

Detailed Book Outline

PART ONE: EARLY EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Chapter 1: Childhood Experiences

Del H. Smith, the author, recalls childhood Sundays in Peterborough, Ontario, walking to church with his brother and quietly using part of their offering money for candy. Raised by agnostic parents, religion was absent at home except for Christmas Bible readings. With no strong faith foundation, rituals like confirmation felt superficial, and a teenage move to St. Catharines marked the end of his church involvement. Religion faded from his life, replaced by friendships and hobbies, leaving questions of belief and purpose unexplored.

Chapter 2: Adult Experiences

During his university years at McMaster in Hamilton, Ontario, Smith's study of comparative religion and his embrace of the scientific method lead him to question and ultimately reject religious beliefs. Applying the principles of proof and evidence, he dismisses the Apostle's Creed, the Bible, and Church teachings as unsubstantiated, finding inconsistencies and contradictions in religious claims. Observing believers around him, he concludes their faith stemmed from wishful thinking rather than reason. He adopts atheism, viewing life's purpose as earthly fulfillment. However, much later, he comes to recognize that his reliance solely on the scientific method had limited his understanding, overlooking the broader dimensions of the Experiential Learning methodology and its potential to shape a more nuanced perspective.

Chapter 3: Initial Experiential Learning

At university, Smith's curiosity about faith leads him to challenge believers, often with the ulterior motive of proving them wrong. His roommate, a devout Roman Catholic, becomes a frequent sparring partner in late-night debates. Despite Smith's persistent refutations, his roommate's unwavering belief and commitment to faith leave him both frustrated and impressed. A new chapter opens when he meets Peggy, a Roman Catholic woman he falls deeply in love with during a summer job. Their relationship leads him to attend Mass and engage in meaningful religious discussions. Though Peggy does not initially return his feelings, their connection deepens over time, culminating in marriage. Her early insistence he need not convert to Catholicism for them to marry and her strength of character leave a lasting impression, marking a turning point in his reflections on belief and commitment.

Chapter 4: Stage One: Accepting the Possibility

Smith's questioning of atheism intensifies during his tumultuous relationship with Peggy, influenced by her faith and Blaise Pascal's Wager. Pascal's argument—that it is rational to live as though God exists, given the infinite risk of disbelief—prompts Smith to explore the possibility of God's existence despite his skepticism. His search guides him to the Catholic Information Centre in Toronto, where he engages in lectures and personal mentoring with a seminarian.

Though he is initially resistant to Catholic dogma, especially the doctrine of Papal Infallibility, his mentor patiently addresses his objections over time. Smith's discovery, that Papal Infallibility applies to only a handful of pronouncements, allows him to accept Church teachings as a whole, while still disagreeing with some of them. This breakthrough, coupled with his growing respect for the Church's structure and teachings, lead to his decision to convert to Roman Catholicism, signaling a significant shift in his spiritual journey.

Chapter 5: Stage Two: More Likely Than Not

Smith's journey toward faith culminates in his acceptance of the Apostle's Creed as more likely than not to be true, opposing his prior atheism. While he cannot achieve certainty, he embraces the probability of Christ's divinity and the existence of God, influenced by Pascal's Wager and his study of Roman Catholic teachings. Step by step, he analyzes the Creed's statements, finding the concept of a creator, Christ's resurrection, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life to align with his evolving beliefs. This deeper exploration of faith corrects his earlier understanding of life's purpose, which he now sees as living according to Church teaching. Though he realizes his examination of Catholicism was incomplete, the experience profoundly transforms his perspective, preparing him for confirmation as a Roman Catholic.

Chapter 6: Early Faith Experiences

On the day of his confirmation, Smith's parents gift him a rosary, indicating a pivotal moment as he formally embraces Roman Catholicism, soon followed by his marriage to Peggy. While he values the discipline of attending Mass, he struggles to connect deeply, performing his religious duties out of obligation rather than love. Over time, he grows uneasy about his incomplete certainty regarding life's purpose and the foundations of faith, feeling he is merely "going through the motions."

Raising three children with Peggy, the couple seeks to instill, in them, their faith through strict adherence to church teachings. However, this approach backfires, fostering resistance rather than belief in their children.

In their adulthood, he regrets having imposed faith on his children instead of fostering open dialogue, seeing it as his greatest parental failure. The demands of career and family lead to a decades-long pause in his spiritual exploration, a decision he later recognizes as a mistake. These struggles, however, set the stage for a renewed and deeper examination of his faith journey, as his exploration of Roman Catholicism continues to evolve.

Chapter 7: Early Love Experiences

Smith reflects on his journey of Experiential Learning, beginning with his initial dismissal of the concept of agape love, which he later realizes to be a profound missed opportunity. Through a series of life-changing experiences, including a Christ in Others Retreat (COR), visits to Participation House, and a Marriage Encounter retreat, he begins to understand and practice selfless, unconditional, agape love. At COR, he sees teenagers and volunteers exemplify agape love. In Participation House, his interactions with a quadriplegic named Alf inspire admiration and a gradual embrace of selfless compassion.

