

Letters By A Modern Mystic
Excerpts from letters written at
Dansalan, Lake Lanao, Philippine Islands
To his father by
Frank C. Laubach, Ph.D.

Foreword by
ALDEN H. CLARK, D.D.
Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners
For Foreign Missions
1937
STUDENT VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT
156 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment is made to The Argus, Benton, Pennsylvania, for permission to use these excerpts from letters originally published by them, and to Miss Constance E. Padwick, Executive Secretary of the Central Literature Committee for Moslems, Cairo, Egypt, who first edited and compiled the excerpts appearing in the booklet.

Foreword

A rare experience awaits any one who reads these selections from the letters of Frank Laubach. In them a great spirit has opened the very doors of his soul and invited us into the inner sanctuary to share his experience of God. To read this book quietly and with sympathetic insight is to find one's self transported into an atmosphere of dedication, of discernment and of spiritual ecstasy which reminds one of St. Francis of Assisi. It is as exciting as breathing the ozone of a mountain summit and makes the reader long to rise on the wings of the spirit as the author has done.

Who is this man who expresses himself, when occasion requires, in the scientific language of the day yet speaks with a timeless voice of a great mystic? It is very characteristic of Dr. Laubach that in these letters he gives us only the barest glimpses of himself and his work. The fascinating story of his service to the Moros during the years when the letters were written is barely suggested. What is of supreme importance to him and what he wants in all modesty to share with others is his own inner religious experience, yet to know something more of the man and his work gives new meaning to the letters.

Frank C. Laubach went with his wife to the Philippines as a missionary in 1915. For the first seven years of his service he gave himself unstintedly and with great effectiveness to the building of evangelical churches on the North Coast of the great southern island of Mindanao and to the broader contacts with the culture and leadership in the Islands which has always characterized him. These churches on the North Coast have continued to progress and still show markedly the effect of his formative influence.

His next great service was concerned with the establishment and conduct of a Union Theological Seminary in Manila. Dr. Laubach was a prime mover in these plans and went to Manila not only to be one of the Seminary's first teachers, but to give strong spiritual

leadership in the changing life of the city. The Seminary continues to be a vitally important institution of the evangelical movement in the Islands. Here again he rendered constructive service, the results of which continue. It was during this period that Dr. Laubach wrote his scholarly and sympathetic book, *The People of the Philippines*, and his delightful picture of the Islands for young people entitled *Seven Thousand Emeralds*.

But all the time he was doing these things that seemed to require his first attention Dr. Laubach's thought went with increasing frequency to the Mohammedan Moros on the Island of Mindanao with whom he had had some contacts during the first period of his service. These were a wild and backward people, about 500,000 in number, who looked upon the Christian Filipinos as their traditional enemies. They seemed almost completely inaccessible to approach by a Christian missionary. To win them, as he well knew, would require unbounded patience and great Christian resourcefulness. Dr. Laubach believed in the power of God to accomplish even this task and felt that he had a call to undertake it. So in 1930, a short time before the first of these letters was written, Dr. Laubach went to Dansalan in the uplands of Mindanao to begin his remarkable service for the Moros.

The letters reflect the beauty of this place with its homes and fields reaching down to a sparkling lake beyond which rise jagged mountain peaks. The letters also reflect with complete frankness the lonesomeness of those first days. For reasons of health and education Mrs. Laubach and their surviving son Robert were compelled, during these first months, to stay at Dumaguete, a mission station on another island, and he was alone. This was the time when he was learning the language and coming to understand something of the way of the life of the Moros and therefore, he was isolated from any intimate fellowship with them. It was characteristic of the greatness of the man that this very lonesomeness led him to the deep mystic experience of God which is recorded in his letters.

