

Self-Evident

by Timothy Cross

“It is self-evident that the self-evident is not always self-evident.”

This last year a little light turned on in my head when a chaplain, mentor/friend used the word *self-evident*. All of a sudden some things I'd been wrestling with in my thinking became very clear. It was as though the truth had been staring me in the face all along, but, because the answers were so common sense, so *self-evident*, I'd missed seeing them. Just as common sense is not so common these days, neither are some of the *self-evident* truths of this world. For example, it is self-evident that air surrounds us, but when was the last time you thought to yourself, “*Yep, sure enough; I'm surrounded by air and without it I'd be in big trouble!*”?

Denial and avoidance are two ways most of us deal with the thorny issues of life. We *deny* the obvious. We *avoid* talking to the doctor because we're afraid of the truth. Yet, won't you agree that we would spare ourselves a lot of pain in the long run if we would simply face the truth?

Like an ant living at the base of Mt. Everest, it is easy to get so focused on our little ant hill that we miss the bigger picture. If I may, I'd like to encourage you to lift your eyes off your current circumstances, whatever they may be, and focus on some of life's bigger *self-evident* truths which, like air, are easy to overlook. Will you think with me as I share some self-evident spiritual truths I see?

As a hospice chaplain [working with the terminally ill], and as a professional landscape photographer, I see life differently than most. I see both beauty and heartache, almost on a daily basis. And, from time to time, I see incredible faith, hope, and courage. As a photographer, I'm aware that if I can find the right matte and frame to put around a photograph, it will make the photograph look twice as pretty. The right framing enhances the beauty of the picture inside. In like manner, I believe that God has put a frame around each of our lives, and that is death. At first we hate the frame, but once we accept it, the picture inside, life itself, becomes much more precious and beautiful. Life is full of so many wonderful things if we but have eyes to see; things that are so self-evident that, just maybe, we've missed seeing them.

Self-Evident Truth #1: God exists.

To me, one of the most obvious truths is that God exists.

One night a woman brought her husband to the psychiatric hospital where I used to work. The man was as drunk as drunk could be. I asked him if he went to A.A. [Alcoholics Anonymous]. He said, “*No, I don’t believe in all that God stuff.*” His wife said, “*You should!*” He responded, “*I don’t believe there is a God.*”—At that point I couldn’t resist, so I said, “*I think there is an easy way to prove to you there is a God.*” He took the bait, so I said, “*See that picture behind you? Would you believe me if I said there was an explosion at a paint factory and it blew paint everywhere and just by chance made that painting?*” He said, “*No.*” I asked, “*Why not?*” He said, “*It couldn’t happen.*”—I responded, “*So, whenever you see design, there is usually a designer, or when you see art, there is usually an artist, right?*” He said, “*Yeah.*” Then I said, “*When you look at Cindy Crawford, the supermodel, or an Arabian stallion, a rose, a New England Fall, or a butterfly, do they look like something the universe puked out by accident, or does it look like there’s design?*” He said, “*Design.*”—I said, “*Then there must be a Designer, and that is God.*” He said, “*###*#, you got me!*”

Self-Evident Truth #2: God is awesome beyond belief.

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that if God exists, then God is awesome beyond belief. By merely looking up at the night sky, and gazing at the stars, that isn’t hard to see.

For example, the largest star we can see with the naked eye is a star located in the southern sky, during the winter months, in the constellation Orion. The name of the star is Betelgeuse [pronounced *beetle juice*]. It is the upper left reddish star just above Orion’s belt of three stars. Betelgeuse is so big that approximately 160 million of our suns would fit inside it. It has a diameter of approximately 250 million miles. If our earth were the size of a golf ball, by comparison, Betelgeuse would be a ball 2 miles high. If there were a tunnel through the center of that star, driving at 55 miles per hour, it would take us 1,600 years just to drive through the tunnel. [It would only take 193 years to drive from here to our sun.] If Betelgeuse was sitting where our sun is, the orbits of Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, and Jupiter would all be inside it.

To put the size of our universe in perspective, *National Geographic* [May 1974, p. 592] had this to say: “*Imagine that the thickness of this page represents the distance from earth to the sun [93,000,000 miles, or about eight light-minutes]. Then the distance to the nearest star [4 1/3 light years] is a 71-foot-high sheaf of paper. And the diameter of our own galaxy [100,000 light-years] is a 310-mile stack, while the edge of the known universe is not reached until the pile of paper is 31 million miles high—a third of the way to the sun!*”

If the universe is incredible, then the God who created it is even more incredible.

Self-Evident Truth #3: We live in a little speck of time suspended between two eternities.

Imagine a piece of chalk the size of a telephone pole [50-60 feet tall], and a chalkboard hundreds of miles long. Pretend you take that huge piece of chalk and draw a thin line that goes and goes until the chalk runs out. Think of this as a time line representing eternity, except that with eternity the chalk never runs out. Now, put a tiny dot at the front end of that line, and let it represent your whole life here on earth compared to eternity.

