

A stylized heart with a blue, jagged border and a flame on top. The heart is filled with a dark red color, and the flame is multi-colored with yellow, orange, and purple. The background is a dark, textured blue.

**THE  
HEART  
DECK**

COMMENTARY ON  
**50 YEARS OF HEARTS**  
BY DOUG HARRISON

## 7 Steps for Meeting the Cards For the First Time

- 1) Look at just the images instead of reading the names of the cards. Let the art do its thing in you before we bring words in on the fun.
- 2) Spread out the cards so that you can see them all at once. Keep holding off on reading the names I have assigned to the cards.
- 3) Notice your responses. Which images, colors, stories, & ideas seem to jump out at you first? Do they stand out for good or bad reasons in your mind? Which ones come forward next? Do you want to put them in order of which ones stand out most? Does it make you want to make a list? Are you eager to put names on the images? Pay attention to any noteworthy responses including disinterest, boredom, itchiness, curiosity, or (my personal favorite) passionate admiration—just sayin'. 😊
- 4) Bring your words to the cards. You can wonder aloud at the choices I seem to have made. You can look at them with a friend and take turns just describing them aloud to each other. What did I include? What do you think the card is supposed to be communicating and what do you think the card is actually communicating? Do you connect with a card? Does one of the cards feel like your card? Does one bum you out? Do any of them make you crave pudding cups? They did for me. Mmmm pudding cups.
- 5) Guess what the names of the cards are and sort them. What ideas do you see on the card? Name the cards as you would have named them. Guess which cards seem to belong together. Sort them by which cards you believe best belong together.
- 6) Read the names of the cards in any order you choose. Sort them by their suits and other information I have assigned to them.

- **7) Finally, Scan the QR codes on the backs.** Each card has a unique code you can scan with your phone using a QR code reader (there are many free apps on every platform). When you scan it, it will reveal prompts and questions to help you think, reflect, or talk about the thoughts related to that card.

*PRO TIP! The Heart Deck works well as a conversation starter. You can take turns drawing cards. Then scan the QR code on the back to read the prompts aloud. The person who drew the card answers the prompt of their choice first, ...and then you can sorta wing it from there until you are bored and the next person chooses a card.*

After you have done any, all, or none of that, you can read my thoughts behind the icon or idea on the cards including why I chose it, what it means to me, and how it relates to the other ideas. It is designed to be read two different ways.

- A) You can use it as a reference to look up my thoughts on the topic of the card name one at a time. They are sorted by suit.

 = Archetypes,  = Faith,  = Insight,  = Wisdom,  = Communion.

- B) You can read the booklet from start to finish. While the cards themselves do not have a specific order, I did write about them in an order that helps draw connections between the images that will make more sense as one keeps reading. The interconnectedness of these ideas, and the nuances I try to add to each concept, is what makes this deck of cards somewhat biographical.

Really more than anything the deck is meant to be an of gesture of  
\*Vulnerability and deep appreciation to those who have lived some part of these last 50 years with me. Whether you are playing along or just playing, thank you.

Your  
Brother  
Doug.



- *"A [Conviction] is a persistent belief such that if X (a person or a community) has a conviction, it will not easily be relinquished and it cannot be relinquished without making X a significantly different person (or community) than before"*  
–Jim McClendon, *Convictions*
- *Every card in this deck is a way of saying, "Oh here again is the Love of God."*  
–Doug

### Introduction: There is nothing like a first impression

These cards are designed to evoke your responses to images I've created about convictions that are important to me as a person and an artist. I love, really love, protecting the clean, non-didactic space between people that art is uniquely qualified to host. So for the sake of protecting the richest possible conversation you and I can have through these cards, I wanted to recommend on the previous pages a way of discovering the cards that guards your first impressions, gut feelings, and experience of engaging them.

In that spirit, please consider meeting these cards slowly and in the order I recommended. That way the purity of your impressions can be carried forward into this little conversation we are having, as much as possible.

Having said that, I know I am the type of guy that tends to want to touch all the parts of a thing before I even consider opening the instructions that tell me where to begin. If that is also you, great! Do that! These cards belong to you. Do with them what thou wilt. So if you happen to have already flipped through the images, no problem, nothing is spoilt. You can still play along from the beginning and just see what happens. Start over again a year from now . . . then again in five. I plan to begin again and again and again . . .

Some of these cards, I happen to know, represent some ideas which have hefty cultural baggage. That is just one reason I think you will get more out of them, and benefit more from the work I have done over the years, if you begin the images rather than the name of the idea first. I also think it is way more fun for the squishiness of the human brain to experience the search for meanings & intentions in an image- trying on one imaginary glass slipper at a time- than to simply be told that  $A=B$ ,  $C=D$  & here is a chart explaining precisely why. Don't get me wrong, I mean what I have designed here. There is a great deal of intention in this art and even in the choice to make this deck. Not one of these heart cards does not come from my heart. I trust you will meet them in kind. (caution, heavy handed \*metaphor is approaching)

If I were a stained glass window (told you so) then each card here would be a fixed shard of glass featured prominently in the larger figure of who I have become. Each slice of slag has been carefully fixed in place (as a conviction) and is intended to bend a different beam of light at different times of the days & seasons, and at different angles depending on where you stand. Sometimes the light shines inward and sometimes it shines outward like from a Church holding services at night.

Light, as it happens, is only visible when it bounces off of, or passes through something. I think of these cards as places where light is either bouncing off of, or passing through my life. I hope you can see and take in some light the moment you see it before I try to explain any of this. I hope my explanations deepen and nuance why you see what you see, but it is the light itself I love and it is the light itself I hope you notice as it bounces off, or pass through you too

Math and geometry can add to or take away from the beauty of some magnificent works of stained glass. It almost always depends on whether one learns about the relevant mathematical formulas before or after one experiences the light for themselves. I want you to start, if possible, with experiencing the light however you see it, whenever you see it and from wherever you happen to be standing when you do.


I still mean something by the configurations of these symbols, colors, shapes & words. These are not merely a set of Rorschach test for the heart. They are an exercise in transparency & vulnerability. I hope they reveal a little more of what W.V.O. Quine would call my Web of Beliefs. I'm trying to tell you a little more of my story. They were created to be an act of thanks to those who have walked any of these 50 years with me so far. They just aren't meant to accomplish any other single thing other than that. We are all having more fun (and are way better off as friends) if the things your heart and mind brings to this deck are allowed to run amok in you like an army of scrappy ants in hot pursuit of a half chewed tootsie roll melting somewhere on a summery sidewalk than if I were to try to set up some tiny ant farm and start charging your little hexapods for maps to where I stashed some pre-mixed sugar water. All I am saying is please let your impressions go on at least one date with my intentions before they are forced to swipe left or swipe right on what we have to say about heart shaped things... [so so so many \*metaphors already. I am aware. Admitting I have too many metaphors is the first step to recovery]


I know some of you really like to have directions to follow and will possibly end up cataloguing of your impressions while documenting your

interpretations. Others of you will not even notice a booklet was included till you put everything back in the box. Of course there is another group of you entirely who is thrilled there are rules solely so you can enjoy breaking them. Great. Such is the nature of \*Art and it is why art is such a great host to the conversation we need to have. I am just glad we are connecting in any small way.


These cards are fixed shards of glass, pieces that do different things at different times from different angles. However, they are pieces that collectively tell a some stories I hope are worth telling, namely, my own. I try to tell it because I believe my story is ultimately a \*Narrative of what happens when light bounces off of or passes through pieces of stained and broken windows. I hope it makes clear the things that are \*True, \*Beautiful, and \*Good, about your own story. I \*Hope the whole of these is greater than the sum of my art.

### The Archetypes & Icons


 The Outpatient Monk — The Outpatient Monk card represents that trying to live your purpose, or God's call, as best as you understand it can mean sometimes mean you end up living a fairly precarious life. Sometimes we have to make seemingly contradictory pieces work together even when we are told it is not possible. A monk has a particular call to a life devoted to God, and an outpatient, well, needs help, but still gets his mail outside the normal institutions that do that sort of thing . . . I am the Outpatient Monk, the monk-out-of-order. I am living my monastic vocation as best as I can outside an order and without formal vows. That does not mean I have a free pass to pick and choose what I like about my calling. My call is my call. I just have to work out my vocation in everyday life. I take it as a dare to see just how much of an authentically Benedictine life I can cobble together out of my friendships with other \*Burners and my job answering phones for a big tech company. Many of us are called to live some aspect of our vocation in a unique way or unusual setting. We often have to be creative to make the pieces work. Sometimes it is precarious. Sometimes it is the precarity itself that helps us tread new paths for others. Sometimes it just leads to a richer, more complex \*Imagination. If we live it well it can be \*Beautiful. I know because I have seen it done. What makes your precarious life beautiful?  
[www.OutpatientMonk.com](http://www.OutpatientMonk.com)

 The MetaDetective — The Metadetectives are on the case, peering through the Ouroboros (symbol of the "meta") for "evidence." The Xanatos Gambit Metadetective


Agency is an art collective that asks, "What is the meta-for?" Whether designing experiences that are tailored to help people toy with the \*Metaphors they use to navigate life, or just having coffee with a friend, the Metadetective is always learning, asking deeper questions, and listening carefully for clues about what is important to others but might be kept hidden (and how art might help someone solve their own case). The agents are always cultivating \*Curiosity and learning to ask the next right question, and how to ask it. That alone is an art form. Sometimes it means paying attention to details. Sometimes it means being willing to step back, way back, and ask the biggest questions about what is really going on. The Metadetectives want to be those kind of artists of the heart, or "heartists," if you are in need of a good portmanteau ... or a bad one. Our motto is, "No question too big, no case too small." What is your case that needs solving?


 The Burner. — The burner figure echoes the Burning Man symbol. They are floating above the "Playa" in the Black Rock Desert speckled with the ethereal light that comes from the camps and art of tens of thousands of people. Their arms are raised and they seem to emanate their own ethereal light, participating in the \*Ecstatic experience that comes from the hard work of building community and making art. They are in the moment, participating in both the community and the art with both a spirit of \*Generosity & Receptivity.

I had no intention of making the \*Burner community in Austin, (participants in the regional burning event, "Burning Flipside,") my home. They kinda chose me. They are lovers of art and community and those are two things I want to love. They have taught me a lot about both while making room for my flaws while still pushing me to be better. Art doesn't have to be anything you think it has to be. Take what you're told won't work and just #ArtHarder. Oh, and when you find your people, even if you aren't sure if you're happy about it, go all in and love them anyway. These folks have made me one of the richest men on the planet. Thanks y'all. but while we are at it... could you please back up a little and stop yelling, its megaphone not a weapon... it is grating... oh and your MOOP is really starting Grind. My. Gears. Get a curiously strong mint tin, wouldya? Ok, I probably just need water, but your music is terrible and I have been thinking you should.... I mean, ....thanks y'all!


 The Open Chair— The stain glass window of Mother Mary seems to be coming to life under the light of the "Coram Deo," -the Gaze of God. The chair is empty but alive

with anticipation for whomever dares to step into the scene and risk becoming more real. Our hearts can be like this scene, with a space open and reserved for strangers and friends, or whomever dares to enter into your moment and watch you become more real to them. Or maybe life is inviting you touch what you thought was just an image, a myth, and turns out to be more real than you imagined. Keep one chair open. Keep yourself open to the open chair. You may end up entertaining angels unaware.


 **The Metaphor**— On this card, the heart is a candle. It is not similar to a candle, or reminiscent of candles. It is a candle. The heart shape itself is a metaphor. Almost every form of human communication involves the use of metaphors (See [I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World](#) by Geary, or [Metaphors we Live By](#), by Lakoff & Johnson). How we navigate life is, for each of us, a different metaphor or set of metaphors. When the Xanatos Gambit \*Metadetective Agency designs an experience for someone, what we always go looking for are the main metaphors someone is using to navigate their lives. Then merely by playing with those metaphors through art, we help a person stretch their own \*Imagination around how they approach life. What are your main operating metaphors? What the your main metaphor for the heart? How can listening to other's metaphors can help you empathize, understand, or help? How can listening stretch your metaphors?

 **The Holy Fool (or Yurodivy)**— The Holy Fool, (or “yurodivy” in the Russian Orthodox tradition) is a long standing character in the Christian Tradition. The Yurodivy often took on the appearance of a feeble, morally suspect, or mentally unstable person. St. Symeon was know to blow out the candles during mass or throw peanuts at the priest. For this reason, I like him very much. By night, however, people would seek the a Holy Fool, like St Simeon, out for healing and advice. On this card, the Holy Fool is painted like a jester, who in a more Shakespearean context “plays” with other characters to help them see the truth, much like the \*Metadetectives try to do. It is a reminder that the Reign of God is upside down. What is foolishness in one way may actually be a higher wisdom. What looks like success may turn out to be folly. It also turns out it is not a big secret which is which when we ask the right questions or the wrong questions to the right people. One may well look and feel like a fool when she seeks the genuine life of holiness and rejects mere appearance of piety. The Holy Fool, knows her audience. . . her audience is above all God.




 The Hero's Journey (The Odyssey)— The phrase comes from the work of Joseph Campbell but it has evolved in all it represents to me personally. It is crucial to the Odyssey Works art collective, ([www.odysseyworks.org](http://www.odysseyworks.org)) which designs many heroic journeys for select participants (and is a big sister organization to the Metadetectives). They refer to the experiences they design as Odysseys, and rightly so, both in terms of the arc of the journey as well as the scope.

All of us, have things to learn from the myths of heroes. On this card the heart is just reflection that is being generated by a light from behind you as you look at the water. What gives it so many colors? The message in the bottle, before you even retrieve it, is daring you to leave the comforts of your current home and go on some kind of an adventure. The details are still unknown to you. What do you do to help the people around you become heroes they are? What journey are you being dared to go on right now? What adventure do you need to go on in order to become your best self? On what kind of adventure must you invite those you love in order for them to be their best selves? Do whatever you want but my best advice is ...Do. Not. Turn. Away.


 The Peculiar— So, what is going on here? The heart on this card is also a uhhh...um...a chicken? But a closer look reveals it is actually also a human, in fact it is my friend Anna who has been so supportive in the making of these cards. But wait, is Anna a quadrupedal mammal? The Anna Chicken has paw prints.

I love the truly peculiar. It is an art form to learn how to move toward peculiar people, or to make space for some people's peculiarity, but it can be the stuff of the most interesting lives. Who do you know that might wear this costume and not even think to mention it? What keeps you from moving toward the peculiar? How does it ask you to change, to question more of your reality or habits? What is peculiar about you that, with some guidance, might be let loose upon the world? In an insane and dysfunctional world, shouldn't we trust only those who do not completely fit in? How can you move toward something peculiar today? Just say the magic word.  
ChickAnnaPaw!