The Marriage Encounter retreat deepens his and Peggy's love for each other and sparks an unexpected sense of love for God, leading to realizations about gratitude and attentiveness in relationships. However, despite these experiences, Smith struggles with questions about how to actively love God, feeling disconnected due to his (and our) inability to tangibly communicate with Him. This introspection highlights the need for further growth and belief through Experiential Learning to bridge the gap between feeling love for God and actively living it.

Chapter 8: Active Pursuit of Belief

In his mid-40s, Smith, working as an IBM Account Manager, enjoys a flexible schedule and a supportive sales team, which enables him to attend a weekday Mass for the first time. He finds the shorter service less distracting and more introspective than the usual Sunday services. Having initially viewed the services as merely a duty to God, he is surprised to find himself engaged by the readings and homily, which offer points of cogitation that linger with him throughout the day. Over time, attending daily mass becomes a regular habit, providing him with insights akin to the valuable takeaways from business seminars.

However, his skepticism about the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, persists as he sees it as symbolic rather than transformative. While he questions the divinity of Jesus and the historical accuracy of the Gospels, the daily readings' comprehensive coverage of the four Gospels over three years begins to deeply influence his thinking.

Despite unresolved doubts, Smith embraces the rich learning experience, balancing skepticism with a commitment to continued exploration of faith.

Chapter 9: Second Career

In his early 50s, Smith faces an unexpected crossroads when IBM Canada begins downsizing, offering early retirement incentives. Although approaching his 30th anniversary with the company, he is initially devastated by the prospect of retirement, fearing financial instability and the loss of purpose. After careful consideration, he retires at 52, leveraging his pension and launching a management consulting practice from a home office, which allows him to balance professional work with personal pursuits.

During this transition, he explores deeper spiritual questions, profoundly influenced by reading C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*. Lewis' compelling arguments for God's existence and Jesus as the Son of God leads Smith to strengthen his tentative belief in the Gospels as likely delivering God's Word. This inspires a more extensive study of the Gospels, aided by a Bible with Jesus' quotations highlighted. However, he still struggles to connect the teachings cohesively. Smith describes how he resolved this issue in Part Two.

PART TWO: ACTIVE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Chapter 10: The Gospels

Smith's examination of the Gospels starts with the challenge of understanding Jesus' message on various topics. He devises a method to categorize nearly 400 of Jesus' quotations by topic, aiming to study each topic's message in order of its importance, based on the frequency and length of Jesus' references to it. To organize this data efficiently, he uses an Excel spreadsheet and Logos Bible Software, which allows him to quickly compile and rank the topics by the number of words and quotations. This process provides him with a powerful, structured view of Jesus' teachings, revealing clear and reinforced messages on each topic.

Impressed by the impact of this method, he seeks to share it by authoring a fictional book, *The Journey*, about an atheist encountering the key messages of Jesus. Although he never publishes the book due to new insights gained during the editing process, the work sparks deeper exploration into the sayings of Jesus, leading to a more extensive study and the eventual writing of another book, *The Sayings of Jesus*.

Chapter 11: Stage Three: Sound and Supported Knowledge

Smith, seeking feedback on *The Journey*, receives a critique from a professor that challenges the validity of his ideas without a proper grounding in philosophy. Though initially resistant, Smith follows the professor's advice and studies two introductory philosophy books: *Philosophy for Dummies* and a first-year philosophy text.

Contrary to his expectations, he finds *Philosophy for Dummies* to be a thorough introduction to philosophical thinking, presenting both sides of arguments in a way that leads him to conclude no single philosophical argument is conclusive. The first-year philosophical text teaches him to develop his own philosophical arguments, which enables him to establish a more solid and supported understanding of life's purpose, moving beyond the tentative "more likely than not" conclusions he had previously accepted. His philosophical journey deepens his re-examination of *The Club*, exploring atheism before delving further into philosophy.

Chapter 12: Atheism

Smith, after exploring atheism and reading works by prominent atheists like Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, finds that their arguments against the existence of God do not convince him. Instead, they reinforce his belief in a divine creator. Dawkins' criticism of the cosmological argument, his insistence on abiogenesis, and his perceived flaws in creation lead Smith to question these points, ultimately finding them unconvincing.

Harris' arguments about suffering and evil in the world also fail to challenge his growing conviction that God, despite allowing pain and suffering, has a purpose for humanity. Smith addresses the atheists' critiques, such as God's remoteness and the existence of evil, by presenting arguments that these aspects of life are part of God's plan for enabling free will, personal growth, and selfless love. After examining these viewpoints, Smith concludes that, because atheism does not provide satisfactory answers, it is clear he needs to pursue philosophy further to solidify his understanding of life's purpose and the existence of a loving God.

Chapter 13: Philosophy 101

In "Philosophy 101", Smith explores how reasoning shapes one's understanding of knowledge, existence, and life's purpose. Using deductive and inductive reasoning, he concludes that, while all reason-based knowledge is tentative and subject to correction, it can still be reliable, practical, and as sound as any knowledge humans possess. Applying these methods to the question of God's existence, Smith uses reasoning to establish that everything has a cause, leading to the concept of a first, uncaused cause, identified as God. From this starting point, reasoning establishes that God loves us, that He created us to live with Him for eternity and that His purpose for our lives is to love Him and all His children as selflessly and unconditionally as we are able. He concludes we can know the purpose of our lives through rigorous reasoning and without dependence on blind faith.