First, does it matter whether God exists?—Of course. If there is no God, you might as well erase the line, for when you die the party is over—forever! In which case, you should drink all the enjoyment you can out of this tiny dot of time, for that is all you will ever get.

On the other hand, if God is real, and there is an afterlife, then nothing on earth could be more important. You are literally at the beginning of forever; be it good, bad, or otherwise. Things such as war, a terminal illness, making money, marriage, having kids, national freedom, getting an education—even sex—would not begin to compare in importance to that which will affect you eternally.

Latest statistics say that 100% of every generation will die. We are each living one breath and one heartbeat away from eternity. Pascal, the French mathematician who invented calculus and created the first crude calculator, said it was amazing to him that people worry and fritter over temporal things which are of no eternal consequence, while at the same time living without forethought or seeming concern for that which will affect them throughout all eternity.

One thousand years from now what difference will it make whether you lived in a shack or a million dollar mansion? Will it really matter whether you drove a Porche or an old used Chevy, or wore the latest designer clothes, or were the CEO of a company?—A person once asked, *“How much money do you think Bill Gates will leave when he dies?”* His friend responded, *“All of it!”*

One of the harshest self-evident realities of life, is that we will lose everything physical at death.—We can only take with us that which is eternal in nature, the spiritual. Jim Elliot, a missionary who was martyred for his faith, may have said it best, *“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose,”* which leads me to the next point.

Self-Evident Truth #4: We are eternal spiritual beings. Only that which is spiritual is of eternal lasting value.

I once read a book by Bruce Larson [no relation to me] where he commented

that the Bible is not primarily a book of theology, although it contains a lot of theology. He said the Bible is not primarily a book of history or prophecy, although it obviously contains a lot of history and philosophy. As I read, to be honest, I began to wonder, “*What’s left?*” He then pointed out that the Bible is primarily a book of relationships: one’s relationship with God, with one’s neighbor, and with oneself, and that if we miss the *relational*, we have missed what life and the Bible are all about.

Speaking candidly, as a hospice chaplain, the greatest sadness I feel in working with terminally ill patients is *not* the death of the patient. It is seeing the tragedy of wasted lives; of witnessing the devastating consequences brought about by the bad choices some people have made throughout their lives as they have pursued their own self-interests apart from God. It tears my heart out; like the man I spoke with earlier today who wept as he lamented the many “wasted years” of his life, when he could have known God, but, out of rebellion, chose to bully his way through life with disastrous results. He had a failed marriage, and now has terminal throat cancer because of years of smoking or chewing tobacco. Thankfully, he made his peace with God a few years ago, but he cannot bring back the wasted years. Others waste a whole lifetime.

It saddens me when I see patients who not only don’t understand the spiritual, they haven’t a clue. Some of them don’t even know that they don’t know. They are spiritually in the dark. With only days or weeks to live, they will soon be taking life’s final exam before Almighty God, and they come with empty hands, empty hearts, and empty lives; totally unprepared. They somehow hope that God will grade on the curve and not hold them accountable for their foolish choices and their stubborn self-will.

The good news for some of them, and the most redeeming part about my job, is that I can tell them that it is never too late to make peace with God. There is still hope. According to scripture, while God doesn’t grade on the curve, Jesus took the test for them [and me]. If they will humble themselves, and ask for God’s forgiveness, which is free for all who will place their faith in Christ [John 1:12;3:16, IJohn 5:11-13, Ephesians 2:8,9], then Jesus will trade His test scores for theirs. Instead of flunking, God will mark down a perfect score.— God’s grace and mercy in accepting such people still amazes me.

I was visiting with a patient, an old hillbilly-sort of fellow who lived in an old farm house back in the Ozark hills. He’d not been to church in over seventy years. I asked him, “*John* [not his real name], *this is a big question, but how are you doing spiritually? Do you feel at peace with God?*” He responded, “*No, I think I’m going to that other place [hell].*” I then asked him if he’d heard the story Jesus told about the prodigal son [Luke 15]. He said, “*No.*”

So, I proceeded to tell him the story of the young man who took his share of his father’s inheritance and left home at an early age, where he proceeded to

waste all his money on wild living: wine, women, and song. Then, Jesus said, a famine hit the land and before long the young lad had hit bottom. Mustering his courage, he decided to return to his father, like a dog with its tail between its legs, totally whipped. The Bible says that while the young man was still a ways from home, the father [representing God] saw him, ran to him, hugged and kissed him, put a ring on his finger, a robe on his back, killed the fatted calf and threw a party.