 The Table— Every culture has some version of a place where people gather to eat together. Gathering to eat with friends is one of my favorite activities in life, especially for feasts and special occasions. The main practice of the Christian faith is to gather at such a table and celebrate together. The Table, along with the \*Open Chair, constantly reminds that I do not decide who gets to be at the table or not, only God


does...and everyone is invited. The existence of the Table reminds me that I sit with some of the great saints over the centuries but I also sit with all the lesser saints, the less-than-saints, and those who struggle with faith altogether, like me. All of us sit at the same table.

I am reminded that I sit at this table with conservative pundits, trans people of color, environmental activists, people with intellectual disabilities, "ugly" people, angry people, lazy people. I sit at the same table as people from certain countries that my country likes to bomb or threaten. I am reminded that I sit next to black bodies who are members of the singular Body of Christ and perhaps I need to live differently because of it. All of that changes how I live. All of my life is shaped by the fact that I am not in charge of the guest-list to the feast to which I have been \*Welcomed. I want the particular tables I sit at to reflect the reality of the \*The Table. I think that who I sit with tells you a lot about who I am. What tables have you been invited to? Look past who is there and also see who is not there. Why? Who is standing in the way? Who is standing in their own way? We are all invited to a feast. What does your table say about you?

 **The Ecstatic**— Ecstasy has been given a bad name a) by the drug that shares the name and b) by the habit to use the word in a way that only refers to things that seem rapturous. It is further complicated when people call some experiences "transcendent," and what they mean is ecstatic. They are not the same thing. Ecstasy does not require transcendence and the Transcendentals (The \*True, The \*Beautiful, and the \*Good) do not require, nor do they promise, just one experience. At least that is not what they are there for.

What I am referring to on this card is the experience of genuine human delight that is brought about by activity, connection, success, insight, creativity, or satisfaction. Therefore, the drug MDMA would not count in this case. The card is intentionally labeled The Ecstatic, not just "ecstasy," for these reasons. What I am celebrating here are the human practices, or perhaps divine actions, that liberate individuals or a community for a moment and allows them to feel free and easy in their bodies. Sure it is often expressed through things like spontaneous dancing, but not all spontaneous dancing is the same thing as the \*Ecstatic. The actual feeling or experience of ecstasy is not the focus. The feelings are just a symptom of some great human achievement or divine connection. "Ex stasis" the roots of ecstasy "To get out of its place" or "to make stand." It means the things that make you jump up and dance. I


don't seek ecstasy, but I do look for a life punctuated by The Ecstatic. There are things in life that make us want to jump up and dance freely in their bodies. I don't love the dance alone, I love what it means when we get there together.

 Faith— Faith is the first of the three “Theological Virtues,” along with \*Hope and \*Love. In this colorful, fantastical scene, The bluish body has turned toward the path, lifting a boot as if to keep turning and to continue walking along a path of hearts which have been laid out like stepping stones. The light from a lantern does not light the whole scene. Instead it shines just enough light for our blue buttocks-ed self to keep moving forward, one step at a time.

In North American culture, Faith is mostly measured by the intensity of one's belief and the unwillingness to change or grow in the face of evidence. Well, pishposh! St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that, “Faith” really begins with the willingness to question, and to deeply mine the most complex mysteries of human existence. Faith is an example of the hard work of \*Love, the hard work of engaging the questions of the most ultimate things. This is a communal, not just an individual quest. In another sense, Faith is found in the \*Mundane work of everyday life. Faith finds its first expression in ethics, not conscious belief. Faith is acting as if something is indeed the case.



For example, my Faith in electricity is hardly demonstrated at all by my feelings or thoughts. I rarely have regular conscious feelings about electricity at all (until one's entire state loses electricity during a record freeze which costs more than 90 people their lives and the Governor who is responsible is passing bucks faster than den of mountain lions after a hunt- then I have all kinds of intense feelings about electricity which are unlikely to fade despite some pretty sketchy sleight of hand and partisan showmanship. ahem.) No, my faith in electricity is demonstrated by my habit of reaching for the light switch in the middle of the night before I go to pee. I have a conviction about electricity that directs my habits and behavior. That is what faith is, not a short list of assertions, or a creed about electricity to which I am expected to assent without much consequence. Faith is the investment in the questions the engineers, who do follow assertions about its properties, have asked and pursued that now allow us to use electricity in new ways. Faith is the willingness to keep moving, even when I am in darkness and have only just enough light for the step I am on and the next one. Faith is being sure-enough today to keep playing along with others who

play with the biggest questions (with or without a blue-ish ass). Faith is acting as if something really is the case. It is often what makes the courage to \*Love possible.

 Hope— Hope, the second of the theological virtues, is also a driving force in ethics (by which I mean our actions, lives, habits and decisions). Hope is not a matter of a tight-eyed, intentionally blind, will-to-power, that shows off one's piety. Hope is not merely crossed fingers and wishful thinking. Hope is participation. Hope is active participation in the story, the \*Narrative you believe leads to good things to goodness. It is also the convictions that are formed deep inside us over time by doing \*Good, virtuous things, like showing \*Forgiveness, \*Compassion, and \*Hospitality.

Hope enables you to stay on course in the face of adversity. It is the willingness to participate in a \*Narrative we believe is \*True, \*Beautiful and \*Good even when the news is dominated by terrible self-serving spin on life's tragedies. Our hope is seen in our actions that participate in the goodness and promise of the most promising narratives, even when they are costly. Hope is continuing to act as if all of life is worth it because the \*Narrative you participate in is lovely, full of promise, and self-giving.


Depicted on this card is a man raising a fist, as if fighting for a cause. It is like a fist you'd see at a Black Lives Matter march. Marching is an act of hope that justice, and maybe one day reconciliation and equality are possible. The light in this scene emanates from his heart, not a lantern like on the \*Faith card. His active faith has taken root in his deep convictions that the struggle is worth it. He finds courage to carry on. That shines. What story do you participate in? Is it \*Good? \*Beautiful? and \*True? Is it worth sacrifice and struggle? In what area of life do you find you share the most hope with others, what makes you hopeful? What are you fighting for that isn't hope? If you found hope, what would you surrender?

 Love — Finally, comes Love, the third and highest of the Theological Virtues. "If I speak with tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong and a clanging symbol." Reads the famous chapter from 1 Corinthians. It continues, "Now these three remain, faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is Love." Aquinas helps us out again to see why only Love remains. Faith is working toward something and one day we will get there and not have to work anymore. Hope en-courages en-heartens us to invest and sacrifice in the struggle for good things, and one day, we will have the goodness of things and wont have to struggle. So what


will still be there when we “arrive?” Faith will pass away, hope will pass away, . . . only Love remains. When we practice acts of genuine love, they are the fullness of our legacy. Everything else disappears. On this card two hands wash the feet of another in a pale imitation of Christ who humbly washed the feet of his disciples (including Judas who he already knew betrayed him). Love, however, is not made up solely of humility. While kneeling down, Christ also lifts the feet of the other, raising them up because in Love you want to lift them up.


Love \*is\* related to desire but it is not at all understood completely in the genre of romance stories we repeat over and over. Love comes from realizing that one is deeply and profoundly loved and that there is not one human on this planet not worth loving. That doesn't mean I have to be the person loving every human or that I should have bad boundaries. Love necessarily includes saying no to things like violence and self destruction or anything contrary to love. But it says no in a way that clears a path for Love. The hard work of Love requires discernment. It is an art form. It is an art form best lived by in-spiration . . . breathing Love in. My best resource in loving others is the profound, tender, and relentless love of God.

### Faith

 The Sacred— A small simple, hand drawn church stands awkward and upright. I did not choose to draw a cathedral or other glorious elaborate spaces, though that can also be true. Sacred does not necessarily mean grandiose. I want to remind us that humans have always dedicated spaces to the sacred. While I believe that everything is some way sacred, sacred spaces are as important to understanding \*how\* everything is sacred. Similarly, punctuation marks like a period or a comma are the only part of sentences that isn't letters or spaces and they help break our rhythms, cause us to pause, and reflect. They help us make sense of not just a sentence, but the whole paragraph, and the whole of the book. Sacred spaces and sacred moments break our rhythms. They remind us everything has holiness in it, however imperfectly, and that we can become more truly holy, not just arrogantly pious, if we have rhythms of remembering what \*Holiness is. Life needs spaces set aside where we weave our own stories into the \*Narratives of the ultimate things and where we do not do our taxes or play parcheesi. Then we can discover the holiness in parcheesi, or a burn event, or a stranger too. ..and maybe even in an enemy.


The Sacred is also part of a Triptych with aqua corners

 **The Mundane**— This card sits close to \*Love and \*Faith but is not otherwise marked as such. I have struggled whether or not to include this card as it is. It is a simple roughly drawn image of a hand washing a dish. At the end of the day, however, it may be one of the most important cards. The rich and \*Beautiful life is full of doing dishes, wiping butts & changing diapers, while paying bills. The life of faith is lived not above the mundane demands of life, but inside it. It is the manner in which we manage to do mundane things, and the extent we can learn to do them with great love, that is the key to living a holy life. Most of the sacredness, the \*Holiness God has called us to is written in the mundane. My personality loves to craft rich “Kairos” moments in life. They are powerful. But even more powerful is the habit of brushing one’s teeth, calling your mother, and taking out the garbage. Life, like a mosaic, is made up mostly of the small things. The Mundane is also part of a Triptych with aqua corners

 **The Liminal** — Liminal in the most literal sense means the in-between or threshold spaces. Jacques Ellul articulated that being a Christian is a matter of living in both the Now and the Not Yet. On this card, in a heart-shaped sink similar to one on The Mundane card, a gloved hand washes. . . well, the sacred. I like this for many reasons, not the least of which is the absurdity of the image. This shows us the synthesis of the Sacred and the Mundane. Not just between, but in-between. It captures the tension of the Now and the Not Yet. A phrase I use in my writing a bit is “In the middle of this meantime.” That is where we live our liminality. . . in the meantime. . . the meanwhile. . . while we practice waiting. And some of the strange Sacred/Mundane activities can include, polishing the pews on a weekday and putting in new candles and recycling the old ones. How about fertilizing grapes that will become the wine that will eventually be communion? It’s poo, but when well placed, it is key element in creating our sacred spaces. Annie Dillard writes beautifully about this in *Holy the Firm* as she carries a bottle of communion wine in her backpack on a walk. Some of the harder work we may have to do is other forms of cleaning sacred spaces, like holding board/Vestry meetings where a staff member has to be let go for abuse of power or even just sustaining the criticism of abuse within a tradition while still being part of it. So in another sense, the middle of this current meantime is well represented by the practice, and the need to wash a church soiled with power, and riddled with state politics. I also don’t love laundry, but you gotta do the work you need to do or you are the only one that suffers. Folks, some of us have some scrubbing to do. Pull on

your latex gloves, this may take awhile . . . we have time. Time is all we have.  
Especially between the Now and the Not Yet.


The Liminal is also part of a Triptych with aqua corners.

 **Prayer**— On this card my heart burns with some kind of fire but is not consumed, like the famous burning bush Moses encountered in the desert. One sword pierces upward, almost as if it is coming from the heart while it also breaks it. The downward piercing sword pierces the heart, but also brings color, light, and more fire to the heart. I hesitated over the design of this card. The design for “The Mundane” card is a better representation of my prayer life, at least in how I experience it and the necessity of doing the work of prayer regularly. \*Love, \*Faith, \*The Mundane, and \*Prayer always overlap. It was really important to me to also depict how prayer really changes me. The fire is a slow burn perhaps but colorful nonetheless.

It is prayer that has lead me to some of the most challenging, peculiar, curious, and formative moments. It is the regular ongoing work of prayer that continues to purge my heart of the residual, habitual racism that still hides in the corners of who I am. This is not an image of what prayer feels like in my heart. It is an image of what it does to my heart over time. I reach out to God to simply tell God about my day, but doing so often pierces my heart. And when I pause in silence to listen to God, sometimes the silence itself pierces my heart again. I consider the extent that my heart is changed by the \*Constancy and ongoing \*Mundane work of prayer proof that a life of prayer matters, especially when it comes to \*Faith, \*Hope, and the capacity to \*Love. There is only one thing that has radically changed my life more than any single other thing, prayer.

When politicians dismissively offer “thoughts & prayers” after a public shooting or other public calamity, it infuriates me not because I don’t think thoughts and prayers are helpful. On the contrary, I think committing real \*Thought and Prayer about serious real-world issues is one of the most transformative and powerful thing a person can do. However, if the only prayers a politician can manage to pray are prayers to comfort the loved ones of a situation that could have been avoided if only the politicians had done their jobs, then that isn’t sincere prayer, that is scapegoating. So when you hear someone offer thoughts and prayers, ask them which thoughts, who is helping them think, and how they intend to pray, with whom and when. Thoughts and prayers aren’t the problem, trying to fence thoughts and prayers in, is a sure sign of idolatry. You can’t serve God and mammon and prayer is often where the contest

between those plays itself out. Though the change is often more like the slow sculpting power of the glacier rather than the heat of a lightning strike, prayer and change go hand in hand. What could be more transformative than the willingness to open one's heart to God as we direct our desires toward God and then the willingness to have our hearts opened to what it is that God desires. Is prayer a fire that does not consume and a sword that pierces a heart that does not destroy? It sure feels like that if anything at all. . . .and I would not trade it for anything. If I had, I would not be who I am.

 **Thought**— In my \*Tradition, to be a person of \*Faith means to love God, “With all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and all your mind.” In the same way that the life of prayer can pierce the heart, a life of thinking and reflecting about the mysteries of life can pierce the mind. Frankly it is really hard work to move beyond anything more than simply having opinions about religions or spirituality or the vague idea of God. Everyone living the life of Faith is necessarily a theologian. Some of those theologians find a vocation in working out issues of life and faith with intensity and nuance and they get degrees and jobs teaching others. It is important that this part of the body of humanity do this. I have a vocation to do this. These people are also theologians, but they are hardly the strict definition of one. As mentioned in the write up about the \*Faith card, Aquinas reminds us that the life of \*Faith is the courage and willingness to enter the questions of the great mysteries of life, and to learn how to navigate them, dance well with them, and to also propose humble responses that help us carry on in \*Faith. I also want to be careful. I often hear people, when complaining about the state of the world that the people they don't like are stupid and what we needs is smarter people. The world is not necessarily in need of more smart people and we have no control over that. Smart people hardly produce reliably good people. Everyone, however, is called to love God with their whole mind. We must all do our best thinking. Good thinking arouses us to \*Love, regardless of our IQ.

The famous verse, the Rime of the Mariner begins, “Water, water every where [but not] a drop to drink.” The job of the theologian is to understand this ocean of God's love well enough to help the thirsty find something to drink. But if you want to know God's love in any way, you better learn at least some of the wisdom of those who know these waters, lest you abandon ship, or worse, take the lot of us down with you. Thinking, is necessarily some of the hard work of \*Love.