PART THREE: FOUNDATIONS

Chapter 14: The Bible – The Old Testament

Smith explores the question of whether the Old Testament is the revealed Word of God, beginning with an analysis of the first seventeen books of the Bible and the book of Daniel. Initially, Smith questions the consistency of the Old Testament with Jesus' teachings and struggles with the idea that fallible humans could receive divine revelations. However, through reflection, Smith reaches the conclusion that God could communicate His Word directly into the minds of the Bible's authors, despite their potential misinterpretations. Smith further examines perceived inconsistencies in the Old Testament, such as the Genesis creation story, God's selective love for Abram's descendants, and His instructions for violence and genocide, interpreting these as human misinterpretations rather than contradictions. Ultimately, Smith concludes that the Old Testament is indeed the revealed Word of God, once its authors' misinterpretations are corrected.

Chapter 15: The Bible – The New Testament

Smith's studies of the New Testament are initially as troubled by its authors' misinterpretations as he has been with those of the authors of the Old Testament. His study addresses the concept of atonement, concluding that Jesus' death was a reparation for human sinfulness rather than a punishment from God. His study concludes that "unquenchable fire," rather than being a punishment from God, is a metaphor for our self-imposed separation from God, that only we can choose to resolve. He portrays Jesus' teaching, that it is harder for a rich man to attain heaven than for a camel to pass through eye of a needle, as not saying it is impossible. Rather, it refers to our inability to do God's will on our own, without asking for and acting on God's help. Smith ultimately deduces that the New Testament is the revealed Word of God. That this is unprovable is God's way of preserving our free will whether to accept it or not. He shares his journey of study, involving the need for ongoing exploration and discussion with others to challenge and refine one's own positions.

Chapter 16: Jesus Christ – Son of God

Smith, after establishing the Bible as the revealed Word of God, explores the question of whether Jesus is the Son of God, initially, by examining Old Testament prophecies. These prophecies, from Nathan to Malachi, progressively describe a Saviour who will be both divine and human, culminating in the portrayal of Jesus as the Son of God. Smith then considers Jesus' own claims to divinity, citing His repeated references to God as His Father, His miracles, and ultimately His resurrection.

The evidence from scholars, particularly works like *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* and *The Case for Christ*, strengthens the argument for Jesus' divinity, refuting challenges posed by critics. Smith's study concludes that, based on both the prophetic and historical evidence, Jesus is indeed the Son of God. However, personal skepticism still lingers, and Smith turns to Pascal's Wager to reconcile his doubt.

Chapter 17: My First Case Study

Smith ruminates on a painful chapter in his life, detailing the decline of his wife, Peggy, who is diagnosed with bone cancer after years of battling hip pain. Despite various misdiagnoses and treatments, Peggy's condition worsens, requiring palliative care as she suffers through chemotherapy, radiation, and increasing pain. Throughout her illness, Smith learns profound lessons about selfless love and, after her death, about his self-centeredness in focusing on his own grief rather than his children's loss.

Chapter 18: The Roman Catholic Catechism

Smith next addresses whether the Roman Catholic Catechism is the revealed Word of God. He initially concludes that where its positions are unsupported by Jesus' teachings, they cannot be the Word of God. To pursue this possibility, Smith turns to Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. In this treatise, the pope posits that our bodies teach us three important lessons. 1) God's purpose in giving our bodies sexual ecstasy is to give us a glimpse of the spiritual ecstasy of loving Him in heaven. 2) God gives us the sexual act to enable us to be as inside each other as we are physically able, to give us a glimpse of the spiritual experience of being in Him and having Him in us. 3) God gives us the capacity of procreation so that our experience of parental love will give us a glimpse of His fatherly love for us. God's will is that we use these three gifts as expressions of the selfless and unconditional love Christ modeled, rather than as a source of selfish pleasure. His treatise extends Christ's teachings in a way that is largely consistent with them.

Smith uses this extension of Christ's teaching to examine seven controversial positions in the Roman Catholic Catechism that appear to not align with it. His study establishes that three align with Christ's extended teachings, three are misinterpretations of them, and one is indeterminate. However, because none of them contradict Christ's extended teachings, He concludes that the Roman Catholic Catechism is the Word of God, despite its authors' likely misinterpretations.

Masturbation

Smith's study concludes that masturbation uses God's gift of sexual arousal for selfish pleasure rather than as an expression of the selfless and unconditional love that Christ modeled. He comes to the realization that anything that goes against God's will is a sin. While acknowledging it as a lesser sin, since it primarily harms only the individual and their relationship with God, Smith accepts the Catechism's position that masturbation is a sin.

Abortion and Euthanasia

Drawing on Scripture and common sense, Smith argues that human life, created and sustained by God, cannot be terminated without contravening His will. While acknowledging the significant emotional and physical burdens these issues impose, Smith emphasizes the need for selfless love and compassionate care rather than the termination of life. Because God wills the preservation of life under all circumstances, Smith accepts the Catechism's position that abortion and euthanasia are sins.