It was not long before the Moros began to realize the nobility of the spirit of this American who had come among them as their simple friend. As he started to help them in various practical ways their response grew in cordiality until at the end of an almost incredibly short time they had come to regard him as their best friend. And this indeed he was, for he discerned their greatest needs and with untiring industry and creative ability of a rare order set out to meet them. In 1930 he found these Moros almost entirely an illiterate people. It is probably fair to say that one-half of the 90,000 who live about the Lake can now read and write. He found them wedded to the past and ill prepared to play their part in the modern world. He has done nothing to destroy their pride in the best of their past. Indeed, he has done much to preserve the valuable elements in their culture, but he has also helped them to realize that they are a part of the great world and to adjust themselves to its life.

This man who writes with such poetic beauty of his inner spiritual experiences has also been a man of intense practical activity. He has devised a remarkably effective method of adult education and promoted it with great ability; he has developed industries, fostered health service, stimulated the introduction of better seed and in a thousand and one ways proved himself a practical friend to these people. Yet no one who reads these letters can fail to see that through it all Dr. Laubach yearned to help them to a richer experience of God. He has not sought primarily to win them to baptism, although some have sought baptism as a result of his ministry, but he has desired to make a deep and transforming spiritual experience the basis of their life.

Here, as elsewhere in the world, the great mystic has been the loving servant as well as the effective channel for the outflow among needy people of God's transforming power.

Alden H. Clark
Boston, Massachusetts
January 5, 1937

THE BOOK
Experiencing the Presence of God
aka: PRACTICING HIS PRESENCE

>>> PAGE 1

Chapter 1 **THE FORETASTE**

January 3, 1930

To be able to look backward and say, "This has been the finest year of my life.", that is glorious! But anticipation! To be able to look ahead and say, "The present year can and shall be better!", that is more glorious!

If we said such things about our achievements, we would be consummate egotists. But if we are speaking of God's kindness, and we speak truly, we are but grateful. And this is what I do witness. I have done nothing but open windows – God has done all the rest. There have been few if any conspicuous achievements. There has been a succession of marvelous experiences of the presence of God. I feel, as I look back over the year, that it would have been impossible to have held much more without breaking with sheer joy. It was the most lonesome year, in some ways the hardest year, of my life, but the most gloriously full of voices from heaven.

As for me I resolved that I would succeed better this year with my experiment of filling every minute full of the thought of God than I succeeded last year.

January 20, 1930

Although I have been a minister and a missionary for fifteen years, I have not lived the entire day of every day in minute by minute effort to follow the will of God. Two years ago a profound dissatisfaction led me to begin trying to line up my actions with the will of God

about every fifteen minutes or every half hour. Other people to whom I confessed this intention said it was impossible. I judge from what I have heard that few people are really trying even that. But this year I have started out trying to live all my waking moments in conscious listening to the inner voice, asking without ceasing, "What, Father, do you desire said? What, Father, do you desire done this minute?"

It is clear that this is exactly what Jesus was doing all day every day.

January 26, 1930

For the past few days I have been experimenting in a more complete surrender than ever before. I am taking by deliberate act of will, enough time from each hour to give God much thought. Yesterday and today I have made a new adventure, which is not easy to express. I am feeling God in each movement, by an act of will – willing that He shall direct these fingers that now strike this typewriter - willing that He shall pour through my steps as I walk - willing that He shall direct my words as I speak, and my very jaws as I eat!

>>> PAGE 2

You will object to this intense introspection. Do not try it, unless you feel dissatisfied with your own relationship with God, but at least allow me to realize all the leadership of God I can. }I am disgusted with the pettiness and futility of my unled self. If the way out is not more perfect slavery to God then what is the way out? { Paul speaks of our liberty in Christ. I am trying to be utterly free from everybody, free from my own self, but completely enslaved to the will of God every moment of this day.

We used to sing a song in the church in Benton which I liked, but which I never really practiced until now. It runs:

"Moment by moment I'm kept in His love;
Moment by moment I've life from above;
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine;

Moment by moment, O Lord, I am thine."

It is exactly that, moment by moment, in every waking moment, surrender, responsiveness, obedience, sensitiveness, pliability, 'lost in His love,' that I now have the mind-bent to explore with all my might, to respond to God as a violin responds to the bow of the master.