 **Pride**  — Frederick Beuchner says that the story of any one of us is, to some




degree the story of us all. I think that is true in part because what it is not claiming is that all of our stories are basically the same. When we encounter others stories, we necessarily have to see other's lives as metaphors for what is possible in our own story. This deck is not intended to be a list of universals. Instead these cards are depictions of recurring themes or useful central elements of my own biography so far and how those elements have related to each other in my life. I think by including moments of specificity, you or forced to make \*metaphors of my own ideas and see where they fit and what they can possibly become for you.

This is why I included the pride card. Of course, not everyone is gay. Nor do I think that every LGBTQ+ person sees coming out as a matter of \*Faith. For me, however, both of these are true. I could not have come out had it not been for the conviction that I am deeply, profoundly, and relentlessly loved by God. I would not know the fullness of the love of God if I hid part of who I am.

I may not have become a theological ethicist, or even a decent human, if my sexuality didn't produce the challenges and gifts that is has. The undeniable complications of my sexuality has forced me to reflect on not just this one ethical issue, but the very nature of God and the way we do Christian ethics and discernment all together. I know many people they are no longer X or Y religion because of their experience of being gay. For far too many that has been best path on their journey to get them to safety where they can experience some of the dignity and joy God intends. For me, being gay has been an incredible fertile environment to seek a faith that was also a vibrant spirituality, and a set of convictions that are credible and reasonable. I am religious and Spiritual. They are not opposites. Be suspicious when anyone, religious or not, tells you they are not intended to be one in the same. In our short memories, a lot of people have no recollection that it was unthinkable for someone to be both Christian and gay in my early life, except for a few rare examples.

I trust there are things in your life that you may have wished was not the case at all, but I also believe that those conflicts can also help turn sickeningly sweet grape juice in to the fine wine of a faithful life. Now in my life, I go looking for I these anomalies, contradictions, & paradoxes (and even made a card about the \*Peculiar, and the \*Outpatient Monk for this reason). What is your pride that you forged from ashes? What is the pride you still have yet to find? I am proof that you can.


 **Obedience** — First, let's consider this image: a man with glowing hearts behind his head and apparent wif-looking symbols radiating from his ears. He has his eyes

shut. It may look, at first glance relatively absurd. What do you feel it is telling you? What would you have expected a card named "Obedience" to depict? Obedience, I knew, would not be a popular, or even welcomed inclusion in this deck. Meanwhile it is more necessary and crucial for thriving on this planet than we realize.

The root words for obedience collective echo the idea of listen-well, listening deeply or hearing rightly. The contrasting words for obedience is not strength, courage, rebellion, confrontation, dissent, or even disobedience. The opposite of obedience is absurdity. To be ab-surd, is the opposite of listening-well. Think about the moments this year you have accused or heard someone accused of being tone-deaf to a moment, movement, or a people group. It usually makes the statements come off as ridiculous, wildly absurd. "Absurdity," is to hear something poorly or to not even try. ("Read the room, buddy," is a phrase we don't hear often enough ). Obedience, simply means to listen well, which is far from implying blind compliance. Obedience connotes a sense of well earned trust and being awakened to love. "Obedience," is being thoughtful and attentive to what is trustworthy.

I feel I have been truly obedient when I really "get" a client and we design a perfectly thoughtful and insightful experience for them. I am being obedient when I nail the perfect birthday gift by listening to a friends heart and life. I have been obedient when I hear a customer's need and help them find the right product. I am obedient when I internalize, question, and engage the expectations of the Burning Flipside community to which I belong. It is always a good thing when done well. It is always bad when good obedience is spat upon. That is arrogance, not rebellion.

As for being compliant, that can be done without love whatsoever. For the most entertaining evidence of this please go read the subreddit [r/maliciouscompliance](#). You will thank me. Let's all get a good image of what bad obedience can be. [r/maliciouscompliance](#). Hysterical. Absurd. Not obedience.

 Dissent — Apparently, on this card, one heart has decided outright, to not be compliant and to leave the card entirely. Entirely.


Here is a little know fact, one of the major positive functions of religions in society is (wait for it) the cultivation of dissent. People who gather & engage ancient stories, and who then weave their lives into those stories that ask something meaningful of them tend to see the world very differently than what the "State" seems to imagine when it thinks of citizens as subjects, and religion as a means of taming those subjects. It is Quaker dissent that paved the way for conscientious objection in

the US. Much of the Civil Rights Movement of the 60's was animated by religious. This is not merely a modern phenomenon though. Did you ever notice that the stereotypical monastic vows of Poverty, Chastity, and \*Obedience, are the exact opposite of money, sex, and power? And Jesus didn't crucified for being a good, compliant, citizen.

We live in an era in which compliance seems to be elevated higher than obedience, and therefore obscures it. There seems to be little or no room for dissent unless it is in the service of some political party narrating our circumstance. That is actually compliance. Here is where #Obedience and #dissent meet. It will be an art form to discern when to dissent and when to obey. Or if I say that more accurately: we have to work to know which community and \*Narrative we will most lovingly obey in order to dissent from lesser more evil social influences.


We are always obeying and dissenting. We will sometimes intentionally choose which is which. Other times we will not have to choose at all as the formation of us in our communities bypasses the need to even experience a quandary. Martin Luther proclaimed at his trial, "Here I stand, I can do no other." St Francis renounced his inheritance and went streaking through the Assisi town square. Dorothy Day spent more than a few nights in jail because her body would not let her bypass an opportunity to defend the rights and dignity of the poor, women's right to vote, and the necessity of making peace in a frenzied arms race. When the time came, Rosa Parks sat where she knew she had a right to sit, not in a fleeting moment of indiscretion, and she had a community and a \*Narrative to back her up. To whom will you listen? To whom do you most often listen? From whom or what must we learn to walk away boldly. If somehow in your mind you are reading this insisting you are solely an individual, not some sheeple, who always does your own thing, then your have clearly been listening to the \*Narrative of American individualism. It is a \*Narrative espoused as much by RuPaul and Britney Spears as by Ayn Rand.

We live in a time of individualist conformity. We have not found, and will not find a way to obey ourselves into a credible dissent from that myth. Dissent is an art form. We all listen, we all walk toward something thing, we all walk away form other things. Now we just need to learn to do it well.

 Justice — What is the most typical image used in the portrayal of justice? Blindness? Balancing scales? Neither of those images come anywhere near the richness of the search for justice.

Justice is about making way for life and for dignity. Sometimes that involves restraining evil, like arresting people. Sometimes it is a far more complex journey like the struggle for equality by People of Color, women, the disabled, and LGBTQ+ communities. In this image I set it against a cityscape because that is where I first learned about justice, in urban studies, and it is where justice is still sorely needed. But revenge, balance, blindness, & reward systems, are not the notion of justice one finds in the ongoing plot of the Bible. Justice is about clearing the way for life, tearing down things that keep humans from flourishing, and celebrating and nursing the life that is trying to get through. This is the archetype of justice. The other questions we usually ask in ethics classes about justice (punishment for crimes or justified violence) would be significantly reframed if we always saw the first task of justice to break the chains that bind and to cultivate the life trying to get through. Then we can ask those the difficult questions about those other notions of justice. Never the other way around.

### Insight

 The True— In Western philosophy, the idea of the Transcendentals is born in Antiquity by the classic Greek philosophers (you know the ones), and later solidified in medieval Scholasticism (I know you have no idea who that would be). There are the three things which rise above, well almost everything else. Three things get to be truly “extra”: \*The True, \*The Beautiful, and \*The Good. In contemporary speech patterns we struggle to make sense of the word transcendent, and we often end up using it to elevate the personal experience of \*ecstasy, which means something quite different entirely.

Today we are more inclined to talk about “objectivity” instead of transcendence, as the opposite of particularity, subjective experience or individual perspective. That is part of our “Enlightenment” hangover.. *[Some history: In modern metaphysics everyone from Descartes to Nietzsche treats the who of philosophical questions as the “subject,” and the what of philosophy the “object.” This drives the distinction between experience and empirical sciences, and philosophy becomes increasingly concerned with epistemology –or the theory of how we come to know stuff. Max Weber begins to refer to*

*the stuff of experience as values, and the stuff of empirical science as facts. it is a short leap from there to where we are now. if Beauty and Goodness are not established through empirical discovery, they default to being seen as values than metaphysics.].* Now we seem to only speak of \*Truth and objectivity as related, though that is changing too (more about that in a minute). Instead of something transcendent, \*Beauty, as the say, "is in the eye of the beholder." By this, we generally mean that something can/should be considered beautiful based solely on the extent someone experiences it as such. The opposite seems to also be assumed, \*Beauty does not/can not exist outside "the eye of the beholder" in any meaningful way — so, no transcendence to be found here. But there is more here than a flight to objectivity. The fact that we have separated these ideas from each other is as perhaps as important as the fact that we have separated them from the idea of transcendence. Well, that is a lot to consider, but all we need to know for now is that to whatever extent we can begin to rediscover the relationship of \*The True, \*The Beautiful, and \*The Good, is the extent we might also rediscover transcendence and perhaps even metaphysics in a more meaningful way than just the woo-woo section of the bookstore.

Let's start with The \*True. We still use the words "truth," and, "objectivity," in the same sentences a lot but in a way that is wildly suspect to me. Mostly what we mean today when we say "truth," is a series of empirical facts. They are not the same thing. The problem with a series of facts – a data string, is that no matter how accurate or comprehensive the facts are, it is not necessarily the "Truth."

Make a list in your mind of all the furniture and objects in your front room. No matter how long and accurate you make that list, it will never eventually explain why that room is your "living room" or "den" whatever it may be. However, when most strangers who come over rarely accidentally go directly into the bathroom thinking that is where you plan to hang out. They know what is true. If you told a judge a crime happened in the 12-pieces-of-wood-and-metal-furniture room, and not "the Living Room" you might even be considered as obscuring the truth..and get in trouble.


The ancient philosophers told us there were some things that transcend, that rise above a mere series of facts or individual experiences but hinge rather on participation. Insofar as we participate in the \*Beautiful, we discover it is more than a series of empirical facts or of something I experience as an individual. The \*Truth is not merely facts, nor is it just my perspective. This is why it is a little bit of madness

when we make a habit of using possessive pronouns in conjunction with transcendentals. There can really be no such thing as “My Truth.” There are a lot of complex reasons that phrase has evolved – part of it is the post-modern obsession with epistemology. Part of it is a need to emphasize showing up to conversations with vulnerability and integrity, especially when we want those conversations to be ethically compelling to others — i.e. I share “my truth” as a gay person to help inform and shape other’s lives. Those are good things. However, when we speak like that we lose some of what can be most compelling. There a good, and less good, beautiful, and less beautiful, true, and less true ways of living with each other, that isn’t based on my perspective or your’s alone. So I can share with you my perspective of what is true. I can share truthful things about my context you may have no clue about, but it doesn’t mean the truth itself changes with your preferences, perspectives, desires, or opinions. This is why telling the truth, and not just lying is an art form. We have to get really good at describing the right things in the right contexts in a way that most fully participates in the truth. There isn’t just one way to do that, but it also is not relative.

You may not see me as fully human, but my humanness is not up to you. It is above you. It is even above me. You can’t alter it. You can participate in it and be truthful, or you can attack it and become less truthful and, well, less aligned with your own humanity. The same is true for my \*Beauty which has little to do with my appearance or self-esteem. The same is true for what is \*Good and it is neither based on being particularly good at something nor on the self-assessment of my intentions.

This card for The True is blue with a series of concentric squares morphing in color from blue to green with a background repeated heart shapes. The Beautiful is red concentric circles fading to blue and The Good has green concentric triangles turning red. The three primary shapes are a nod to the Platonic forms, or ideas, as another reference to transcendence in western Antiquity. The morphing of colors from blue to green, green to red, and from red back to blue gesture to how they are inherently related and moving toward each other even though their shapes are distinct. In drawing one of these cards you draw an element of all three.

The True is also part of a triptych with yellow quarter-circles

 The Beautiful— Stick with me for a few thoughts before I paint a very small picture of how contemplating The Beautiful can lead us to useful insight. Of the three Transcendentals, beauty seems to baffle philosophy undergraduates the most. We are so inclined to see beauty as something so subjective that there is no way it can be

anything more than an expression of mere preferences, or rather, a matter of taste, (which incidentally is not merely subjective, nor inherent, but socially constructed — which means it is often shaped by those in power –see Pierre Bourdieu). We seem to feel very nearly the same way in our understanding of the \*The Good, which makes it clearer why ethical reasoning seems no more coherent than the reasoning between high school friends who are furtively debating who should win on this season of “The Voice.” As passionate as those arguments may get and as certain as any one engaged in it can feel, there is no real shared criteria, let alone an appeal to something beyond our preferences or the preferences of the powerful. This wrestling match of preferences is part of what Alisdair MacIntyre argued in his books, “Whose Justice? Which Rationality?” and “Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry.”

I won't belabor this critique any farther, but I can propose a humble suggestion: Imagine if we made some effort to reintroduce the category of transcendent things into our \*Imagination, even if we don't fully know how to best operate those ideas. We probably would not be able to cut right to the heart of the dragon and be able to walk through a modern museum, labeling which pieces qualify as truly Beautiful or not (which is not a real application of contemplating transcendence). However, just knowing that Beauty was actually a thing means that everything (including, art, music, last week's homework, office presentations, chores, and the actions between friends and loved ones), could more or less know they were participating in Beauty itself, in varying degrees. Just the reintroduction of such an idea could nourish our convictions and raise the bar on how we try to live, our aspirations.

Sometimes in helping people try to design thoughtful moments for loved ones, I will often suggest we keep pressing forward with brainstorming ideas until it appears we have come across something beautiful, which is often for people quite moving when they start to sort it out. It is easy to plan pretty events, exorbitant anniversary parties, dramatic proposals etc. . . . many of which might not end up being particularly meaningful to the person for whom we are designing the experience. What is tricky, what requires some insight, is invoking the presence of the person you love in the occasion you are planning, and not just some aspect of their lives. When we can tap into and expand on that person's beauty, we begin to believe we are doing something which itself is beautiful. Whether we are right or not is a good question for discussion. For the sake of this deck, and the two other transcendental cards, it will be

enough to say that when we imagine that The Beautiful is indeed transcendent and when we try to participate in it in a way particular to our circumstances (by crafting a letter, arranging an act of service, or even trying to discern the direction of our lives) we almost always end up with a great deal more than we thought possible. We move closer to coming upon insight in different situations when we go looking for insights that participate in The Beautiful. We are certainly better off than if we just tried to impress people with some expensive elevated experience. It is this notion of the noun, "Beauty," or as I have chosen to list it here as "The Beautiful." That makes sense when Fyodor Dostoyevsky writes in The Idiot, "Beauty will save the world." While we may be obsessed with factuality or pure subjectivity in our culture and language patterns, it is just imagining or contemplating The Beautiful that can inspire us to weave our stories into stories we come to know as beautiful. When we go looking to live beautifully, we realize quickly we don't get there alone or without some inspiration or discovery of what is beautiful beyond our own preferences or tastes. Yes, Beauty will save the world, which is all the more reason we should want to try to practice participating in The Beautiful with our lives. The Beautiful is part of a triptych with yellow quarter-circles.