Christian Exclusivity

Initially misunderstanding this Catechism position as limiting salvation to Catholics or Christians, Smith's questioning leads him to a more inclusive interpretation. He argues that Jesus' assertion, that no one comes to the Father except through Him, teaches the necessity of God's grace rather than the exclusion of anyone. Highlighting the Church's Good Friday prayers for all humanity, Smith concludes that the Catechism's position, that God has many ways of reaching all peoples, is the Word of God.

Premarital Sex

Smith challenges the Catechism's stance that premarital sex is inherently sinful, suggesting that Christ-like love and commitment are not dependent on the Sacrament of Marriage. While affirming that selfish, uncommitted sexual behavior is sinful, he argues that, where unmarried couples love as Christ modeled, premarital sex is not a sin. The Catechism's misinterpretation is its position that marriage is a prerequisite to the love Christ modeled rather than simply an enabler.

Contraception

Smith critiques the Catechism's teaching that contraception is always sinful because it separates God's gift of the sexual act from His gift of procreation. He argues that responsible use of contraception can align with God's will by enabling sexual expression of committed love at times when procreation is irresponsible. The only alternative to contraception is abstinence, which, in itself, is a separation of God's gifts.

While misuse of contraception for selfish purposes remains sinful, responsible use of contraception is consistent with God's will, and thus the Catechism's position that it is a sin is a misinterpretation of God's Word.

Homosexuality

Smith challenges the Catechism's view that same-gender relationships are sinful, emphasizing that homosexuality is not a choice but a God-given condition. He interprets Christ's teachings as inclusive, applying the model of committed, selfless love to both homosexual and heterosexual relationships. Smith further disputes the Catechism's claim that the inability to procreate renders homosexual unions unfruitful, citing examples of loving, adoptive parenting. Although uncommitted, selfish sex is as sinful for homosexuals as for heterosexuals, homosexuals are equally capable of the selfless love that Christ modeled. He concludes that the Catechism misinterprets homosexuality as sinful, asserting that only uncommitted, selfish sexual behavior constitutes sin.

Celibacy and Female Ordination

Smith questions the Catechism's requirement of priestly celibacy and the exclusion of women from ordination, arguing these practices stem from cultural traditions rather than explicit divine mandates. While questioning the Catechism's position that celibacy is a marriage to Christ or the Church, he contends that God grants individuals the freedom to marry or remain celibate. Smith concludes that the Catechism's position is a misinterpretation of the Word of God.

Adultery

Smith questions the Roman Catholic Catechism's position that adultery is a sin. After considerable study, he has been unable to find any satisfactory argument to show the Catechism's position to be consistent with Jesus' teaching, simply a misinterpretation of it or truly contrary to it. As a result, he is left uncertain whether its position, that a loving adulterous relationship cannot be permanently forgiven, is the revealed Word of God.

Conclusions

Smith's re-examination of the Roman Catholic Catechism has profoundly deepened his understanding of faith, sin, and life's purpose. By questioning its teachings, he infers that the Catechism, while containing some fallible human misinterpretations, is fundamentally the revealed Word of God as guided by the Holy Spirit. He is encouraged by Pope Francis' pursuit of further discernment of the Holy Spirit's revelation, which may result in the correction of some of the Catechism's misinterpretations.

For example, the pope has apparently concluded that married men should be allowed to join the priesthood. If married men become priests, what is to prevent priests from becoming married men?

Smith's study of the Bible and the Roman Catholic Catechism establishes they both are the Word of God, though occasionally misinterpreted. He surmises that, because we must know God's Word to discover His purpose for our lives, it behooves us all to interpret the Bible and the Roman Catholic Catechism to the best of our ability.

To do less is to remain in culpable ignorance. What further helps us discover the Word of God is Christ's Greatest Commandment.

PART FOUR: COMMANDMENTS

Chapter 19: The Greatest Commandment – Love Your God

Smith examines the profound meaning and demands of the commandment to love God, recognizing it as essential for spiritual growth and alignment with divine will. He reflects that loving God with all one's heart involves prioritizing God with the intimacy and devotion akin to a spouse. Loving with all one's strength entails developing and fully utilizing personal gifts in service to God, striving for self-improvement. Loving with all one's mind requires continuous questioning, learning, and reflecting to deepen understanding of God through every life experience.

Smith presents a method of developing a love for a God that we cannot physically experience. He proposes using our knowledge of the stages of human love—evolving from dependence to admiration to active devotion.

Chapter 20: My Second Case Study

Peggy, a dedicated palliative care nurse, is universally praised by her peers for her exceptional compassion and skill, which becomes evident through her preference for the night shift despite its toll on her health. She cherishes the quieter hours to connect deeply with her patients—doing their nails, listening to them, and ensuring they feel loved. Her selfless love leaves an indelible impression on her husband, who recognizes her work as a profound example of the love God calls us to emulate.