In defense of my opening my soul and laying it bare to the public gaze in this fashion, I may say that it seems to me that we really seldom do anybody much good excepting as we share the deepest experiences of our souls in this way. It is not the fashion to tell your inmost thoughts, but there are many wrong fashions, and concealment of the best in us is wrong. I disapprove of the usual practice of talking 'small talk' whenever we meet, and holding a veil over our souls. If we are so impoverished that we have nothing to reveal but small talk, then we need to struggle for more richness of soul. As for me I am convinced that this spiritual pilgrimage which I am making is infinitely worth while, the most important thing I know of to talk about. And talk I shall while there is anybody to listen.

Outside the window, as I completed the last page, has been one of the most splendorous sunsets I have ever seen. And these words came singing through my soul. "Looking to Jesus 'till glory doth shine!" Open your soul and entertain the glory of God and after a while that glory will be reflected in the world about you and in the very clouds above your head.

>>> PAGE 3

Chapter 2 UNDISCOVERED CONTINENTS OF SPIRITUAL LIVING

January 29, 1930

I feel simply carried along each hour, doing my part in a plan which is far beyond me. This sense of cooperation with God in little things is

what so astonishes me, for I never have felt it this way before. I need something, and turn round to find it waiting for me. I must work, to be sure, but there is God working along with me. God takes care of all the rest. My part is to live this hour in continuous inner conversation with God and in perfect responsiveness to his will to make this hour gloriously rich. This seems to be all I need think about.

March 1, 1930

The sense of being led by an unseen hand, which takes mine while another hand reaches ahead and prepares the way, grows on me daily. I do not need to strain at all to find opportunity. It plies in upon me as the waves roll over the beach, and yet there is time to do something about each opportunity.

Perhaps a man who has been an ordained minister since 1914 ought to be ashamed to confess that he never before felt the joy of complete, hourly, minute by minute – now what shall I call it? – Is it more than surrender? I had that before. Is it more than listening to God? I tried that before. I cannot find the word that will mean to you or to me what I am now experiencing. It is a will act. I compel my mind to open straight out toward God. I wait and listen with determined sensitiveness. I fix my attention there, and sometimes it requires a long time early in the morning to attain that mental state. I determine not to get out of bed until that mind set, that concentration upon God, is settled. After awhile, perhaps, it will become a habit, and the sense of effort will grow less.

But why do I constantly harp upon this inner experience? Because I feel convinced that for me and for you who read there lies ahead undiscovered continents of spiritual living compared with which we are infants in arms.

>>> PAGE 4

And I must witness that people outside are treating me differently. Obstacles which I once would have regarded as insurmountable are melting away like a mirage. People are becoming friendly who suspected or neglected me. I feel, I feel like one who has had his violin out of tune with the orchestra and at last is in harmony with the music of the universe.

As for me, I never lived, I was half dead, I was a rotting tree, until I reached the place where I wholly, with utter honesty, resolved and then re-resolved that

I would find God's will, and I would do that will though every fiber in me said no, and I would win the battle in my thoughts. It was as though some deep artesian well had been struck in my soul or souls and strength came forth. I do not claim success even for a day yet, in my mind, not complete success all day but some days are close to success, and every day is tingling with the joy of a glorious discovery. That thing is eternal. That thing is undefeatable. You and I shall soon blow away from our bodies. Money, praise, poverty, opposition, these make no difference, for they will all alike be forgotten in a thousand years, but this spirit which comes to a mind set upon continuous surrender, this spirit is timeless life.

March 9, 1930

For the first time in my life I know what I must do off in lonesome Lanao. I know why God left this aching void -- for himself to fill. Off on this mountain I must pursue this voyage of discovery in quest of God's will.

I must plunge into mighty experiments in intercessory prayer, and I must confront these Moros with a divine love which will speak Christ to them.

>>> PAGE 5

Chapter 3 THE REST OF MY LIFE AN EXPERIMENT

March 15, 1930

This week a new, and to me marvelous, experience has come out of my loneliness. I have been so desperately lonesome that it was unbearable save by talking with God. And so every, waking moment of the week I have been looking toward Him, with perhaps the exception of an hour or two.