**The Good**— In the culture wars, one of our main forms of moral discourse is a mere war of preferences. I find it extremely strange that in all the thousands of years of moral reasoning, most people have come to believe that the (ever shifting) platform of their particular party happens to perfectly nail what is good and important for society while the opposing team, and their entire platform, manages to get it precisely wrong. One need not look much further than the quick polarization of the responses to the COVID travesty to see how even very basic safety measures and easily verifiable information about what is happening around the globe split in to two camps. Of all of the many different communities to which people belong, it is the battle between two political parties that has shaped the everyday, life saving or life risking behavior of an entire nation. It is not just a disagreement about how a government should enforce life saving measures, but whether those measures are themselves valid. It has moved beyond policy to controlling our daily reality.

When it comes to social ethics, we have stopped asking what a society should be, what humans are for, what their telos is, or anything about human purpose at all. Instead, people tend to look primarily to the narrative their political leaders are telling and embrace both the narrative and the relatively narrow conclusions they draw



about what policy should be. In the meantime, the whole of our lives are being driven by one set of powerful people's desire to remain in or accumulate power.

In America, we used to be able to see good in each other regardless of how our friends or even a spouse, thought a state should be governed. Now the culture wars are so demanding that if a person does not agree with my party's position in any way, then I assume they are part of the opposing party and then tend to consider her morally suspect. In fact, I almost have to think of them as evil, rather than different. Morality follows state-making, not goodness, not the pursuit of the Good. The Good has all but disappeared from our discourse. Like most wars, the war will not bring an end to itself. Even if your side won a sweeping campaign for years it would likely result in the repositioning of the opposition to return to a more contentious game. The only way out is to \*dissent from politics as our main framework for moral conversations. We have to find more credible, longer standing threads of moral reasoning, learn to discover common ground, and relegate politics back to the art of compromise and negotiation. We need to favor politicians with win/win strategies that follow our convictions about what is good, rather than the other way around.


Consider one of the hottest topics for decades, abortion. Few people on either side of the culture wars think far past whether it should be legal or not, or perhaps which version of some legislation they can get away with that will provide an appearance of a moral victory, without even approaching the total complexity of the questions as to how to be a good people. There is rarely much talk or interest in other rich and complex ways of \*Narrating this difficult topic. (I can already sense the heat from those who think this is not a difficult topic at all). Imagine with me, just for a moment a bi-partisan effort, with the convictions of each side in tact, to reduce the amount of abortions. While liberals consider access to abortion a good, the abortion rarely seen as a good unto itself, more of a necessity. What I mean is that even hard left leaning liberals do not consider having an abortion itself a badge of honor. I know of no women personally who are bragging about having as many abortions as possible. IT is not an end unto itself. Still, access is considered a good thing. Similarly, it is not my experience that my conservative friends delight in sending a woman, especially one faced with difficult life circumstances, to jail, but they still want to discourage abortions. It just happens that our discourse often drives us to only consider its legality. In different ways, both liberals and conservatives, should generally be able to cooperate in reducing the net amount of abortions –not as a moral end, but as a

compromise (when did that become a bad word?) Liberals might recommend steps to prevent unplanned pregnancies (by funding organizations that make birth control accessible, for example) while Conservatives may want to encourage other options to abortion, (by supporting adoption or supporting women through pregnancy). But the current narratives that both sides have embraced preclude the possibility of win/win discussion . . . let alone compromise. We don't discuss what good we can seek, we only argue about winning. The only good we seek is a victory over the other camp, not a good unto itself. We argue about being right, rather than doing good.

This is all commentary on power and narrative, not on any particular stance. I am trying to use a fiercely debated issue to make a point about how we frame our lives and our neighbors lives and how it keeps us from imagining The Good. I certainly will oppose shaming any woman who has made or is making a tough choice. There is no good in offloading the complexity of a social issue on to one woman's shoulders. Period. But note that just because I may be saying things that do not fall squarely into your rhetoric on the issue, does not mean I must be asserting a position on abortion opposite of yours. I almost certainly am not. What I am asserting is a position on the tyrannical approach to story-telling our politicians have learned to leverage for their own purposes, and how we have let that dominate our \*Imaginations. This is not a pursuit of \*The Good at all. Our all-or-nothing version of partisanship is killing our ability to imagine or create solutions outside the opposing blue/red platforms. Most painfully, our participation in the culture wars has stolen our ability to appreciate and enjoy things that are, well, Good things, including respect, compromise, patience, good-will, dignity, freedom and creativity. . . all things that participate in Goodness. We have traded these things in for team colors.


When I believe in the Good, try to move toward it, & learn to talk about it, I end up with a lot more helpful insight to share with others than if I simply play along with stories I embrace mostly out of disdain for the opposing side. It is \*dissent from a culture war that can give us something helpful and interesting to say. It is good to imagine a time for us in which we all might be forging creatively beauty-filled, and morally praiseworthy lives right alongside people who for whom we do not know their voting habits, because our voting habits are comparatively boring to the good work we do together. Members from both parties could find ways of doing good things, protecting families, caring for the marginalized, defending both religious and intellectual freedom, advancing women's equality and just doing some good stuff in the

world without caring one iota what our politicians think of it? Yeah, that is how much closer to how it is supposed to work. But to get there we are going to have to learn to participate in the Good. I trust some of the other cards will help paint a picture as to how we can do that. The Good is part of a triptych with yellow quarter-circles.


 **Imagination** — If I want to be insightful, to help others gain perspective on their circumstance & make wise decisions, I am going to need a competent and well formed Imagination. I don't think it means you have to be a creative artist to be insightful, but you will definitely have to exercise your creative muscles whatever they are. So many times in life we are trapped in bad circumstances simply because we genuinely lack the imagination to want more, or even believe that more is possible.

I don't say any of this disparagingly, it is why we need each other. We all need our imaginations stretched and each of our imaginations bring something unique to the human community whether you debug code, make interesting school lunches, streamline polishing the school's floors, or paint in watercolor. But if it is important for you to see and understand things \*Truthfully, and help others widen their repertoire of \*Metaphors, then practicing your daydreaming, walking new paths to work, writing stories with your children, designing your own recipes, and/or reading outlandish sci-fi will probably come in really handy.


If you have ever heard a young person say they can't wait till all the "old" people in politics/the Church/their Family/society die so they can move forward with life, then you probably get why imagination is so important. Nothing could be a more doomed lack of imagination than thinking removing people older than us will ever moves us forward when we could be developing evolved and reiterated narratives for our tomorrow. Eliminating people never cultivates hope. I happen to love any reality TV shows that ask artists, chefs, decorators, whomever, to finish challenges within certain parameters. It pushes our imagination. Having no parameters at all not only can be paralyzing, it often produces really uninteresting work.

 **Wonder** — I know the experience of being caught unsuspecting in a moment of awe and wonder. I also think that Wonder can be a discipline we practice and a competency we develop. For people of \*Faith, this could include participating in worship, contemplating God and wondering about the expansive goodness of the Divine. For those who do not practice a particular faith or spiritual discipline there are still plenty of ways we can practice wonder. Museums seem an obvious choice


because they keep interesting things available across time and cultures. Microscopes and telescopes are great tools when framed beautifully. As this card suggests, nature is a good friend of Wonder. Wonder is a thing that stretches the \*Imagination by tapping into some part of us that still recognizes \*The Beautiful. Rarely do people marvel at something simply because they like it or prefer it. Few people marvel of the taste of Coke vs Pepsi. It is a preference. Wondering includes at least a wee bit of awe, inspiration, or profound respect. Just the practice of searching for moments of Wonder, can lift our expectations and give us a sense of insight to share with a world going blind by the light of our handheld phones. The one who goes looking for Wonder speaks the language of insight.

 **Silence** — Like \*Wonder, Silence can be something we think of as something that just happens or we can choose to think of it as a discipline we can practice. Many people might think of Silence is the absence of something, and that is not wrong. As a discipline, however, like punctuation in a sentence, or the preservation of \*The Sacred, Silence is a break in our rhythms to make space for something else. Achieving a perfect state of inward and outward silence is not crucial for developing insight. Working to interrupt our noisy lives, however, and practicing listening, is crucial.

I find the image of the labyrinth so helpful for me in reflecting on the nature of silence because the traditional labyrinths (such as the famous Chartres in France) follow a pattern of gradually descending toward their center, just as we can do, but it is not a perfectly descending spiral since that is rarely how humans settle. The labyrinth moves in and then back out to edge, then right near the center and then back out a little. It is more like the slow ebb and flow of a child's sobbing after a good cry, or like ocean waves as they recede with the tide, than the steady cooling of a hot pot of boiled macaroni. Silence is not a thing we accomplish, but a series of things we practice together. I think the silence we need, the silence that will give us insight is the practice of straining to listen, not just shutting out noise. I am not seeking to be deaf, but to listen better. You may at first feel disappointed, but you will notice how the listening shapes you. You will listen to things differently. Whether you hear something or not, your mind and heart will thank you.

 **Narrative / Story** — I have written elsewhere about how we often think of lying as an art form, but truth telling as an exercise of report naked facts. I think we are currently fundamentally wrong about this, that Truth-telling requires a great deal of


curating bits of real facts and stitching them together to reveal the truth about something. I could produce, for example, a report on a spreadsheet of the blood pressure measurements of each person in a given room, their heartbeats per minute, and the hair color of all 32 people who are sharing that carpeted climate controlled venue. It could all be accurate, but not truthful. Or I could talk about 31 students in a classroom taking notes. Also true. But when your friend catches after your Philosophy of Social Movements course in college and your eyes are still filled with tears, they will want you to tell them the story of what happened, specifically how it led you to this particular presumably transformative state. They want you to bring them with you on your journey as best as you can to even move them to tears as well, if possible, or else you aren't really answering the question. The narrative, the curated weaving of truthful pieces into an itinerary, a time bound account of related things that unfolded, a telling of student's journey, is exactly the kind of thing that really guides human lives. We need to hear the story in a way that is compelling (which is somehow neither objective nor subjective). We are not merely a collection of atoms smashing into each other or holding on for dear life. We are storied creatures with an ability to recognize plots, threads, and characters. We live by patterns and their meanings. What is hope if the ability to see or imagine a pattern of meaning over time? And if you tell your story well, truthfully, it won't matter if you get the precise color of the professor's dress wrong or misreport your body mass as part of the tale. \*Truth is a thing we point to with stories, not something we trap like a possum in a shed. Learn the art of narrative, the telling of the stories of your days, weeks, years, that points toward the reality beyond the sum of its facts. If you want to be insightful, learn to listen to stories and discern the truth inside them so you can know how to tell them better. You might even get to re-tell them with the kind of wonder and imagination that makes new things possible for the person to whom you have been listening. Making new things possible is not just the work of \*hope, and \*faith, but of insight and all we have said about it so far. Tell stories \*Truthfully. Learn to tell them \*Beautifully, so that they point, and make possible something Good.

 Tradition — Few words reveal our recently acquired modern short-sightedness as this word, Tradition. When we say tradition, we talk about routines, social habits, especially related to Holidays. "It is a tradition that my family eats Chinese food on Christmas Day," we say. But in another sense, the art of story-telling serves us best when we let it extend over time through generations and across space through multiple

cultures. Alisdair Macintyre in his profoundly influential book, *After Virtue*, says a Tradition is an argument extended over time.

Other aspects of our Enlightenment hangover is how we seem hell-bent on abandoning “institutions,” so called “organized” religion, and the long standing stories we have told to make sense of human life. I get it, I inherited the same impulses, but these are precisely the kinds of things we need to access so we don’t keep reinventing the wheel being a good human. As I hinted at elsewhere, inheriting wisdom is not the same as gross compliance. It is \*Wonder & \*Imagination, \*Obedience & \*Dissent that together allow us to repeat a \*Tradition in a way that is faithful, without being an exact replica of what came before it. The identical repetition of a story is legalism. A nonidentical repetition of a story that is still faithful to its ongoing \*Narrative is what I mean by Tradition.

Participating in a tradition is the opposition of stagnation or paralysis. When it comes to the best stuff on earth, it is usually something we are apprenticed into, not something we forge ourselves from the ground up. I hate to see good people leave a rich inheritance behind because they don’t care for how probate law works. In the same way, I hate to see us try to start learning life from scratch when there are oodles of myths, memoirs, mentors, books, biographies, and other creative innovations that help us stand on the shoulders of those who came before us reach even farther than they did. On this card are many hearts and yet no two are alike. We need to listen to and reiterate the stories we have inherited so the next generation can stand on our shoulders too. What will the next heart look like?

 Holiness— Holiness is a word that has elicited profoundly different responses from my mind and from my body as the word Holiness. In short, Holiness was often used to refer to piety, or a narrow form of compliance to self-selected rules for the sake of showing off and wielding power. What that meant for me is that it was easy to reduce the Christian faith to refusing to watch movies, avoiding dancing, not cussing, and not being gay. (Which may have saved me from legalism). Since some of these things were easy for some members of the church I grew up in, they could emphasize them and then reap the benefits of their own piety. We didn’t discuss the sin of racism (so complex) in my little, mostly white church in the suburbs of LA. That would have been too hard. So what is Holiness?

I remember reading Thomas Merton’s “Life and Holiness,” while volunteering with Mother Teresa in Calcutta in 1995. I knew the lives of the sisters of

the Missionaries of Charity were inspiring to me. I knew they revealed something to me about the \*Goodness of God. It was their lives and that book that helped me reconnect that idea of a beautiful life with the word Holiness.

I know when I was young and people in my church would talk about holiness, I would always think, "Yay! Right on. I'm all-in. 100% . . . Now, somebody just tell me how." That was the kicker. It was the "How." Well, I have tried to capture some of the mechanics of the How-To-of-Holiness in this deck. I will try to sum up, it is a life of love that fosters trusting God enough to live beautifully and do good to others regardless of the consequences. It is in the ongoing mutuality of the Hard Work of Love that we get to know what is \*True, \*Beautiful, and \*Good about God. It is the virtuous cycle of \*Love giving birth to more \*Love, which inspires more \*Love.


