

“On the Brink of Everything” — 48-08  
PAUSE TO CONSIDER: REFLECTIONS ON SESSION #8

1. Today I’ve included another of the songs that Carrie Newcomer wrote and performed with “On the Brink of Everything” in mind. It is called *Lean in Toward the Light*. In the video segment last night, we heard how the light affected Parker as he emerged from his bout with depression. **Click on the image to open the link.**



It seems fitting to dream about summertime as we enjoy our +12 temperature today.  
The promise of springtime!!

2. Michael’s Opening last night was all about ‘discovery and engagement’ as he shared his piano composition and story about a very special friend in his life. Even as Jim faced his terminal illness, he did not sit back and wait — rather he and Michael shared time with Jim painting while Michael’s music played. What an awesome image! Here are Jim’s picture and Michael’s composition. Enjoy!



3. Deb Closed and what follows is the poem that she shared with us last night:

*On the Brink of Everything:  
Grace, Gravity & Getting Old by Parker  
Palmer  
St. David's Winter 2022 Book Study  
Closing – March 14, 2022*

**Growing Old is a Double-Edged Sword**

Time....

They say time stops for no one  
And while that may be true  
I still fight the passage of time  
Holding onto each minute and second with a  
tenacious grip  
Worried that I might not extract each drop of  
preciousness from it.

Years...

They do not gently go by now  
But rather fly by at the speed of light  
Blink  
And yet another year has flown by.

Letting Go...

Such a tough lesson to learn  
Fraught with feelings of failure and loss  
and ripe with regrets of what-might-have-  
been's  
With age has come understanding  
That there are times  
When you simply need to let something or  
someone go  
To be at peace.

Relationships...

With the march of time  
Comes the awareness of how important  
relationships  
Are to our well-being  
The inter-connectedness and intersection of  
your life  
With the lives of others  
Gives meaning  
Always remember to cherish those who you  
love  
And who love you in return.

Acceptance...

Of my limitations  
My body now may struggle  
With the physical demands I make upon it  
I grieve for what I am no longer capable of  
But choose not to dwell upon it  
Instead, I will embrace and celebrate  
That which I am still able to do.

Awareness...

This is still a struggle...  
An ongoing challenge to master  
To be more aware of all that is around me  
To engage all my senses  
To see, smell, taste, hear and touch  
So that I able to live more fully in the present  
moment  
And not rush heedlessly into the moments to  
come.

Wisdom...

They say with age comes wisdom  
Though not always the case for everyone  
I continue to be a lifelong learner  
And my quest for knowledge and  
understanding  
Is a journey  
Which will end  
At the end.

Sense of Self...

I have found myself  
In the latter stages of my life  
With a better sense of "who" I am  
My values and beliefs  
What I stand for  
And my soul's Purpose for Existence.

Strength...

I am stronger in many ways,  
Emotionally and mentally more stable  
To withstand the gales and the storms  
The winds of life may bring.

Time Outs...

Take on a deeper meaning  
Then when you were young  
Finding time to pause  
To contemplate and consider  
To observe  
Or simply to savour

Allows me to seek and to truly understand  
What happened  
Why I did what I did  
And why it is important.

Balance...  
I understand now that life is not always  
The way I would wish it to be  
As I have become older  
I find joy in the good times  
And try to find learnings in the bad  
And most importantly,  
I've learnt how to dance in the dark and light  
Of each sunset and sunrise.

Indeed...  
Growing old is akin to a double-edged sword  
Full of both sharp and dull edges  
And when my final whispers of breath are  
taken  
And my spark of life extinguished  
I hope it is said of me  
That I wielded my sword well.

That I lived my life to the hilt

In a spiritually enlightened manner  
That I shared my time and talents  
And cared for others and the earth.

That I was adventurous  
And found joy and wonder in creation  
By travelling the world  
and continually striving expanding my mind  
and horizons.