Last Thursday night I was listening to a phonograph in Lumbatan and allowing my heart to commune, when something broke within me, and I longed not only to lift my own will up but also to give it completely to God.

How infinitely richer this direct first hand grasping of God himself is, than the old method which I used and recommended for years, the reading of endless devotional books. Almost it seems to me now that the very Bible cannot be read as a substitute for meeting God soul to soul and face to face. And yet, how was this new closeness achieved? Ah, I know now that it was by cutting the very heart of my heart and by suffering.

[comment>that is the suffering of the wounding of my pride which pain is often more excruciating than the physical pain of childbirth or that of the presence of stones in the kidney<comment.]

Somebody was telling me this week that nobody can make a violin speak the last depths of human longing until that soul has been made tender by some great anguish. I do not say it is the only way to the heart of God, but I must witness that it has opened an inner shrine for me which I never entered before.

March 23, 1930

One question now to be put to the test is this: Can we have that contact with God all the time? All the time awake, fall asleep in His

arms, and awaken in His presence, can we attain that? Can we do His will all the time? Can we think His thoughts all the time?

Or are there periods when business, and pleasures, and crowding companions must necessarily push God out of our thoughts? We cannot keep two things in mind at once. Indeed we cannot keep one thing in mind more than half a second. OUR Mind is a flowing something. It oscillates. Concentration is merely the continuous return to the same problem from a million angles. We do not think of one thing. We always think of the relationship of at least two things, and more often of three or more things simultaneously. So my problem is this: Can I bring God back in my mind-flow every few seconds so that God shall always be in my mind?

I choose to make the rest of my life an experiment in answering this question.

>>> PAGE 6

Someone may be saying that this introspection and this struggle to achieve God-consciousness is abnormal and perilous. I am going to take the risks, for somebody ought to do it. If our religious premises are correct at all then this oneness with God is the most normal condition one can have. It is what made Christ, Christ. It is what St. Augustine meant when he said "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our souls are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

I do not invite anybody else to follow this arduous path. I wish many might. We need to know so much which one man alone cannot answer.

For example:

"Can a laboring man successfully attain this continuous surrender to God? Can a man working at a machine pray for people all day long, talk with God all day long, and at the same time do his task efficiently?"

"Can a merchant do business or can an accountant keep books, ceaselessly surrendered to God?"

"Can a mother wash dishes, care for the babies, continuously talking to God?"

Is this obtainable?

Any hour of any day may be made perfect by merely choosing. It is perfect if one looks toward God that entire hour, waiting for his leadership all through the hour and trying hard to do every tiny thing exactly as God wishes it done, as perfectly as possible. No emotions are necessary. Just the doing of God's will perfectly makes the hour a perfect one.

>>> PAGE 7

Chapter 4 "HERE-NESS" NOT STRAIN

April 18, 1930

I have tasted a thrill in fellowship with God which has made anything discordant with God disgusting. This afternoon the possession of God has caught me up with such sheer joy that I thought I never had known anything like it. God was so close and so amazingly lovely that I felt like melting all over with a strange blissful contentment. Having had this experience, which comes to me now several times a week, the thrill of filth repels me, for I know its power to drag me from God. And after an hour of close friendship with God my soul feels clean, as new fallen snow.

April 19, 1930

If this record of a soul struggle to find God is to be complete it must not omit the story of difficulty and failure. I have not succeeded very well so far. This week, for example, has not been one of the finest in my life, though it has been above the average. I have to make a greater effort next week. I have undertaken something which, at my

age at least, is hard, harder than I had anticipated. But I resolve not to give up the effort.

Yet strain does not seem to do good. At this moment I feel something **let go** inside, and lo, God is here! It is a heart melting "here-ness," a lovely whispering of father to child, and the reason I did not have it before, was because I failed to let go. And back of that failure there was something else. A crowd of people arrived, who, when they are in a crowd, wish to talk or think nothing of religion. I fear I have not wanted some of them to think me religious for fear I might cease to be interesting.