I no longer imagine Holiness as represented by floating halos, bleached white robes, and some occasional light levitation. I now think the color of holiness is the full spectrum of life, or perhaps the color of dirty hands. I think Holiness has teeth and callouses and sweat. It is Mother Teresa. It is Dorothy Day. It is Mary, who invites you to sit near her in the \*Open Chair and become more real. Mary knew Jesus more intimately than anyone. Mary's halo is no badge of honor. It is more of a window to the heavens. For Mary, the circle above her is not intended to draw your attention to her piety, but to be an archetype, like the circles on the card for "The Beautiful" that reminds us that all the circles everywhere were created to be beautiful. Everything has halos. The holiness in all creation—even in this \*Liminal era—is not just ours to help discover, but ours to reinvent in our own context in a way that is faithful to its source, to its \*Narrative.

God's fingerprints are on everything. The beauty of holiness is that we get to put our fingerprints on things right next to God's. It is participation. Holiness is not a walled-off abstinence, but the song of an awkward warbling chick whose mother has pushed it out of the nest and now must turn the air around it into flight and song, (even if she still has a little gravel under her wings). We cannot not bring insight to a life we do not, ourselves, live well. Another way to think about this is that is the Transcendental Cards, The True, The Beautiful, and the Good, are about contemplating transcendence, Holiness is about participation in the Transcendent. You don't know it till you try to live it.

I don't need to master every aspect life to love my friend, my neighbor, or even an enemy, but I absolutely do have to want to want more. I think the best

kablooie behind our desire to want more, is lighting the dynamite of knowing we are loved just as we are. It is \*Grace. How can I be good in the way that participates in The Good, beautiful in a way that participates in The Beautiful, and true in a way that participates in the True?

### Wisdom

 **Art**— Refrigerator Magnets. They are perhaps, one of the greatest supporters and promoters of the arts of our epoch as any of the Guggenheims, Ahmansons, or Norton-Simon people. It is by means of refrigerator magnets that a child (well, this child anyway) learns that I could spontaneously make a thing out of love that someone would want to honor it and even put on display. “Well, well, look at me. I have another installation showing in the kitchen this week!” I have clear early memories of trying to sort out the mysterious formulas of which artworks made the refrigerator and which ones were received with gratitude, but ushered into my parents room (where I presumed they were taken into some grand archive for safe keeping and catalogue (it turns out I was almost right in my delusions— Mom has returned a handful of unexpected treasures to me that she kept safe somewhere). I knew some of my creations impressed Mom. Some of them moved her to tears completely (that was the hardest to reproduce), and some were \*merely\* appreciated and celebrated in the moment. Ha! Little has changed.


In retrospect, I can see how discovering early that there were mysterious elements of art works that could change the impact on people. I soon also learned that context (like Mother’s day) could make an otherwise mediocre work seem like a stroke of genius. (I sewed my Mom a turtle once for Christmas, I did it without a pattern... tears were involved... she collects turtles...ok you had to be there). That was the point. You had to be there, it is context art. It was not something “objectively” good, at all. But clearly it participated in \*The Beautiful in ways I struggled to see. Notice I didn’t say it was subjective, just contextual. If you could apprehend what the gesture was and the \*Narrative around it, you’d agree it participated in the \*Beautiful in some mysterious way.

Child artists do what mature artists try to do well: capture the essence of something and breathe life into it. Most children do not attempt photo-realism. They draw figures, two arms, two legs, 4 legs is the dog, the long hair or dress is Mom, or the Dad with the blond hair is Daddy Joe and the one with no hair is Daddy Justin. It



works because it is rough. Sometimes it packs surprises – The one with the big heart is Aunt Carol, the one with the man passing out socks to homeless people is uncle David. The one with the dirty dishes is my Mom. Children see. Artists try a little to see how children see. There are sometimes mysterious factors. But just because they are mysterious and difficult to codify, doesn't mean some people can't absorb them get really good at creating magical works of art that consistently move people.

I sometimes hear people say, "It is an art, not a science," about a doctor after some ailment slips through and becomes something dreadful. They are right. It turns out, even science is an art form we are best apprenticed into. Accomplished, compelling, innovative science also requires \*Wonder, \*Imagination, \*Silence, Story-weaving, \*Wit and \*Constancy, for example. The best artists like the best scientists are tenacious. They are ambitious about the work, not the recognition. And even if the fruit of their labor only ever reaches the heights of a refrigerator door, they have still made leaps and bounds toward Wisdom.

 **Ethics** — There were reasons I used to hate the discipline of Ethics as much as I did. One need only to see what I have written on Holiness to know. I am not a big fan of malarkey, and Ethics as a discipline, seemed full of malarkey. I saw a degree in Ethics as either a way of being legalistic around others or learning how to justify any action. What could be more tedious than fiddling with the minutiae of rules and regulations, the tedium of some pretentious war over right and wrong (Oh look, I am trashing the culture wars again). Did you know that the vast majority of almost all Ethics classes in the past several decades has taught either A) ethics was almost entirely about decision making (no wonder lawyers and doctors eventually took over most ethics instructions in schools) and that B) decision making was one great and boring tug of war between whether we should be more concerned about rules or about consequences. No wonder I was initially repulsed. I still am. It wasn't until after my first two years of Grad School that I realized I was repulsed by being a lawyer, not an actual ethicist. Big diff. Relevant to the idea behind the \*Outpatient Monk card, I was just imagining my call only by example of what existed so far (that isn't all bad). My very dissatisfaction with the field, however, was part of the call to be a part of it, and change what it means to be an ethicist.

When I first began to look at doctoral programs, I had mostly looked in to degrees in Christian Spirituality. However, every time I read a description of the coursework at the time (when Spirituality was a fairly new discipline at most


institutions) I got wildly and dramatically. . . .bored. At the time, "Spirituality," really meant a study of mysticism alone, not the discipline of reflecting on everyday spirituality for most people and for the benefit of living one's life well and beautifully. It was more about exceptional, rapturous phenomena. . . . "ecstasy" – in a bad way. But thanks to Dr. Frank Carver at PLNU, I had already read through a huge chunk of Teresa of Avila's works and knew that, while she experienced exceptional moments of rapture and revelation, the life of \*Prayer was \*Mundane, more like hauling pails of water to the garden than experiencing private ecstasy of contemplation. Life is work. Spiritual life is Spiritual Work. Since I was still kinda hung up on hearing about \*Holiness and being inspired to want more of it but always left asking how? How!? HOW?!! About that same time I was reading Teresa of Avila, I also discovered what some people now call "Virtue \*Ethics" and/or \*Narrative \*Ethics. So I eventually ended up discerning that ethics might just be about the how; ethics was about formation and becoming, not just exercising one's will, not just decision making. I think I lucked out. In my Ph.D. coursework, I still ended up immersed in months-long conversations about consequences vs rules. I sat through several semesters as an Assistant Lecturer at USC watching episodes of the original Star Trek because one particular professor was obsessed with "utilitarianism" (consequences)– She thought students would be better equipped for life if they could just understand that Spock was a thing and Kirk was a thing, but the Prime Directive was also a thing, and Planets were a thing and we could calculate things and. . . .oh I just can't go on. It was awful, and much worse, it was useless. Most of life is not a moment of performing "Hedonic Calculus" which is a glorified Pros-and-Cons list. Life is much more about who we are becoming. Its about the whole \*Narrative and \*The Good (ethics) as I knew it had a lot to learn from The \*Beautiful. Look, life is certainly full of really hard decisions but those decisions stand some chance of being coherent when we see our life as an ongoing story. It all hangs together whether we like it or not. Sometime in LA studying Urban Studies and Theology with Dr. Bryan Stone, I stopped just asking what the right thing to do was and started also asking, "who do you want to become, Doug?" I don't just want to live a good life, I want to live a beautiful one, and one that I think others might hopefully, possibly see as, at least from time to time, connected to what is \*True. Contemporary ethicists might have drawn an images on this card like a calculator, a scale, a flip-chart, some dice, or a judge's gavel. For me, ethics is not about solving one of life's tricky spots. It is not merely about not doing what is wrong

and trying to do what is right. (I rarely use that language at all). It is about achieving our telos. It is about \*Holiness, about \*Beauty, about bending our souls toward \*Love.

There is a reason I quoted Jim McClendon's definition of convictions at the start of this booklet. There is a reason I talk about \*Faith as "acting as if something is the case." Life is neither about just one's beliefs, or just the sum of my actions. Life is a \*Narrative. Who I am is inevitably a web of story-formed convictions. A good life, then, comes from participating in a good story, a beautiful story...and a truthful one. Living a good life is more than a series of decisions, it is \*Hero's Journey to set out to find True North, and the willingness to adapt, learn, and to have my deepest convictions be shaped in pursuit of What is \*True, what is \*Beautiful, what is \*Good. That is ethics.

You want me to just decide something in a way that covers my ass in case we all get sued? Ok fine. I get the importance of that. However, it will never be enough to merely cover our asses. I want my life to be something something really good, not just above the bare minimum in order to not get sued or to cash in on a barely justifiable transaction. I want other people's lives around me to be better because of who I am. That is ethics.

I am more convinced than ever that pursuing who we can become (if we care about what is True, what is Beautiful, and what is Good) might get us killed but it will be worth the journey, and will do more for others than mastering a class on how I can cover my ass while maximizing profits in caring for people's bodies. We have already lost at that point. I don't want to spend life figuring out how to get away with things. I also don't want to be trapped in just trying to decide what is good, I want to participate in it. I want to embody it. I want to play along with Truth and Beauty. I want to be more like God, not spend life covered in magic marker while hashing out pros and cons lists. Let's reason through some ethics find out how to pursue our best highest possible selves.

 Science & Philosophy— I feel like I have two sermons to preach, two soapboxes to stand on, and no town square worth shouting into...

Let's start here: 1) Science is not perfect. In fact, "Science" is not really even a "thing" at all in the sense that what "science," is a method. Science is a way of learning, it is not a Pope. It does not make decrees once and for all or ever claim some kind of infallibility. It used to drive me absolutely mad to hear Mulder declare to Fox one more time in every 🍌 single 🍌 episode 🍌 of the X-files that she was a scientist and she


needed science to science her science-ing-ness so she could finally science the truth that is "out there,"(she meant facts, not \*Truth).


What scientists do is provide us with generally reliable information, information that engineers along with artists and designers can turn in to reliably useable stuff. If it weren't reliable it wouldn't sell half as well as it has. Which stuff? All of it, iPhones, Slinkies, Underwear, your blood pressure medicine, Christmas lights, lip balm, and even tacos. This leads me to my second soapbox 2) it is important to note that Scientists do indeed produce generally reliable information. . . . so in the words of William of Occam, the brain-father of the aptly named Occam's Razor, "don't make this complicated," and "yeah, yeah, go with that."

There is really no possible way for all the millions of scientists in the world, the nation, or even in one particular institution, to cooperate much, let alone conspire to tell the whole world one thing or another for the sake of one political party or one election. Their very competitive jobs hinge upon their reputations for veracity and reliable information. When a scientist becomes unreliable, we stop calling them scientists and start call them baristas, Uber drivers or, homeopathic house cleaners. So let's start paying attention to the consensus of the scientific community when it happens. And the next time you hop on social media and see an article that says "Science has proven that. . .". You can already be suspicious. This is why this card refers to both Science and Philosophy. If you have hard-core faith in science, please dive in to the philosophy of science as well, like Thomas Kuhn, WVO Quine, Karl Popper, and Imre Lakatos.


Scientists try to prove things and they regularly do so by rigorous reproduction of results, clearly articulated conclusions, and a lot of peer review. I am less interested in what the scientist says as much as what they tell us the data from their method has been able to reproduce. We want to know how things work. That is what the menagerie of different kind of scientists do (be they biologists, physicists, chemists, social scientists, economists, geologists, epidemiologists etc. . .). Yes, science evolves, but when it does it is more like the work of a glacier and less like a race car on a hairpin turn. Occam says, if you hear hooves stampeding, think of horses, not zebras. Don't make it complicated. Trust reliable information. And also don't fetishize one discipline among many as the one discipline capable of guiding us on the path to the \*Truth, when we need a truth that also touches what is \*Beautiful, and what

is \*Good. Anything that proclaims truth but can say nothing of Beauty and Goodness, is leaving part of the story out.

 **Wit**— “Wit is a treacherous dart. It is perhaps the only weapon with which it is possible to stab oneself in one’s own back.” –Dorothy Parker. “The joke of the world is less like a banana peel than a rake, the old rake in the grass, the one you step on, foot to forehead. It all comes together. In a twinkling. You have to admire the gag for its symmetry, accomplishing all with one right angle, the same right angle which accomplishes all philosophy. One step on the rake and its mind under matter once again. You wake up with a piece of tree in your skull. You wake up with fruit on your hands. You wake up in a clearing and see yourself, ashamed. You see your own face and it’s seven years old and there’s no knowing why, or where you’ve been since. We’re tossed broadcast into time like so much grass, some ravening god’s sweet hay. You wake up and a plane falls out of the sky.” — Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm*, p.42  
.....also, I just farted. #TheBody. “You will never find wisdom in the same places where you never hear laughter.” —Doug Harrison.  
#WriteYourOwnFortuneCookie.

 **Simplicity**— My podcast regularly uses a musical cue. “♪ It’s probably more complicated than that ♪” A lot of the work of the HeartBurn Podcast ([www.theartburn.net](http://www.theartburn.net)) is to help people dive deep into the complexity of some pretty interesting and passionate people. I think one major weapon used in the culture wars is oversimplification of issues, black and white thinking, and hyper focusing as aspects of an issue without seeing its complexity. I mention elsewhere this might just as easily have been called “Complexity” as Simplicity. They have a necessary relationship. I ended up choosing simplicity because it is the tool, the discipline, the art form that needs to be practiced while complexity is more just about truthfully describing the human condition. Complexity is one aspect of any healthy bio system. One aspect of simplicity is seeing things as they are and then recognizing your role in that ecology/economy. The world we live in may be wildly complex and the people who live with us are just as complex. There is a connection between simplicity and acknowledging the whole, total, & complete system we are part of is just one singular thing. Try to keep it simple because, once you see life for what it is, you will see its bald and unapologetic complexity. That is a good thing. It does not mean we are in control of that system, and we do well to find our simple place inside it. Pursuing


simplicity does not only mean reducing or cutting back nearly as much as it means seeing all the parts in light of the complete whole. Keep it simple. Everything touches Everything. Once you recognize that, then we can do a much better job and taking baby steps, being focused, and experiencing clarity. That kind of clarity is at the core of wisdom. The trend toward Minimalism (as a kind of life philosophy) on the other hand, is just more boring compliance. It over complicates asking just how minimalist does it have to be before it is Minimalism? What? I hope it is already clear that I think we deserve better than that. Minimizing things in your life seems like a perfectly reasonable thing to do in light of the whole of your life and how it is connected to all the other lives in this realm. Creating a new variable of “minimalism,” you have to live up to is redundant redundant... redundant. “Live simply so that others may simply live,” is wisdom. “Tune in to our podcast so you can purge yourself to the point of distraction,” is... just one more thing to add.