That I loved and laughed with abandon  
And faced my demons  
Both internal and external  
with my sword held high  
And my banner of self  
Flying fiercely in the wind.

For in the end...  
It is my deepest desire and steadfast hope  
That I live up to the challenge my beloved  
grandfather bestowed upon me  
And leave the world a better place somehow  
For me having been it.

*Debra Charnuski*

4. Housekeeping: Last night I referred to the Pi (3:14) Service that became available to us Monday at 3:14 p.m. on youtube. If you missed this Affirming service, just click



on the image and spend the next 30 minutes with United Church folks from across Canada and some from home: Jennifer McTavish, Amy Haynes, Hugo and Iris and the Sanctuary choir with Brent.

I also mentioned that next Sunday, March 20, 2022 at 5:30 there will be a Ukrainian Fundraiser Event at St. David's beginning at 5:00 p.m. with proceeds to the Canada Ukraine Foundation.

5. I ran across a quote from Dean Koontz, a writer whose works have keep me busy reading over the years. From 2016: "When I realize how unlikely it is that anything at all should live on this world spun together from dust and hot gases, that creatures of almost infinite variety should at night look up at the stars, I know that it's all more fragile than it appears, and I think maybe the only thing that keeps the Earth alive and turning is our love for it." I was reminded of Wayne's fifth discovery from Chapter Six — "If I want to help heal the world, I must heal myself" — a statement made on page 147 as part of his essay, "Confessing My Complicity" — in which he also states, "As long as I draw breath, I want to be part of the solution. that requires a close examination of my own heart and dealing with whatever pathogens I find there." He was referring to racism as a social pathogen ... "which breeds irrational fears... the worst of political evils."

6. Last night Wayne shared with us his fourteen discoveries from Chapter VI: about **facing our demons**, that becomes an act of discovery and engagement. As Parker says, "You have to look in the mirror." In my experience, they have less power than I feared and, as Amy mentioned in her reflection last Sunday, maybe Courage is sometimes greater than Love for us.

A second discovery focussed on the segment that stated that "**Aging and dying well** requires practice." Mike quoted his friend Jim as saying, "In accepting death, I am rediscovering life."

#3. reminded us that the older we get, more more our lives are enriched by lessons we weren't ready to learn when we were young. Parker is keen to remind us in this chapter about changing seasons and how they allow for resurrection and... maybe readiness to learn.

#4 challenged us to consider and share our **spiritual epiphanies**. This is not an easy task in our traditio n but thank God for those dark night of our souls when we suddenly saw more clearly. A thin place as it is sometimes referred to.

#5 (**Healing the world** by healing myself) needs some attention, not just once but repeatedly in our lives as conditions change and we are forced to rethink "our complicity." #6 and #10 referred to a theme often developed by Rev. Peggy over the years — our heart broken open as a tranformative power. With thoughts of Russia, and for me, the weekend mandate protestors, I need an open heart. Even #9, with reference to revolutionary love reminds us that love is more than good feelings, it is "a force in the face of injustice."

Eldon's point re: #10 regarding the **brittle and the supple heart**, he said that often the brittle heart is that way due to shock and grief but that given time, that heart becomes supple from the love of many people. Definitely food for thought.

#11 had Wayne creating an image of the gardener and the **Seasons of the Yard** - the resting of winter, the awakening of the seeds, planting and cultivating. Again, the concept of seasons upon us. The topic of Fake News and an earlier reference to our living in a post-truth world raised all kinds of comments and reflected concerns. Parker's optimistic hope for the future is highlighted in Wayne's comments about overcoming, in not fearing diversity but using it to make our lives more vital, smarter, more creative and for increasing our personal resilience.

7. Some ideas to be reflected upon:

- "... my failings and lost opportunities forgiven as they are under this sun — released in their triviality, resurrected as new life enroute to dying with thanks and praise and no mind-begotten regrets."
- "I will hold you in the light... Laughter so healing ... humour and tears as gifts from God. "
- "Only a supple heart can open us to new life."
- "All the 'falling' out is full of promise — seeds planted, composed leaves."
- "Darkness and light (the paradoxical dance) conspire to make us healthy and whole."