I told John, “*Do you know that, to my knowledge, the only time the image is ever used of God running in the Bible, is when He ran to that son, hugged him, and welcomed him home?*” Then I said, “*John, if you want to know how God feels about you, that’s it. It is never too late. Better late than never.*” Then I asked, “*John, are you ready to come home? Are you willing to come back to God?*” He thought it over and finally said, “*Yes.*”—I then shared a prayer with him and invited him to pray along with me, which he did. Two days later he died. I fully expect to see him when I get to Heaven.

The prayer I shared with him went something like this: “*Dear Lord Jesus, I thank You for loving me. I am sorry for the sin, and pride, and lack of trust that has kept me from You. I believe You died on the cross and rose again to pay for my sin which has separated me from You. As best as I know how, right now, I place my life in your hands. I invite You to come into my life. Forgive me of my sin and make me the person You want me to be. Calm my fears, carry my burdens, and open my heart to receive your love. Thank You for hearing this prayer. Amen.*”

By now it should be *self-evident* to you that eternal issues are at stake [for all of us]. If, for whatever reason, you have never seriously considered entering into a relationship with God, or, through denial or avoidance, you have blocked God and eternal issues out of your mind, may I encourage you to please reconsider. The God I know is not only awesomely powerful and holy, the Creator before whom you will one day stand, God is also a God of love, of mercy, and forgiveness who invites you to come to his *party*—which will last for all eternity.

C.S. Lewis states, and I totally agree, “*Joy is the serious business of Heaven.*” What joy awaits those who are forgiven [Romans 4:7,8].

Jesus said, “*He who comes to me, I will never cast out.*” [John 6:37] The question is, “*Will you come?*”—There is no single question of greater importance that you will ever have to answer in this lifetime. The invitation has been given. What will your response be? If you are willing to say, “*Yes,*” may I encourage you to pray the same prayer I shared with John. The words are not magical. The important thing is that they come from your heart.

Self-Evident Truth #5: Our hearts long for Heaven.

In one of the most powerful books I've ever read, "*The Journey of Desire*," John Eldredge points out that *it is impossible to hope for that which we do not desire*. Do you desire the things of God? Do you really long for Heaven, or does it sound like a place of total boredom? You may rightly ask, "*How can I desire a place I've never seen or been?*"—Let me try to answer this questions, if I may. I truly believe that if you learn to *desire* Heaven, then you will *hope* for Heaven, and it will change the course of your life; not to mention affecting how you view life on planet earth.

To start with, visualize the most beautiful thing you've ever seen in your life. For me it was the summer of 1978. I'd just driven across western Kansas and eastern Colorado in rain. As I approached Denver, the storm passed, and there before me were the snow-capped Colorado Rockies. It was near sunset and the sky had that luminous quality. The sky seemed to be filled with every shade of purple, lavender, pink, peach, and orange you can imagine, capped with a bright red sun just above the mountain peaks. And to top it off, behind me, where the storm had just passed, was a brilliant rainbow and some geese flying south. It was so incredible that I pulled off the highway and stared. It almost brought tears. But, do you know what? Within twenty minutes it was gone and I felt so sad.—"*Oh, if it could have just lasted longer! If only I could have, somehow, entered into the beauty and stayed.*"

Have you ever been to a music concert that is your type of music, whatever that might be, and for a brief while it seems as though you are suspended in time? But then what happens? The curtain drops, the lights come on, and it is over. If you're like me, a wave of sadness often hits.—Again I feel, "*Oh, if it could have just lasted longer!*"

Or, do you recall your first feelings of romantic love and how wonderfully exciting they were? Do you still have them?—No. And while you may still deeply love whomever you're with [if you are with someone], I'm guessing those wonderful feelings of romantic love have diminished as you see them more realistically. They may snore, not pick up after themselves, and have some quirky habits which can drive you up a wall.

Or, have you ever seen someone's face and been drawn like a magnet to it? You could seemingly stare into the beauty of that face, into the beauty of those eyes of love and acceptance, forever. And then what happens? The person gets up and leaves, and a knife pierces your soul.

Well, what would it be if you could live some place where the beauty never fades, where the music never ends, where the feelings of passionate love never diminish, and where for all eternity you could stare into the face of perfect love; the face of God?—You have just described Heaven.

You see, ever since you were born, God has planted the longings for Heaven in your heart. The achings, the longings, the deep desires, the passions, the

thirst for adventure and acceptance; they all point in one direction, and it isn't toward earth, nor to the past, but toward God and Heaven.

Like the warm aromas coming from your mother or grandmother's kitchen when you were a child, we only get tantalizing foretastes of Heaven now. The beauty and the glory of nature, as C.S. Lewis says, "*is only the first sketch.*"

I Corinthians 2:9 says, "*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*"

To me, these are *self-evident* truths. Listen to your heart, and your heart will tell you that these longings are true. You see, you've longed for God and Heaven all your life; whether you've realized it or not.

These truths I hold to be self-evident. May God grant you the courage to act upon them.

With love and respect,

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