After Peggy's passing, Smith begins volunteering on her former ward, inspired by her legacy, to offer comfort and presence to patients and caregivers alike. The experience, though challenging, deepens his capacity for selfless love, a capacity that further deepened through his study of the second half of *The Greatest Commandment*.

Chapter 21: The Greatest Commandment – Love Your Neighbour

Smith explores the profound challenge of selflessly and unconditionally loving our neighbour—all of God's children. Smith admits to falling short in this, even with his closest relationships: spouse, family, and friends. Self-centeredness often undermines his ability to prioritize others' happiness and engage meaningfully. He recounts experiences of judging or avoiding difficult individuals and grappling with the moral dilemma of loving those whose actions are harmful or destructive. Smith turns to Robert Blatchford's *Not Guilty: A Defense of the Bottom Dog* to understand how to love God's worst offenders. Blatchford makes a compelling case that heredity and formative environment shape perpetrators' behavior beyond their control. Through this lens, he advocates for empathy and rehabilitation over judgment.

Philosophical insights from C.S. Lewis and Flatland resolve his misunderstanding that divine omniscience prevents free will. He concludes that God's perception transcends human limitations, and, since we do have free will, we are solely responsible for our exercise of it.

Chapter 22: My Third Case Study

During the latter part of his Experiential Learning, Smith receives devastating news: a close friend of several decades has been charged with a serious crime and later convicted. While others distance themselves, Smith and his wife support the friend, witnessing his rehabilitation through prison visits. This experience intensifies Smith's understanding of how formative and generational traumas influence behavior, inspiring him to engage in jail ministry and parolee support, offering unconditional love.

He reflects on how his late wife explained love to their children. When their children would return from school, telling her they hated "little Billie," she would tell them that it is wrong to hate "little Billie" but right to hate the bad things "little Billie" did. She is simply and effectively explaining that Christ's Greatest Commandment means we can hate the crime but must love the perpetrator.

Chapter 23: The Puzzle

Smith uses a jigsaw puzzle metaphor to help enable discovery of life's purpose. Observing his wife assemble a puzzle, he envisions creating a 40-piece jigsaw puzzle and accompanying book, *The Puzzle*, which uses philosophical debates to explore knowledge of life's purpose. Although never published due to its dense style, the project catalyzes his thinking.

He comes to realize that Experiential Learning requires us to engage our hearts as well as our minds. Initially relying on intellect alone, Smith recognizes his need to embrace the heart's role in understanding and fulfilling Christ's Greatest Commandment: to love God and others selflessly and unconditionally. He deduces we all have a predominant strength and one less developed, and that we all need to fully deploy the former and further develop the latter. Reflecting on how much he has learned from Christ's single Greatest Commandment, he realizes how much more there must be to learn from Christ's 400-plus teachings which he had begun to explore in *The Journey* project. It is time to study *The Sayings of Jesus*.

PART FIVE: TEACHINGS

Chapter 24: The Sayings of Jesus – 1

Smith discusses the challenges of studying Jesus' teachings using the Bible, finding them dispersed and difficult to integrate. To address this, he creates *The Sayings of Jesus*, which organizes Jesus' teachings by topic. It then sequences the topics by importance, using the number of teachings on each topic and their word length as criteria of importance. The sequencing reveals that two-thirds of Christ's teachings are contained in just fifteen topics. Studying all Christ's teachings on any one topic clarifies His overall message on that topic. Most importantly, Smith discovers that studying just fifteen topic messages enables a synthesis of Christ's overall message to us. He strongly encourages his readers to undertake their own study and offers the following results of his study as an example.

Passion and Death

Smith's study determines that this is the most important topic Jesus addresses, even though it contains no teachings as do all the other topics. Smith concludes its importance is its description of the depths of Jesus' immense love for humanity. Jesus' agony and His plea to God to take the cup from Him reveal His humanity and the profound sacrifice He makes for human salvation. During the worst of His suffering, He forgives those who crucified Him, praying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." His final lament, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" encapsulates the intensity of Jesus' suffering in order to save our souls. Through his study, Smith comes to know that Jesus is a man and how much He suffers for us.

Discipleship

On this second-most important topic, Smith comprehends the demanding nature of discipleship. Christ calls us to deny ourselves, take up His cross daily, and follow Him. His demand, that we love Him more than family and even life itself, illustrates the total commitment required of His followers. Smith concludes that following Jesus means putting His teachings first and sharing them with others zealously even in the face of rejection. In this, our responsibility is to share His teachings with them, while leaving it up to them to accept or reject His teachings. Through his study, Smith grasps that we are fully accountable to love Jesus more than anyone, emulate Him daily, and proclaim God's Word zealously despite rejection.

Authority

Smith unearths Jesus' claim to divine authority, noting His actions, miracles, and words as proof of His divinity. Jesus' miracles, such as healing the paralytic,

serve as testimony to His divine power. Christ boldly asserts His unity with God, telling His followers that seeing Him is seeing the Father. Jesus' authoritative words and actions, such as claiming to be the I AM and responding to Pilate's questions, affirm His identity as God Incarnate. Smith concludes that it is folly to reject the teachings of God Incarnate. Through his study, he came to know that Jesus was God Incarnate.