8. We have two sessions left with only one finishing off our book. It is time to start making suggestions regarding our fall session.

9. Enjoy Reading Chapter Seven and the Postlude: 'Where We Go When We Die.' I listened to chapter seven last night on the audiotape. I'll be sad to leave this book behind. I suspect it will continue to follow me.

10. Here are Michael's notes for chapters 4 and 5. Thank you so much for your support and contributions to our study, Michael.

Chapter 4

85-88, I think one of the concepts he nibbles at is "how much of your life's purpose do you bring to and contribute as part of your work?". As we know, you spend a minimum of about 25% of your entire life within the environment and structure of "work". That's a lot for you as an individual to give. \*what\* do you give?

88 middle. I can't tell you where my urge to compose music first came from. I do know that I've had it most of my life and I've recorded compositions that I wrote at age 12 and 13. I

went through a period of intense "vocating", where I churned out a full compositional album about once a year. That time is long gone---and, in fact, I went through a drought of about 11 years. I'll talk about that here (again from the journals)

90, write vs. publish . Yeah, for sure. I write my journal entries for myself. Same with almost all my compositions. Despite various friends exhorting me to submit them for publishing and/or sale, I've never felt the urge to do so. Here's part of why, I think. My more-than-I'd-like-to-admit-logical brain parses out the activities I do

to earn money and the activities I do for self-growth and pleasure. I aggressively don't seek to meld the two. Wine is the same. Although a lot of people, including a number of my wine friends, do this, it is utter anathema to me to purchase wine to resell. I won't do it.

90 middle, dumb luck. My lexicon word is "kismatic"

91, early schlock. For SURE. I do reread my journals. Sometimes I say "wow, who was the smarty that wrote that?" And sometimes I say "was I \*that\* dumb back then?"

91, another lexicon word, "inrigorating". Though I use it more for when one is exposed overlong to cold weather.

"I was writing to impress rather than express"--- ooooh, I love that!!

93 bottom, vocation commentary which I alluded to in small group---I bet that for most of us, our work vocation would be the thing we said we wanted to be when we were 6 years old

94 bottom – 95. I'll answer some of these questions. 1. Because these affluent people are products of social and cultural conditioning that goes back probably at least a thousand years. The vehicle may be economic instead of geographical or hereditary or cultural, but it's still \*colonialism\*. And colonialism is earmarked by an insatiable, rapacious hunger for more. We value the things we don't have more than we value the things we do have.

2. because all that time tuning in to well-educated...well, that type of education leaves out any education on the "soft skills" of empathy, perseverance, morality, self-questioning and so forth. As we come to know more, we come to \*think\* less.

3. because, and this can be said for a lot of followers of democracy. We've forgotten where we came from and we don't know where we're going. It's a pretty scary thing. But the idea of

democracy---being allowed to have an opinion and allowing others to have an opinion—is a long way from the real thing right now

4. well, that's what a human is. A living, breathing contradiction

97, when you share your story of struggle....this, too, will be part of my message in my opening

Story on paper being frozen---I don't know about that. I disagree a little here because you can reread what you wrote---I do it often---and bring a fresh thought train or perspective to it. The words meant enough to write them down. It doesn't mean they have to mean the same thing at every point in time that you look at them

99, I can relate to his feelings about this

100, top. Yup, that's me too. I'm not a good person. And I'm not a bad person. I'm a mixed person. And I'm Ok with that, because it makes me human

101, one of my sayings---don't get to the end of the journey and end up being unable to see the road that got you there

102, again, I can relate I only compose music when it comes naturally and easily. To force it is to end up with a piece I am guaranteed not to like

104, inadequacy. As I mentioned in my notes to Braving the Wilderness, that was my core takeaway---that I want to and need to be inadequate to my world

107, ooooo, that's a lovely definition of poetry—the Paul Engle one

108-110, I'll only add that poetry, as we're looking at it here, doesn't have to be words. It can be body language. It can be a hug or a kiss. It can be tears. It can be music.

