also pondering how I want to publish this book. Do I want to reorganize it into chapters or do I just want to publish it as a stream of consciousness kind of book? I think there is merit in doing it both ways. I think that either way would work. I will probably let a few people read it first and see what they think. I am going to keep it in the first person as I think that is more similar to a conversation and that is all that this book is.

I wonder if I will eventually die because of the medications that I am on. That the Zyprexa is not good for my body, both in my liver and because of the weight you ultimately gain. I used to be in great shape and I weighted consistently under 170 lbs. Since I started using anti psychotic drugs, I now weigh just over 260 pounds and am pretty lazy when it comes to exercise. Even starting a walking routine is like pulling needles from a pile of hay. And I know this is the second time I have breached this subject. I know that my body is a temple and that I should treat it as such. Maybe this year it will be different. Maybe this year I will get back into some kind of physical shape. I hope so – and that is a good thing to hope for.

My medication also makes me very groggy in the morning. I normally go to bed before 11pm, but find myself getting up between 8 and 8:30am unless I have a doctors appointment. This is true most days. So I don't help at all with the kids in the morning. This has to be hard on Becky. We have great kids, but things are still rushed and she still could use my help. Sleep is something she does not get enough of. But I find that if I force myself to get up early and even make a routine of it, I still am useless for the first hour or so. The medication I am on really screws things up sometimes. I just need to be thankful that I am able to get a lot of sleep. Sleep is one thing a bi-polar individual need desperately. I remember back to the times when I was manic – the months leading up to the attacks were full of sleepless nights. I think this is common among the mentally ill – that its hard to sleep without some kind of medication.

I also wanted to let you know that everything that I have written here is completely true. I have not embellished the facts or sensationalized the feelings. The God moments I have

had are real – the common darkness in my life, though I would want otherwise, is a reality I deal with daily. I am hesitant to ask for brighter days because sometimes I think that's not what God wants for me. That if He is going to use me to the extent that I really am a force for proactive change, that I will continue to struggle with my cycles. I do think he offers me breaks from time to time. I have some days that are your typical ground hog day. I just don't want to even get out of bed. But for the most part, I continue to drive on in my life and I am just grateful that I will be spending eternity with Jesus.

Thank you for your interest in my story and may Jesus bless you abundantly,

Steven Clarkson