Close of the Age

On this topic, Smith originally rejects Jesus' teachings on the Close of the Age. Christ's insistence that "...this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." makes it seem like nothing more than another false prediction of the end of the world. Upon reflection, he realizes that Jesus cannot be wrong about that. He concludes Jesus meant that the Close of the Age for each of us will be at the instant of our individual deaths. As such, we will have no warning of our inevitable judgment. Jesus teaches that we will be judged based on our proactive love of others. Jesus warns against complacency and being misled by false teachings that fail to align with one's full study of His sayings. Through Smith's study, he comes to know that, because we will be judged at the unknown moment of our death, we must prepare now by testing every idea we experience against a full understanding of Jesus' teachings.

Guidance

In the topic of guidance, Jesus sets an unattainable standard of perfection, encouraging believers to strive for it while acknowledging that, on their own, they will never fully achieve it. Jesus' teachings extend the Ten Commandments, calling for acts of mercy, reconciliation, and selfless generosity. Smith notes Jesus' insistence on using one's gifts for others, asking for God's enablement and His forgiveness whenever we fall short. Christ offers rest to those who take on His yoke, with the promise of strength to meet the challenges of striving toward God's ideal. Through his study, Smith comes to know that we must continuously strive to approach God's standard of perfection and pray for God's forgiveness and help each time we fail to love our enemies, do good rather than look good, and use our gifts to help those who can't repay us.

Chapter 25: My Fourth Case Study

Shortly after Peggy's passing, Smith meets Marcelle, a Francophone teacher whose profound impact mirrors the effect of his previous Roman Catholic encounters. Their shared experiences of losing spouses, who encouraged them to find new partners, ease their marriage and help their families embrace it. Marcelle enriches his spiritual and intellectual growth, introducing him to the rosary as a meditative prayer and inspiring him to dedicate heartfelt prayers for his loved ones and others in need.

Together, they become extraordinary ministers of communion, deepening their faith through shared retreats and acts of service. Marcelle's unwavering support, listening skills, and mentorship strengthen his understanding of Jesus' teachings while allowing him space to focus on his spiritual journey. Her faith remains a guiding light in their shared life of devotion and service.

Chapter 26: The Sayings of Jesus – 2

Smith offers the results of his study of the ten second-most important topics in The Sayings of Jesus.

Faith

In his study of this sixth-most important topic, Smith learns the necessity of faith as a means of attaining healing miracles. Jesus often requires individuals to confirm their faith before healing them, insisting that belief in His powers was a prerequisite of His healings. Smith realizes that his lack of faith had made it very difficult for him to pray and is why he had never experienced a miracle.

It will take further study of miracles to achieve that prerequisite faith. Through his study, he comes to know that we must grow our faith in our prayers for God's help in accomplishing whatever Jesus demands of us.

Kingdom of God

Though Smith's criteria of topic importance rank this topic in seventh place, his study of it leads him to conclude it may just be the most important topic, in that it addresses what a treasure heaven is and what it takes to attain it. Jesus' many parables teach that the Kingdom of God, planted in each one of us, must be internalized to fully experience it. Internalizing it demands putting its pursuit before all earthly pursuits. Attaining it demands preparation through study of The Sayings of Jesus and following what Jesus teaches.

Jesus warns us that few of us will be judged to have adequately done this but assures us it is never too late to start. Finally, because of our gift of free will, we must choose to pray for God to top up our best efforts. God will do all we ask but will force nothing on us. Through his study, he comes to know that eternal life with God is far beyond what we can imagine, and to realize it, we must respond to His invitation and adequately prepare for it to be judged ready to attain it.

Laws

Smith's study of this topic concludes several things. God's law trumps societies' laws. Religious laws that do not align with God's law are invalid. He concludes it is easier to follow human nature than to study and follow God's laws. God's laws are communicated to us through the Word of God in the Bible and the Roman Catholic Catechism, Jesus' Greatest Commandment, and His teachings in The Sayings of Jesus. Through his study, he comes to know that we must avoid judgment of others and increase our righteousness while following God's laws.

Preparedness

Jesus' Parable of the Sower teaches that we must clear away anything in our lives that keeps us from receiving the Word of God. These things include ideas that do not align with the Word of God, family and career pressures, media distractions, and financial and medical concerns. Realizing these things cannot be avoided, Smith concludes that we must set aside some time each day to temporarily clear them away and focus on the Word of God. Jesus reveals that, to receive the Word of God, we must become like little children rather than relying on our perceived self-sufficiency.

We must proactively seek the Word of God, asking for God's revelation and repenting—admitting when we fail to receive it and committing to do better. Through his study, he comes to know that we must open our hearts to every insight God sows in us, internalize every teaching Jesus gives us, proactively seek to understand the Word of God, and commit to correct each failure to act on it while we still have time on Earth.

Pharisees et al

Jesus uses the Pharisees to illustrate the hypocrisy we all need to avoid. Smith concludes that we must focus more on what we are than on how we appear to others. Jesus insists that we not subject ourselves to anyone except Him. We must carefully avoid self-appointed teachers, like TV evangelists, popular authors, or any one earthly teacher or priest, whose teachings do not align with the will of God as proclaimed by Jesus.