 **Constasy** — I can already read your mind. You are wondering if I mean the same thing as “Consistency.” I assure you, I do not. “Consistency,” means one of two things. 1) A word you use in trying to describe the feel and goopiness of chia seed pudding, “it has a blumpy consistency” and, 2) consistent: a word that describes perpetually the same without exception. “He was consistently on time every day for 5 years.” I find neither are super helpful in talking about a life well lived. But if I had to choose it would be the one about pudding...mmmmm...pudding.

Meanwhile, Aquinas wanted us to know that constancy is a virtue. One can only say that something has acquired a certain kind of characteristic if it is observably present and being practiced with some constancy. It does not mean unwavering predictability, in fact I think people who I would describe as living with constancy are still always full of surprises. Consistency is 3 Michelin Stars. Constancy is one Michelin star. As a person, not as a restaurateur, 3 stars demands something of us that costs too much of everything else.

I am surprised by so many things my former Spiritual Director would say. He often shocked me, yet everything he said resonated with love, careful discernment, wisdom, humor, and courage. He wasn't always funny, but he would not be who he was if you took his humor away. He wasn't always courageous! But it was uncharacteristic of him to give in to fear. He always came home to courage. We need to make some clear choices about the things we plan to always come home to. This isn't a one and done kind of choice.


I strongly discourage sitting around and making a list of characteristics you think you want and then swearing you'll stick to them without every growing or changing your mind. One of the main precepts of AA is "one day at a time." This is wise. It is good to be in pursuit of things like \*The True, \*The Beautiful, \*The Good, as well as \*Faith, \*Hope, and above all, \*Love. If we pursue good things, we will acquire the constancy of the virtues we need to keep pursuing those things. It also means I don't judge people by their exceptions, I look at where their heart finds its home. I am less interested in people who have the will power to swear off something but I am completely inspired by those who learn how to relocate their heart's true home. Where your treasure is, there your \*Heart will be also.

 **Sabbath** — Humans have a unique sense of rhythm. Sometimes we like to pretend we can choose a rhythm and make it happen. There is, after all, music, and we make music go . . . Some things like maples trees and the ocean know when to drop their leaves or back away from the shore for a bit. People can drop their leaves or back away from the shore. What if you allowed emptiness to fill one day a week and rested because there is a kind music that you don't have to push? When was the last moment you had to contemplate reaching higher with your life? Here is the idea pulled from the Ten Commandments, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath."

Ann and Barry Ulanov wrote a book called "Primary Speech," in which they begin a psychology of \*Prayer with observing the human impulse to "cry out. Here is a thing about Sabbath. Humans have a habit of worshipping, even if they do not entertain any concept of the divine. It is just a thing humans do, even when they say they have no opinion on the matter or assert that there is no object to receive any words they might lift. Humans have a habit of lifting something, even if it is just a \*Metaphor. Plato saw this. In his, Symposium, he posited the idea that language is not senseless precisely because some of our language becomes praise and that praise always finds its subject. What if you only burned a bulb six days a week and just sat there with the seventh one? You should choose a candle instead, and read, or let emptiness pool at your feet. Or Look up and say or sing the words that you hope would find a home? Sabbath-ing is not about just one thing. It is about the rhythm, it is about the rest, and it is certainly also about the lyrics humans lift trusting they will go straight home where they belong. Sabbath is about all of these things. Mostly, however, Sabbath is about entering into a song that is already playing. Sabbath is precisely


about realizing I am not God. Can you imagine if the maple tree acted like we do, deciding to turn bright orange in May, and running around naked in the summer? It would surely stick out, but it would not live long. Rhythm, rest, emptiness, stillness, and yeah, anyone can take a moment to put their worship where they want it to be? How subversive! To be present to one's own attention. To see it for what it is, and to put it where you want to instead of letting it be dragged from one demand to a sexy moment to some new sneakers to that one movie, the one with the actor with good skin and oh dear another sexy moment and suddenly having to go to bed. I cannot rest because my gaze has been pulled this way and that and I didn't even go to work today. You can burn a bulb six days a week, and let your heart have some emptiness just one of the days of the rhythm of this song. Emptiness and rest really might heal your attention, and let you put it somewhere you could count on and call it home. "God is at home," says Meister Eckhart, "We are in the far country." What is your heart's true home?

One reason so many cathedrals are really tall and intentionally \*beautiful is that they are there to protect the empty space, so someone doesn't come in and try to make use of it. It is good to keep some things empty. It is crucial if you want to, for a moment, enter the song that is already playing. Six bulbs burn, let the dark one help you find a glorious light, higher than any bulb, scattered about recklessly. It is spilled, no, it is \*Grace-poured-out like an offering of wine. The ocean and maple tree can't help but dance with it. All you are going to have to do is protect the empty space. Would you rather protect the empty space in awareness the moment, and a mindfulness of who you are. Otherwise, could you help empty the space by lifting up whatever seems to want to clutter your heart. People do lift things up. Those things do find their right home, just like you are contemplating right now.

 **Friendship**— Aristotle had his own tweak on the accounts of how humans could achieve their purpose, which in Greek, he called "eudamonia," and we translate poorly as "happiness." Not happiness, like a smiling emoji, but happiness as in, that bird was born to fly and now it is flying. There is another Greek word, telos. Telos can be translated as end, point, or purpose or even the reason for something. It is the questions Wendell Berry asks in his book *Title*, "What are People For?" So the telos of a pen is to write, the telos of a playground is to be played upon by children, and the telos of a human is this complex notion of happiness, "eudamonia." Look it up. To achieve eudaemonia, humans would need a few things, like acquiring virtues by habit



over time (ok), a degree of intelligence (hmmmm, well? I disagree), a face that is not too ugly (hold on now), no female body parts (hold it right there now!), and money ( I knew this veered a bad direction) . . . Ok, fine, so he wasn't stellar on a lot of things we see very differently now, and should. One of the things he elaborates on as necessary for humans to achieve our purpose is this: friends. Not just any friends but good friendships with good people. Remember when your mother used to warn you that she just didn't want you hanging out with this or that person? Remember when your dad used to say "Birds of a feather flock together!" As if that would change your life? They were right. Few things shape us and how we see the world as the friendships you invest in. Aristotle elaborates on this quite a bit (so go read it) For now, I will say if you want to be wise, the most immediate effective thing you can do is shift the time you spend with people to include as many good, wise, virtuous people as you can find. (And yeah, they may push you to make some changes if you want to hang with them, that is part of the point.) This doesn't mean you have to cut off your life long friend because she is going through a rebellious phase. But it does mean that one of the best things you can do for her is to be a ballast, anchored in other wise, good friendships that help you sustain clarity and courage to ask her to be her best self, not just in what you say, but who you are becoming.


 **Compassion**— In their profoundly influential book , "Compassion," Nouwen, Morrison, and McNeil, emphasize a few characteristics of true compassion that have stayed with me since I read it in Downtown LA, a year after the Rodney King riots. The book as a whole is more than worth reading. One of the initial questions they ask is, "Is it enough to live our lives as they are and just try not to hurt people? Is maximum pleasure eight minimizing pain an adequate ethics strategy?" Their answer is a clear no, but hardly an overly simplistic one, nor is it some gross caricature of martyrdom. Pulling heavily from their context of living in Pinochet's Chile, when many members of their community became the "desaparecidos," the disappeared. Their circumstances were calling them to a life of more than trying to stay safe and well, without hurting others. They knew there was some moral imperative to "suffer with" or to enter into the suffering of their community in order to help mitigate the atrocities. They learned a lot in the process of trying to live this. Some of their main learnings include: a)there are no heroes/stars in real compassion as it is always communal work, b)compassion is a call to downward mobility even if comfort is readily available, c)it is an act of solidarity as the word itself, "cum"+ "pati" means to suffer-with, and d) compassion is life giving

to everyone involved and it stands in stark contrast to the value of unmitigated human competition. I cannot help but think of the those eager to rebut, "Black Lives Matter," by saying "All Lives Matter." This is a great example of something that might be technically a factual statement, but lacks truthfulness in its context. The statement isn't technically wrong but the timing within the ongoing narrative is not only wrong, but a powerful detriment to the work of compassion. Those who feel the need to keep repeating a phrase like that are certainly defending something I try to understand but whatever it is it is not the work of compassion. It is a refusal to enter the story, the truthful narrative of suffering. It prefers to mask the truth with an accurate but innocuous appeal to "All Lives." How that translates in to people's lives is that it is saying, "There is nothing important or unique . . . or truthful to see here. Carry on in with the competition as you were. Nothing needs to change."

I suppose it is an appeal to a value such as "fairness" however deafly and awkwardly it tries to do so. It is not that their kind of fairness is even that interesting of a value to which one could appeal. How often does fairness alone, speak in contrast to a struggle for safety and life, lead to much memorable good? Never that I can think of. Here I appeal again to my own \*tradition of \*faith and note that the whole Jesus \*narrative begins in a radical and cosmic downward mobility to become incarnate and continues as Jesus moves toward women, the poor, the marginalized and eventually suffers death literally right along side two thieves. Now I don't want to paint a caricature of martyrdom, since Nouwen, Morrison, and McNeil do not. But however you read this narrative, my callousness to the sustained threat toward black bodies, Black lives, is something Jesus would move toward. No question. Jesus message was explicitly, "Blessed are the poor. . . . woe to you who are rich." (Luke 6). I can see the Pharisees saying it. I can imagine Peter saying it in one of his lesser moments, but not the revelation of God. God moves toward suffering. We can too if we move in community and discover all the richness of the art form that is compassion.

On this card two hearts stand in a Jail. One behind bars, one in front of them, but both of the heart intertwined. I know a lot first hand of visiting the innocent who are restrained behind bars. I also know something of visiting the guilty. Either way, my heart moves toward them both as neither innocence nor guilt seems a cause to let people suffer alone. Not in the way I read this \*Story. It doesn't answer all the questions, but it sure changes the questions when you move toward those who are suffering, even if they supposedly "brought it on themselves."

No, moving in compassion toward one human does not mean one cannot also move in compassion toward their victims as well. Life remains complex. However, in all of the complexity, the practice of compassion, of downward mobility (kenosis), of moving communally together toward those who are suffering, may not answer all of the difficult questions but it does prescribe a simple way of moving forward that we can count on being \*True, \*Beautiful and \*Good.

 **Curiosity**— If you are reading these in order you will probably already have a lot of curiosity about how to work out some of the scenarios that have been raised. Well, good. While curiosity is not an answer to life's difficult questions, it remains an essential part of the method of trying to sort stuff out. In its openness to learn it is not unlike \*silence, \*wonder, \*imagination, \*thought, \*hope, and \*liminality. But it is also, on its own, not a guaranteed method to finding the good life. It is powerful tool, however, in keeping the hero on course for her journey.

What would you consider to be the opposite of curiosity? In my mind it is a kind of rushed certainty, a jumping to conclusions. Drawing conclusions is something humans do a million times a day to navigate the world we live in. But when we encounter a place of any ambiguity, especially if it pertains to a person or has consequences on a person or a community, we do well to practice curiosity until we can begin to move toward clarity that fosters life. From Conclusions, to curiosity, to clarity. Again, I am not attempting to construct a complete ethical method. I don't believe in such a thing. In case you have not noticed I am not a fan of ethical methods. Life is too complex for that. Life an art form. That does not mean it is purely subjective, it means we have to master a set of skills and acquire certain virtues to live in this complex life well and simply. It has been done before and I sure as heck am trying to get there now.



I hope you are catching a little inspiration to want to move toward what a good-life-lived might look like, (with all the adventure it would necessarily include as a \*Hero's Journey). If you even have a little inkling of what your life holds next, especially while sorting through these 50 hearts you feel a moment of inspiration (inspiration was also almost a card, but I figured it was better to try to cultivate inspiration than to sketch or draw it).

If you have any interest in the adventure of the life of chasing the \*True, The \*Beautiful and the \*Good, with \*Faith, \*Hope and \*Love, then that is the good work and blessing of curiosity. Capture for a moment the inspiration, tugging, draw, push.

pull or interest that you might feel. Become aware of how you experience it in your \*Heart, in your \*Mind, and in your \*Body. Now let's return to the card. We can ask these questions about the image on the card, or we can also ask these same questions about what is happening in your heart.

What is in the Box? How does one even process that question? From where in your \*Mind or \*Imagination do you make up answers? What does \*Curiosity feel like in your \*Body? Where do you feel it? What does curiosity make you want to do? Is it barely tolerable or something to savor? Is it irritating? And please someone tell me, Why is it shining such a warm light? "Curiosity killed the cat" is a phrase meant to discourage curiosity. What phrase could I use to encourage it? How can I practice my curiosity with others? The next time I feel judgmental about a person I can try asking, "what do I really want to know?" oh...and lest I forget, WHAT IS IN THIS SILLY LITTLE GLOWING HEART-SHAPED BOX?!

### Communion

 The Heart  — I am aware of the dangers of taking on the image of the symbolic heart shape as a kind of brand, a signature. Dentists with bad teeth have few patients. Obsessive compulsive psychologists have trouble finding enough patients who will always show up precisely on time. And the boy who cries \*Love, will get his comeuppance the moment he lashes out and reveals he is, indeed, also un-loving. So be it. I can assure you, I am that boy. The only thing that overshadows the risks in committing to a \*Narrative of \*Love, is the conviction that we live in a moment that the need to think about, and experience Love in richer and more complex ways exceeds my desire to simply play it safe. The story of \*Love is bigger than even my reputation, bigger than me, period. And it is worth the risks to make sure it outlives me, at any cost. The reality of Love is hard, and I consider myself very much an amateur, a lover, of Love. There is a good chance the years I have left wont go well, but I hope you will at least see my heart's true home.

I think it is important to write about the Heart only after having written about \*Constancy. They are deeply related. I would go so far as to say consistency is something the Will tries to accomplish. Constancy, on the other hand, is where the heart finds its home, and to where you can count on it returning. I have moments of thinking about how I measure up in the world. Those moments are rarely good moments that breathe any life in my pursuit of \*Love. Measuring up is not my strong

point. But I do know what I have chosen to be my home and by which standard I want to be measured. I am no better at loving others than any other flawed well meaning mother or father is a perfect parent. But in the same way that their kids are nevertheless all that really matters to them, loving you, and hopefully eventually loving my enemies, is what matters most to me. Eventually, I hope you will see and remember me as someone who offered you his heart. #OnlyLoveRemains

I still hold up the heart as a trump card, but only precisely because belongs to the communion suit. It is in the middle of the struggle to live well with others, to be constantly turned and returned toward loving and receiving love. Anyone can speak flippantly and appealingly about love but I wouldn't trust what even I had to say about love if I didn't see it as the hard work of showing up to God-and-to-others and caring practically and wisely for humans in their \*Bodies and all that goes with that. In the same way that cheap grace is worse than no grace at all (as it emboldens our own selfishness and can even compel us, as Parker Palmer observes in A Hidden Wholeness, to go about continually trying to save those around us). Cheap love is good at turning us into unsafe people incapable of safely \*Welcoming others, being \*Vulnerable, and practicing \*Compassion.