110, middle, Begin Again is a nice little film--- good music and she's actually not a bad singer!

114, very evocative imagery that has me thinking

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## Chapter 5

116, I have had the best examples—my mom and dad

117, keep reaching out--the delicious irony is that elders have more time and less distraction (i.e. work) to be able to voice things and ideas that count.

119, a president who lies with abandon. The cynic would say that this embodies the archetypal modern politician. Look--politics is the study and application of influence, nothing more. And influence is just power dressed up to go to a ball

120-122 powerful stuff. My small-group book study is looking at the exact parallel in our book on the environment right now

122, bottom, yeah, but how do we bring ourselves to admit we might be wrong? That we might be less? That the Republic of Me, population me, isn't the one and only of life.

124, supports collapsing under weight of life. Indeed---people are often too busy fighting \*with\* their lives to fight \*for\* their lives instead

126-127, resonates. Journal entry in clearly one of my own bleaker moods:

*"News is an interesting thing. It may have started out as a recitation of certain facts, but now? Now it is the most adaptable of communications. It is concerned only with what people want to hear or read. If that is "nonsense" or "sensationalism" then that is what sells advertising space or subscriptions. Look at People and Us---a long time ago when things were different, these were respectable and respected magazines dealing with serious topics. Now? Who is shacking up with who and which wedding needs to be reported on. It has almost come to the point*

*where you have to choose the least objectionable tabloid. The commentary this makes on our society today is not a flattering one. It may be a combination of the sheer "x" needed to get people's attention together with the increased narcissistic bent of much of society today. Thus, when you parse it down like this, it is almost difficult to blame journalists or reporters. For who is going to read a "serious" piece these days? A piece requiring knowledge and context and straining your brain?"*

129, Make America Great Again. An awful, awful question (and I'm not saying we're all that much better up here). Has America ever been truly great? Achieved the kinds of things past empires have done at their respective heights? Maybe in the 40s and 50s. I'm not sure of any other period in history to which this statement applies. And... the question he's skirting around. Are there enough people willing to do real, hard work to keep democracy alive? I don't know.

130-134. I agree with all his points. But in homogeneity lies \*certainty\*. And we have been conditioned to live and aspire to lives of certainty. Diversity brings unknown and danger to many people's thinking anyway (when it should/could bring enlightenment and excitement to people's way of thinking). If you have Netflix, you should take some time to watch some episodes of "Colin in Black and White"---the story of Colin Kaepernick (which he narrates a fair part of). The most poignant thing that is shown is his white parents, who truly love him, but are nevertheless blind to the unconscious racism they partake of. It's really good stuff

136, Buchanan. See? Certainty. THAT is the true illness and scourge

140-141, he's really talking about actively practising empathy. You see, I've come up with a curious and rather useful definition of empathy. Making yourself less to make other people---and other things (expanding this to capture nature,

environment, etc.) more. I say this again---when it's not about you, it can be the most about you.

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11. Check out OVERVIEW subpage on MINISTRIES/ADULTSPIRITUALDEVELOPMENT page if you wish to review many of our previous book studies or last night's powerpoint/pdf keynote.

- **Bible Study** on Thursday mornings on ZOOM at 10 a.m. is on I Corinthians. Chapter 13 - the way of love
- Amy's Wednesday Morning pastoral care session at 10:00 a.m. is a very welcoming place to be Wednesday morning.

12. Some links you might like: <https://couragerenewal.org/wpccr/parker/videos/> ,

On Being Project: <https://onbeing.org>

<https://www.newcomerpalmer.com/home>

[sduc.ca](https://www.sduc.ca)

Thoughtfully yours, have a great week and enjoy Chapter 7 and the Postlude.

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