Smith concludes that to do this we must persevere in our study of God's will. Through his study, he comes to know that we share hypocrisy with the Jewish leaders and that we need to discern what, of what we read and hear, is consistent with what Jesus teaches us.

Rejecting Jesus

Before seriously studying The Sayings of Jesus, Smith often set aside, ignored, or rejected any of Jesus' teachings that were inconvenient, demanding, or difficult. He realizes that part of his rejection is triggered by the realization that Jesus' teachings demand that he become a better person than he is. However, after coming to know that Jesus is God Incarnate, he runs out of excuses. Through his study, he comes to know that we reject Jesus whenever we put our will ahead of God's will and that, because He has left no room for doubt about the will of God, the guilt is ours and we will have no excuse.

Salvation

A study of this topic discloses what we must do to inherit eternal life with God in heaven and how unfailingly God will help us prepare every time we ask. Jesus teaches that we must be "born of the Spirit"—rejecting worldly values and accepting God's values. He insists that we must do more than hear His word; we must do what He says. Three parables describe God's joy every time we repent. Through his study, Smith comes to know that salvation requires putting God's values above worldly values, that God continuously offers His help but that it is up to us to accept it, and that we must do what Jesus insists upon rather than merely professing a love of Him.

Riches

Smith's study of this topic uncovers many realities he has overlooked. Firstly, most of us are richer than most people on Earth. Secondly, our wealth is more a gift of God than earned. Thirdly, God makes us stewards of our wealth. To whom much is given, much is expected. Fourthly, Jesus insists we give unconditionally rather than judging whether the recipient is deserving. Fifthly, rather than simply giving more than others, we must be like the poor widow, who put two small copper coins into the offering box, and give as much as we are able. Sixthly, rather than amassing treasure on earth, which we will no longer have when we die, we need to amass treasure in heaven, which we will have for an eternity. Through his study, Smith comes to know that we must share the gifts of which we are God's stewards, not merely more than others do, but as much as we are able.

Miracles

At this point in Smith's study, he feels unable to pursue this topic because he does not even believe in miracles. Later, after his study of Miracles by C.S. Lewis, Smith surmises that Jesus' miracles are real and that they prove that He is God Incarnate.

Commandments

Before Smith began to study *The Sayings of Jesus*, he felt that his extensive study of Jesus' Greatest Commandment was sufficient study of this topic. *The Sayings of Jesus* reveals two other commandments. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." Smith concludes that, while *The Greatest Commandment* teaches what must be the extent of our love, this additional commandment teaches the intensity with which we must love. In giving us *The Golden Rule*, Jesus reminded us how unrelenting our study and execution of His commandments must be for us to attain heaven: "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." In the Parable of the Vine and the Branches, He teaches us two powerful lessons. We, the branches, can only bear fruit if we stay connected to Jesus, the vine.

The vinedresser, God, will prune those of us who bear fruit to help us bear more fruit and will allow those who bear no fruit to wither. From his study, Smith comes to know that following Christ's commandments demands our best and that the more we achieve, the more God will give us strength to achieve more.

Studying Jesus' Message

Smith urges us to make our own study of Jesus' over-400 teachings. Otherwise, like he had, we may ignore teachings we read in isolation, feeling they do not apply to us; they do not apply to our times, or they need not be taken literally. Studying His teachings by topic enables us to reevaluate them because of the way they support, expand on, and reinforce each other. Smith suggests his readers may discover new meanings in teachings with which they are familiar and discover teachings that are new to them. Their own study will yield more understanding of Jesus' messages than simply reading this account of the results of Smith's study. He offers a study guide in *The Sayings of Jesus*, which is the appendix to this book, *Discovering Life's Purpose*.

PART SIX: METANOIA

Change

Smith describes his experience of metanoia, a transformative spiritual change of heart, which differs from the “born again” experiences described by various Christian denominations. Unlike a single event, such as baptism or a minister-led moment of faith, his metanoia is a gradual, deeply experiential shift. His metanoia is made possible by two key experiences: reading C.S. Lewis' *Miracles*, which overcomes his disbelief in miracles, and the profound experience of the Eucharist, which continues to sustain his transformation.

Chapter 27: Miracles

C.S. Lewis sees Christ's miracles as nothing more than Christ doing suddenly and locally something that God has always done or will do in general. By making the connection between what we know God does with the miracles that God Incarnate performed, he banishes their mystery and unbelievability. Those he describes as what God has always done include the Turning of Water into Wine, the Feedings of the Four and the Five Thousand, the many Healings, the Withering of the Fig Tree, and the Calming of the Storm. Those he describes as what God will do include the Walking on Water, the Raising of Lazarus, the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, and the Ascension.

C.S. Lewis' rationale establishes knowledge where it is based on what we continually see God doing in our midst and establishes belief where it is based simply on our knowledge God is all-powerful. Smith concludes we can know that all the miracles are real because all are supported by sound rationale. His study banishes any doubt Jesus is God Incarnate and any skepticism that the Eucharist cannot be real.