Cheap love is similarly potentially disastrous. You can always spot cheap love by the lack of callouses on its hands and the absence of community around it. Love is not an aesthetic, not a series of framed slogans you buy at Hobbie Bobbie's to hang in your living room. Love almost always bears stains and scars. It is how Thomas eventually recognized Jesus...by his scars. We know true love in a similar way.

The Heart is one of two trump cards along with Love,  
It is also a triptych with indigo quarter circles



### The Mind

We are not quite done yet. Much of what is left to say is all from the communion suit and it is interestingly all related to the "How-to" question of \*Holiness that I have mentioned before. The \*Heart, of course, is not what it seems. We already made sure we knew it is a \*Metaphor. In fact, most of what we call the heart is actually a number of functions that occur in the brain. Even so, it is helpful for us to distinguish the life of the intellect, and the capacity to love with experience life. I have also already included \*Thought as a card in the faith suit. So what remains for us to say about the \*Mind? For one, thinking, and \*Thought, is really a reference to the discipline of inquiry and reflection. It is as discipline and a practice that hinges on \*Curiosity and \*Mundane

work. Here, we are merely acknowledging the existence of one fold in the contemporary account of what it means to be human.

Most of us would agree that there is something we can identify as the life-of-the-mind. And that is worth naming, especially since we have had so much to say about the life of the heart. Whatever we mean when we invoke the heart metaphor, it is clearly and inseparably an aspect of, and not separated from, the Mind.

A few years ago I was undergoing a therapy to jumpstart one particular part of my brain. I consulted with several doctors, particularly psychiatrists, as to what additional kinds of life changes I could make to sustain and build on the effective treatment I was getting. The best answer I got was from one psychiatrist who also specializes in geriatric psychiatry. He is an artist of helping to keep older brains as healthy and functional as possible. After making a few specific recommendations he stopped himself, and sorta stepped back. He intellectually panned out (in the same way that the card, "The Deck of Cards" is supposed to help facilitate). He summarized a lot he had to say this way, "Whatever is good for your heart is going to be good for your brain as well. They evolved together and they work in tandem. So follow a heart healthy lifestyle and you are probably cultivating a healthy brain too."

It was surprisingly obvious. I had been so used to taking some pill that fixed one thing but was hard on the liver, or another pill that improved this but made you feel awful like thus. But when it comes to health, he simply reminded me that both of these organs I care so much about (you can't live without either and you only have one of each) are each other's friends. They don't live in competition. Specifically they evolved in such a way that when one thrives the other thrives. I can hardly think of a more apt analogy for the symbolic heart and mind.

Beyond their role as organs, the life of the heart and the life of the Mind have evolved together. They are distinctly human in the way they work together. If we want to be good at loving we want to be able to have the emotional intelligence to live with others well. Despite what we have been told by certain personality typologies, like the Myers-Briggs test, or other post-hoc personality descriptions ("I am more of a heart person," "I am more of a mind person.") you really can't have one be healthy if the other isn't doing its work. You may not be inclined to think, read or reflect, but if you don't you are limiting your capacity to love others as well as you could.

Now to be clear, I have for years sustained friendships with people with Intellectual Disabilities and volunteered with organizations that create community with

people with intellectual disabilities. One might question whether or not I think people with intellectual disabilities have a capacity to love as well as person with a high IQ. Well, duh. Absolutely. The thing about muscle groups and the \*body, is that it isn't always important that every person achieve every intellectual and emotional capacity in the same way. You don't have to be a genius to love well and you don't have to be an emotional savant to be able to sort out string theory. What is important is that we flex the muscles we have and cultivate health in all of who we are. We have to cultivate a life of them working together. If you think for some reason that your aptitude for emotional matters gives you a pass on growing intellectually then you are like the runner who only wants to work out her left leg. She may even have a naturally strong left leg but if she doesn't keep both working, she will always be settling instead of pursuing the kind of athlete and fit human she has the potential to become.

The same goes for me. If I think I can sort out the stuff of life intellectually and not engage the emotional risks necessary to to be good at connecting with my community, and with strangers, I will never be as good of a thinker as I could be if I took the chance of loving others better. If I think I can get through life by my charm and my sincere affection without learning to exercise my critical thinking faculties, I am resigning myself to be a limping, left legged sprinter who can only round the track, at best, at 50% of my potential. So go get some good counseling, pick up books, have the hard conversations with people you need to listen to, decide to learn how to be a good human, reflect intentionally on wholehearted living. Pick up the books mentioned in this booklet. Go to your library and read the book that jumps out at you as and uncomfortable option.

If you love your heart, recruit your mind to support it. If you trust your intellect, bring your heart in to the mix so you don't become way too certain about some badly skewed perspectives you have about why other people could be doing better than they are. The island of wholeness can never be reached by rowing with only one oar if you have two in your boat. It doesn't mean you wont favor one, it just means it is good to exercise all the humanity you have at your disposal. Otherwise, you condemn yourself to miss your mark by at least 45 degrees every time.

The Mind is also a triptych with indigo quarter circles



**The Body** — When I was young, I largely blamed my body for feeling attracted to people of the same sex, even when I intellectually knew better. My body's desires were clearly going to suck me into an emotional hell in the same way an unsuspecting

cartoon cowboy gets sucked into quicksand in every decent cartoon before 1980. Nevertheless, we have to revisit the idea that the \*Heart, the \*Mind and the \*Body, are all \*Metaphors. In one sense, It is all the body. It is all the stuff the body does. My brain is part of my body. My heart is something that takes place mostly in the brain (and other parts of the body as well) but it is of little use to us to imagine these three "parts" as discreet, as independent from each other. Most importantly, when it comes to real love we quickly reach dead end if we imagine loves as an experience or feeling.

The hard work of love, the place where the heart does its best work is right here in the body. The heart's best tools are the hands and the feet. The mission of the heart is to show up. Do something good (as best as you can), and then go reflect on your life in light of that whole experience. . . . aaaaand . . . repeat.

Show up. Do good. Reflect. Show up. Do Good. Reflect. In many ways this was the pattern I had to learn when I Was 18 years old and began volunteering in an AIDS hospice in San Diego. It was 1989, there had only been one world AIDS day at that point, and we were still 3 years away from the famous debut of the AIDS ribbon. My heart was compelling me to do something, so I began doing all the brain work I could do (I was so young there was no opportunities for an 18 year old to show up and start helping.) So I kept learning and reflecting on what I wanted to do and what I could do until I found the right people. When I found the right people I was ready to make the right pitch from the work I had done and we ended up starting the AIDS outreach at the small college I attended, a program that lasted over 20 years. After that everything fell much more to the body than to the heart and brain work that got me there.

Show up. Rub feet, go home and reflect. Show up. Make dinner, go home and reflect. If I neglected the condition of my heart I found it hard to show up. If I neglected the mind work, I showed up but I was sloppy and ended up hurting a lot of people and not learning everything I could have. If I neglected my body I also quit showing up. Bottom line, we all live our lives in our bodies. We might pretend for seasons that mental work alone will guide us. Sometimes we course correct and pay more attention to our hearts, but at the end of the day all of this is played out in our bodies. More importantly, the stuff of suffering, that requires compassion is almost entirely located in people's bodies.

I have tried to emphasize the ideas of convictions in discussing all of these images and ideas. I can say this with confidence, every single conviction that drives my life has found its place in me through the body. Our beliefs about love,



friendship, work, time, kindness, violence, strangers, the mundane, the sacred, and even art, all come to us one way or another through our bodies.

This flies in the face of a lot of patriarchy. While the intellect is important, I can not think my way into participating in the \*Good, the \*True, and the \*Beautiful. I will say this one more time in a different way: whatever my convictions are, whatever I may evolve and become over time, it is all set and sealed in the Body. I may discover an idea about community, I may have an inclination to love someone, but it is the choice to move one's body in any way one can, to act as if one thing or another is "the case," as I have described in \*Faith.

There is a reason the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark remind us to love God and others with all our heart, soul, mind, . . . and strength. Love will always ask, in whatever way is appropriate, for me to show up.

I think it important to mention this people for whom it seems impossible to "show up," in their bodies. Can a person with Locked-In-syndrome show up in her or his body to love? Well, yes. The reign of God, as I understand it, is not a game like dungeons and dragons where a certain degree or roll of the die for strength determines one's fate. If I understand the commandment in the Gospel of Mark correctly, I am to love God with all that I can muster in every way I can muster it. Muster. We are all called to be muster-ers. Kant said it is not as much if we are successful in doing the good we are required to do as much as we are called to summon our will to do whatever good we can do. I don't love Kant, but he is right here. When we discover the good to be done (which may be led by the heart, the mind, or even the body) it is up to all of who we are to do whatever good is within our power to do, and in some cases, try to do good in realms we do not yet have power.

The Body is also part of a triptych with indigo quarter circles



**Generosity/Receptivity**— There is a thematic thread of abundance-over-scarcity in every card of this deck. In this case, however, the psychological and spiritual connection between generosity/receptivity to an underlying conviction about abundance is remarkably clear. I was initially inclined to name the card abundance because it is such an important word to my whole web of convictions, but instead, like other cards, I prioritized the virtues/practices that anyone can begin to engage even if they are not yet persuaded of the abundant nature of creation. One need not be fully persuaded that everything was created from abundance, but one cannot operate from

an underlying conviction of scarcity and successfully practice either of these things. Something has to give.


This is also the only card that names two inseparable and simultaneous virtues. Like most virtues, the practices and the convictions themselves, go hand in hand. Do you want to develop a conviction about abundance? One of the things you must do is practice generosity. Want to let go of scarcity? You must practice being grateful and gracious when generosity comes your way. This is the nature of most virtues: they never fully find their way into one's \*Heart or into one's \*Mind if they do not begin in the \*Body.

Unlike the \*Simplicity card, which could have been Simplicity/Complexity, Generosity and Receptivity have a necessity relationship not found in some of the other pairings. Simplicity is the practice while complexity is the world we have to learn to deal with as it is. With this particular card, however, it was clear that I could not underscore the importance of generous habits & character without emphasizing the habits & character of receptivity as well. The difference between the two is primarily a discernment of timing. There is not a balance to be found between these two things. One cannot merely choose to prefer one to the other. Humans are an organism that only fully achieves their purpose when they artfully move between being able to graciously receive from others and graciously give. Every human has required both and it is one aspect of human purpose. The image for this card is one of only 5 images that existed before the deck was conceived. I like the image because it simultaneously represents both generosity and receptivity at the same time. In the image is of a heart that appears to be liquifying without disappearing. It pours into a pair of hands that receive the flow of love, and they allow it to flow through them and pool beneath them. In my life I have known and loved people for whom it is nearly impossible to receive even the most basic levels of help. Many of these friendships have been extremely difficult for me to navigate. All humans struggle with degrees of control and distrust. For some people that expresses itself in being unable to freely share what they have been given, or the inability to let go of any of their needs and entrust them to others.

For those who know anything of the enneagram personality types, it is type 2, "The Helper," that most typically struggles with this ability to receive and not just give. The Enneagram "2" often finds his or herself in constant service to others, and when unhealthy, performs those acts of service to ingratiate themselves and

“earn” love from others. There is a fear that they won’t be loved if they aren’t being of service to others. In other ways the helper personality hates relinquishing control over his or her needs in fear that they simply won’t be met, or that they will then be further obligated into more love and more service to the person who has cared for them. Occasionally, when not well integrated, the helper personality can lash out in anger when a desire they express is not met as they expect it to be. Even though they may seem to give freely, they can still operate in a world of tightly calculated economics and still harbor fears that the things they really want will never be given to them.

Attributing these characteristics to one personality type might help some of us to wrap our brains around some of these dynamics, but these aren’t struggles for just one personality type and this card is not meant to challenge just one type of person. Learning to practice generosity and receptivity well is something every human needs to invest in. For some it may be more of a struggle than others but without some degree of intention it is possible for any human to end chewing up the scenery or violently imploding. On the other hand, there is an enormous amount of joy to be found by simply beginning to pay attention to the beautiful and elaborate dance of humans taking care of each other. I struggle both to be generous and freely receive the good graces of others. I am, however, prepared to continue this struggle because the most beautiful things I have ever seen in human beings are directly connected to someone’s ability to pour one’s heart out for someone else and to receive from a heart being poured out for them.


 **Vulnerability** — As I mentioned earlier, there is no cardinal order to the deck, but I am writing about the suits and the cards with a modest amount of deliberation. I think it would be very difficult to try to paint a picture of what I mean by \*Vulnerability without knowing something about convictions I have about things like \*Truthfulness, \*Faith, \*Pride, and \*Love. Few things in this deck require the amount of courage that Vulnerability does. To open one’s self honestly to any other human means we have at least some degree of \*Pride in who we are and some degree of \*Faith in the other person’s capacity for \*Love, or at least a basic respect of the dignity of every person. Nevertheless it is still an act of courage. I am glad figures like Brené Brown are reframing Vulnerability for us at this time but it doesn’t necessarily make practicing it any easier.

Vulnerability, like everything else in this deck, is an art form. If done poorly it can disintegrate into a kind exhibitionism, or even create a distraction away

from more painful and unhealthy aspects of a person's life. Yeah, false vulnerability can be a thing we hide behind. This is just one more reason I am a big fan of learning things in baby steps. There are very things that we do as humans that can bring quite the degree of healing and connection as an artful, well-timed moment of disclosure. Few things can inspire others to strive to be their best selves than learning the story of those who have wrestled, and failed, in trying to be their best. I am persuaded that our legacy as people depends more on the arc of our journey and who we let in on the details, than on any particular accomplishment.

Vulnerability is also part of a triptych with Hospitality and Welcome, two very related, but distinguishable ideas. The image for Vulnerability is a door opening to one's heart. The Hospitality image is of a heart with a door opening to let others inside. And the image of Welcome is the heart itself opening as a door. I can see how one would think that any one of these works might stand in for all of them, but for me, the practices and commitments to connecting sincerely with other people could use some nuance and emphasis. Now is a good time for us to rediscover revealing who we are and letting other into our lives, but also doing these things well and letting people know it is intentional, it is \*Scared, and that the people we let in are worth the risks.

Like many other cards in this deck it is easy to think of unhealthy or abusive versions of Vulnerability. People also abuse food but that doesn't mean we can just opt out of eating. We were made for each other: loving and being loved, giving and receiving, risking and celebrating, forgiving and being forgiven. These things are very close to the center of what humans are all about.

 Hospitality—The heart on this card is large and red, the door leading inside the heart is swung open, and the series of a few periods makes an ellipsis as if to ask, "Now what?" In my imagination as a kid, hospitality referred to a set of skills assigned mostly to women as part of domestic duties. It was something one might read about in Good Housekeeping. It still invokes images of elaborate etiquette rituals of Victorian England, mid-century America, or any other cartoonishly stuffy environment. It was only as I began to learn about and visit intentional communities as a young adult that I began to understand the incredible transformative power of hospitality and that it was important for all people to practice. Most of us have had an experience the experience of winding up some place entirely unsure if we were wanted or even supposed to be there. If you are lucky you have experienced the opposite of that as well, feeling celebrated and desired even after you have arrived and have settled in.

There is good reason that hospitality is associated with etiquette. Humans are not great at “making ourselves at home,” without very specific cues that tell us the invitation to be there was sincere. I have been at the homes of near strangers who told me to “make myself at home” and to “just help myself,” to whatever I needed. These are usually, surprisingly ineffective means of communicating true hospitality to people who do not know you well. As a guest, I am most certainly not going to go to your fridge and whip up some spaghetti, or microwave your Tupperware of leftovers if we only just met a week ago, or even if I have known you as an acquaintance much longer. Those are familiar tasks, things a family member does. That kind of access gets earned.

Meanwhile we depend on our hosts to signal where and in which ways we can make ourselves at home. Hospitality takes some work. It is easy for me to tell you to help yourself. It is more difficult, but clearer and more celebratory, if I make you dinner. I can say make yourself at home but when I make sure you see I have put a towel and travel sized soaps out for you to use, you can be a little more certain you are supposed to be there and that I indeed intend for you to have what you need.

Good effective hospitality is inextricably linked to acknowledging and practicing good boundaries. If you had no walls, you would have no house to welcome people in to. There is something powerful to knowing someone wants me to be in their space. I love meeting people for coffee, but it carries a different meaning than when someone specifically wants me in their living room. The fact that it is not a public space is what makes it such an honor.

Hospitality is not just a matter of welcoming people into your living spaces. There is such a thing as the hospitality of heart. Many of the same rules apply. Sometimes we make assumptions about how much our friends desire us, or what they know about how much we desire them. In fact, using the word, desire and friendship in the same sentence will sound alarms for a lot of people, especially men who have been culturally discouraged from disclosing one’s hearts desires. It is some complicated territory, which is why we have to work to keep things clear and simple. Instead of saying “help yourself,” to whatever you think you need emotionally or even “let me know if you need anything,” I may need to learn to communicate my hospitality of heart by making the same kind of thoughtful gestures one would make to be a good host for my houseguest. “ I realized it has been a year since your Dad died and I thought I would check in to see what grieving is like for you now.” “I know that Monday

is your Birthday so I took the day off and we can do what you want or I can make a few plans for us.”

Upon meeting strangers we can do so much just by practicing a little \*Curiosity: “Tell me more about why you started learning ASL?” “What inspired you to start blowing glass in the first place?” There is not one formula, in part because culturally our etiquette of the heart happens to be in a state of disarray. An ill-phrased or poorly timed compliment can come off as a come-on. A reckless expression of genuine gratitude can sound like self-interested flattery. If we sincerely want to open our \*Hearts, and if we hope to find there are people who sincerely want to enter into our -heart-space, we are going to have to stumble our way through communicating clearly our desire to connect. It will also be helpful to everyone if we communicate the limits and nature of those connections. Again, boundaries are hospitality are necessary partners. Let’s extend the analogy, when I extend to you an invitation to come into my home, it has a certain meaning . . . because my home has walls and doors. In other words, as I mentioned above, hospitality presupposes a non-public space which is literally made up of boundaries. My heart is a space that I control. I have the power to invite people in and turn them away, so when I reach out to you to show you matter to me through an act of thoughtfulness like surprising someone with their favorite snack for no other reasons, I am letting you know you already have place in my heart. If you are new in my heart-space I will do some of the work for you until it begins to make sense to tell you to make yourself at home.

Yes, there is etiquette to letting people into your heart. There are also risks to letting people in to your heart even on a really basic level. The same is true for letting people in to our homes. But houses weren’t made to stand empty and hearts are not intended to be left untouched.

I want to be someone whose love for others is something unambiguous. I want people to be able to see how I live and how I relate to them and know I want them here in my heart, without awkward ambiguity, but with the clarity that not every part of my heart is public access. I also respect other people enough to invite them to wipe their feet on the welcome mat so they don’t make it harder for me to welcome others or feel at home myself, but I also know there are just some times you gotta pull someone inside and worry about the muddy shoes later.

I don’t want people to be awkward in my heart space wondering if they ended up their on accident. You didn’t. If you are reading this I probably want you here.

And I hope you aren't here too terribly long before I have tried to let you know why I want you in my heart.



**Welcome** — Welcome is one of my absolute favorite words in the English language. From its roots in English it means, "your arrival is a pleasure." Come in well. I also like the nuances of it as a command, "Welcome! Enter well and be well, your advent is a good thing." I also love the implication of how we use it when people say thank you. "Thanks for all the work you did for me," "You are welcome, you are worth it, your presence in my life is a pleasure, you're a gift." I suppose you didn't realize you were being so effusive the last time you just passed someone a napkin, but there it is.

I love it so much because it is such an essential part of the etiquette of \*Hospitality. It is important at times for humans to state outright that people are worth the cost of them being in our lives, even around small things. My friend Jeremy used to observe that it was weird habit to belittle the gifts we give others. "Thank you for the Bike, I love it." "Oh well, it was in the garage and nobody was using it sooooo..." I understand the impulse. It is culturally weird to emphasize the costs we pay for others. There is a time and a place for everything. Giving a far too excessive gift for no reason with bad timing can imply an intimacy that has not been earned. But if that is the case then there should be times when we do the opposite with our language. "Thank you for that amazing dinner." "You are welcome, I started preparing it two days ago once I heard you were coming over. You mean the world to me and making something special is a joy."


There is an art to welcoming people, into our spaces, into our rhythms, into our imaginations, into our doors, into our hearts. Vulnerability is something that giving people deeper access to see and know who you are. We can be a little Vulnerable with a lot of people and very Vulnerable with a few. Hospitality involves gifting clarity to people so that they have a place in your life, and precisely where that place is. Narrating any changes in where and how you want to dwell with others can be instrumental in clarifying where the relationship is evolving. We can practice very beautiful and even excessive acts of hospitality with strangers. In fact it is \*Hospitality alone that transforms strangers into something else. However, the clarity that animates \*Hospitality and gives it meaning is sustained when someone remains the host and someone the guest. Rather than melting the boundaries away, taking turns with those roles of host and guest seems to enrich the practice.

"Welcome," is different from these other two words of connection and permeability. There is an art form to it, but it is something we need to practice with strangers and our closest loved ones as well. It is a way of letting people know you have intended to pay the costs of their presence in your life and that it is a pleasure. Practicing, "welcome" might not even involve the word itself, but the art of it is so important for our well being. Imagine if you had been away from your family or loved ones for a month, Of course you would be feeling homesick and ready to be on your own turf. Imagine walking in the door to find your partner casually waving you toward a cold plate of food on the table while he finishes making plans to hang out with his friends that evening. Imagine if your kids or close friends saw you in the hallway and simply said, "Oh. Hey." It would be devastating. Welcoming others is about taking delight in who they are and showing it to them. You can take delight in strangers. You can be joyful about connecting with mere acquaintances especially if you really do look for the gifts in others. And most of all, we absolutely must take delight in, and share our delight, with those we love the most. \*Vulnerability and \*Hospitality change in relationships in a way that is not exactly like \*Welcome. It is a discipline for us to practice across the wide spectrum of all of our loves, and it always will be.

I sincerely believe we are closer to our purpose as humans when we learn to name explicitly how other people are a gift to us and how it impacts our lives. In the same way that passively saying, "make yourself at home," could be limiting and confusing to a guest, asking people to assume, or worse, making them guess why they are important to us could very well be selling your relationship short for both of you.

If \*Vulnerability is the act of opening the door to one's \*Heart, and \*Hospitality is learning to host people in the spaces (and time) where you live, practicing the art of "Welcome" is the art of delighting in other people's existence. Practicing Welcome is the practice of delighting in your friends, or in the beauty of strangers. Every one of us needs to know that who we are is something that makes others happy, that I bring people joy. So enter well. Your presence is a pleasure in my life. Your worth is clear to me. Even if I only happen to know you well enough to kindly pass you a napkin. I want my life to tell you you're welcome. You are worth it. The art of welcome may not always create the intense moments that self-disclosure or other acts of \*Vulnerability might, but none of use would last long without little reminders that some people delight in us. Delighting in others, and communicating to them their worth, is an art form I would very much like to master.



 Forgiveness— There is one tool above all the others that will be necessary for staying in the game. There is a great deal written about the how-to of forgiveness. Go read those books. For me there are two very things I want to mention about forgiveness and why it appears here in this deck.

The first is in simple reference to the image on this card. Forgiveness, in this context, is little more than the choice to not carry someone else's weight around. Practicing forgiveness is a human art form that really only flourishes when there is an underlying conviction of abundance. It thrives in a context when people regularly and freely practice forgiving and being forgiven, of \*Generosity & Receptivity. Most of the stuff people deal with in relationships on a day to day basis has to do with grievances related to scarcity: there is not enough time, not enough value, not enough \*Love, not enough trust. Forgiveness is just returning to the ongoing song and story of abundance. It is a slowly learned truth that even if I don't reck myself trying to balance the books, my needs will still be met. I can get what I need regardless of what I perceive you have taken from me. Forgiveness is refusing to let someone else's sin have the last word on our relationship or on my life.


The second thing I feel like it is important to emphasize is related to the first: Forgiveness is not at all the same thing, or even related to surrendering boundaries. Forgiveness is never an invitation to be victimized again and it does not mean having to remove all consequences from a person that has wronged you. It is at its core simply this, the decision to stop carrying someone else's weight around. I know that when we think of forgiving small things, we often imagine just letting stuff go, letting it slide. It does not mean that all forgiveness looks like that. Forgiveness is not summed in the act of looking the other way. In fact, when it comes to some of the really difficult challenges, forgiveness is frequently a kind of confrontation. There is a famous teaching of Jesus that gets wildly misused along these lines. Jesus once taught that if someone strikes you on the right cheek you should turn and offer them the other one. Nothing could sound more clearly like instruction to be re-victimized. Let's consider what Jesus didn't say though. Jesus did not say if someone hits you once, ask them to hit you a second time. He added all this cheeky business. Now picture the scene, someone strikes you on the right cheek. If like most people they are right handed it means you just got backhanded, the way someone at that time would strike a beast of burden. It would be particularly demeaning. Imagine in that same context what it would mean to turn and face the person who struck you and say, "I

believe if you meant to hit me, you would have been decent enough to hit me this way, to face me as a human and for your palm to make contact with my face." Without turning to violence it is a powerful confrontation and a way of claiming one's own dignity, and even claiming a higher dignity for your abuser than they saw for themselves. It is an invitation to be better. As an act of dignity, it would have proven itself to be true by the act itself. (Luke 6) Though the story has been twisted to further oppress people, it is in fact an invitation to stand and insist upon one's dignity while revealing a dignity in the abuser even they did not see. This is the nature of forgiveness. Look at me. Face me. You have already cost me so much, and you might even have the power, but see me for who I am. That sort of a thing goes a long way toward turning oppressed people or victims into revolutionaries.

While I have, for example, never witnessed someone become a better person by making a habit of withholding forgiveness from others, or choosing to foster a bitterness toward someone, I know of few of my heroes that haven't spoke from intimate experience with forgiveness.

To complicate things, in the book The Sunflower, Simon Wiesenthal tells the story of a time he was asked for forgiveness from a dying Nazi soldier, who had specifically requested a Jewish person to whom he could confess. Wiesenthal happened to know of some of the atrocities this soldier had committed. When the soldier asked for forgiveness, Wiesenthal stood there in silence. He was not there to deny the man forgiveness but he also knew it was not his place to force or feign a forgiveness that was not his alone to offer. He was not there as a Jewish person to speak for the victims, the families of victims, or the children who suffered. I tell this story because I believe it underscores the fact that the forgiveness we learn to practice is not the same thing as a declaration of innocence, or a reconciliation. It also shows that forgiveness is not something to demand or acquire. Why on earth, for example, would I put it on the shoulders on a black friend to forgive me for all my complicity in racism? To demand more on top of more? I can apologize when appropriate to whom I have done wrong I can take responsibility for my life in the hope of forgiveness. How about I stop apologizing for the explosion I helped cause and just start repairing the damage? Even if I was forgiven, the repair work still needs to be done. Forgiveness is no passive act, it has nothing to do with laying down in the road waiting to be run over. It has everything to do with seeing my own dignity and the dignity of others enough to

not let someone else's sin have the last word on who I am. Or possibly even on them.  
This is good news.

 **Grace** — We have known from the beginning that my deck, my stack of cards begins and ends in the Love of God. Grace is not the last word on my life, grace has always been the first word, and nothing about our lives has changed God's mind. Grace is not the final card but simply the word we use to describe what it means when God insists on playing the last hand in which every card God plays is Love, Love, Love. Every card is Love. We don't even have a name for that kind of hand. Do you call that a Straight Flood? a Full and Filled to Excess House? Is God's hand an Infinite-of-a-Kind? Of course. How could I think otherwise? I end this little reflection on the first half of life with words that are four of a kind: *grazie, gracias, grace...* and *thanks*. There is a linguistic connection between the word grace, and offering gratitude. "If the only prayer you said was thank you, that would be enough." says Meister Eckhart. Like \*Forgiveness we underestimate the power of Grace. We sometimes imagine grace as the thing that makes bad things just ok. What an understatement! Grace is not the word that means even though we are too low on the rungs of the ladder of life, we are ok anyway. No. Grace is the radical invitation to leave the ladder altogether. Life off the ladder is a treacherous one in its own unpredictable way. It might cost you your life but it is Abundant, it is True, it is Beautiful and it is Good. It means we'll have to surrender the benefits of being above whoever we imagined we were above on the ladder, but it also means letting go of the whole idea of "lower-than." I've had more than my fill of "lower-than," and it is something I would never wish for you. So for me there is little if any choice left in these old bones. Grace is everything, and as it happens that is fertile soil for a lovely life. The thing about grace is that it is real for you, even if you do not find this vision of life compelling. It just is. Not in a way science could ever prove, it just is. Grace transcends. "For even when our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and God knows everything." 1 John 3:20

### Epilogue

Thank you for whatever time you have given to meet me here. I hope there are little gifts in here that you can steal for your own story. So much was left out. What I chose to include I included either because I absolutely had to or because I hoped it would be a gift to you. Keep what is helpful, set the rest aside. I hope something here has shown you love when and where you needed it. I hope it helps you show someone else the

love they need. Most of all I hope it helps you take whatever cards you have been dealt, and make of it a Heart Deck.

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