Chapter 28: Eucharist

Smith's study of the Eucharist is his most challenging. He has a tough time accepting a position that almost everyone rejects. Because it seems as unlikely as alchemy, and he can find no scientific evidence for it, he strongly suspects the Church is using its teaching to establish its primacy. Smith's study tackles these issues one at a time.

On the first, he concludes that the fact that we cannot observe something like alchemy, or a time dimension, does not prove it does not exist. On the second, he realizes the lack of scientific evidence that something occurred is not proof it did not occur. On the third, he has to admit he cannot dismiss transubstantiation based solely on the unsubstantiated feeling that the Church might be using it to establish its power.

Having dismissed his rejections, Smith undertakes to prove the Eucharist is indeed the body and blood of Jesus Christ. He soon concludes he will never be able to prove it. God makes the Eucharist unprovable because He wants us to choose to accept His outreach. Smith decides the best he can do is to determine whether it is more likely than not God wants to give us the experience of His presence in the Eucharist. After all, what God wants, God gets.

Firstly, He concludes that because God Incarnate said it is His body and blood, it must be. Secondly, he discovers that most Christian denominations teach that it is. Thirdly, he turns to common sense. Because God wants us to experience His presence, and we are unable to physically experience His spiritual presence, He must enable us to experience His presence physically. Because we experience the greatest intimacy when we are inside each other during lovemaking, God chooses to offer us His intimacy by coming inside us. Because our circulatory system delivers the product of our digestive system to every cell and fiber of our bodies, God chooses to come to us in something we can ingest and digest.

In summary, Smith concludes that because common sense indicates the Eucharist is real, Church teaching claims it is real, and God Incarnate said it is real, and because his unsubstantiated doubts have been overcome, it is more likely than not that the Eucharist is real. He concludes that as long as we ignore or reject that Christ is in the Eucharist, we remain as blind as the Pharisees who failed to see God in Jesus. He decides he needs to fully experience God's physical intimacy at every opportunity.

My Experience of the Eucharist

Smith describes his personal and life-changing experience of the Eucharist. During each stage of the Daily Mass, Smith's personal prayers and accompanying gestures strengthen his feeling of intimacy with God. He finds the full, daily experience of the Eucharist to be a major part of his metanoia.

The Effect

Smith's metanoia is the culmination of his Experiential Learning. He goes from an intellectual, experiential relationship with God to an intimate, spiritual relationship. He goes from an occasional connection with God to what is almost a continual connection.

In almost every experience of his day, he becomes absorbed in God. He becomes mesmerized, enthralled, and captivated by God. He considers his metanoia to be his own personal miracle.

PART SEVEN: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Chapter 29: Experiencing Experiential Learning

Smith outlines an ongoing three-step approach to Experiential Learning. He offers a template to capture perceptions, learnings, and resulting knowledge, and offers his own Experiential Learning template to illustrate its use. The greatest strength of ongoing Experiential Learning is its ability to confirm or correct knowledge. For example, he revised his knowledge of life's purpose from pursuing earthly fulfillment to living according to Church teaching to loving God and all His children as selflessly and unconditionally as we are able. He admits Experiential Learning can be challenging but assures us it is rewarding. Supported by its textbook, *The Sayings of Jesus*, it delivers sound and supported knowledge of life's purpose.

Chapter 30: The Dozen Things I Know

Smith summarizes the results of his Experiential Learning, offering the dozen things it taught him. He describes the sound reasoning that led him to each of these learnings.

Conclusion

Smith reflects on the Lord's Prayer phrase "...thy will be done...as it is in heaven." He observes that Christ did not add "by some of the people, some of the time." For Smith, it follows we need to do our best to develop selfless love to the best of our ability in order to belong in heaven. Jesus taught, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom, but the one that does the will of my Father in heaven." Smith concludes it is up to us to learn the will of the Father through our study and then practice it to the best of our ability. Smith's study is never complete. He is still learning. He hopes his readers will choose to use Experiential Learning to do the same and that they will benefit from its textbook—*The Sayings of Jesus*—a book that is the appendix of this one.

Appendix

The purpose of *The Sayings of Jesus* is to aid in one's study of Jesus' over-400 teachings. It presents Jesus' teachings by topic in the sequence of the topic's importance. Smith's analysis, described in the final pages of *The Sayings of Jesus*, establishes that the fifteen most important topics cover two-thirds of Jesus' teachings.

Smith offers a study approach and illustrates it with a description of the results of his own study. He suggests that you study topics one at a time in the sequence of their importance or their interest. As you complete each topic, enter a summary of what you determine to be its message into a journal. You will find, for your consideration, what Smith's study determines to be its message.

When you have completed studying at least a dozen topics, you are ready to synthesize Jesus' overall message. Smith suggests netting out each topic message and placing each on a single page of your journal. On a separate page, rearrange them so each fits in with the others to produce what you determine to be Jesus' overall message. You will find, for your consideration, what Smith's study determines to be Jesus' overall message.

The results of Smith's study are illustrative only. The results of your study are what will help you discover what, for you, is Jesus' message on how to fully live God's purpose for your life.