Fellowship with God is something one dare not cover, for it smothers to death. It is like a tender infant or a delicate little plant, for a long nurturing is the price of having it, while it vanishes in a second of time, the very moment, indeed, one's eye ceases to be **single**. One cannot worship God and Mammon for the reason that God slips out and is gone as soon as we try to seat some other unworthy affection beside Him. The other idol stays and God vanishes. Not because God is 'a jealous God' but because sincerity and insincerity are contradictions and cannot both exist at the same time in the same place.

>>> PAGE 8

April 22, 1930

The **experiment** is interesting, although I am not very successful, thus far. The idea of God slips out of my sight for I suppose two thirds of every day, thus far. This morning I started out fresh, by finding a rich experience of

God in the sunrise: Then I tried to let Him control my hands while I was shaving and dressing and eating breakfast. Now I am trying to let God control my hands as I pound the typewriter keys. (If I could keep this morning up I should have a far higher average today than I have had for some time.)

This afternoon as I look at the people teeming about me, and then think of God's point of view, I feel that this mighty stretch of time in which He has been pushing men upward is to continue for many more millions of years. We are yet to become what the spiritual giants have been and more than many of them were. Here the selection favors those who keep themselves wide open toward God and wide awake. Our possibilities are perhaps not limitless, but they are at least infinitely above our present possibilities of imagination.

There is nothing that we can do excepting to throw ourselves open to God. There is, there must be, so much more in Him than He can give us, because we are so sleepy and because our capacity is so pitifully small. It ought to be tremendously helpful to be able to acquire the habit of reaching out strongly after God's thoughts, and to ask, "God what have you to put into my mind now if only I can be large enough?" That waiting, eager attitude ought to give God the chance he needs. I am finding every day that the best of the five or six ways in which I try to keep contact with God is for me to wait for his thoughts, to ask him to speak.

May 14, 1930

Oh, this thing of keeping in constant touch with God, of making him the object of my thought and the companion of my conversations, is the most amazing thing I ever ran across. It is working. I cannot do it even half of a day - not yet, but I believe I shall be doing it some day for the entire day. It is a matter of acquiring a new habit of thought. Now I like God's presence so much that when for a half hour or so he slips out of mind - as he does many times a day - I feel as though I had deserted him, and as though I had lost something very precious in my life.

>>> PAGE 9

May 24, 1930

As I analyze myself I find several things happening to me as a result of these two months of strenuous effort to keep God in mind every minute. This concentration upon God is strenuous, but everything

else has ceased to be so. I think more clearly, I forget less frequently. Things which I did with a strain before, I now do easily and with no effort whatever. I worry about nothing, and lose no sleep. I walk on air a good part of the time. Even the mirror reveals a new light in my eyes and face. I no longer feel in a hurry about anything. Everything goes right. Each minute I meet calmly as though it were not important. Nothing can go wrong excepting one thing. That is that God may slip from my mind if I do not keep on my guard. If He is there, the universe is with me. My task is simple and clear.

[And I witness to the way in which the world reacts. Take Lanao and the Moros for illustration. Their responsiveness is to me a continuous source of amazement. I do nothing that I can see excepting to pray for them, and to walk among them thinking of God. They know I am a Protestant: Yet two of the leading Muslim priests have gone around the province telling everybody that I would help the people to know God.]

>>> PAGE 10

Chapter 5 MORE BUT NOT ALL YET

June 1, 1930 - One new lesson -

Inwardly this has been a very uneven week. As a whole my end of the experiment has been failure for most of the week. My physical condition and too many distractions have proven too much for me, and God has not been in the center of my mind for one-fifth of the time, or perhaps one tenth. But today has been a wonderful day, and some of yesterday was wonderful. The week with its failures and successes has taught me one new lesson. It is this: "I must talk about God, or I cannot keep him in my mind. I must give Him away in order to have Him." That is the law of the spirit world. What one gives one has, what one keeps to oneself one loses.

Do you suppose that through all eternity the price we will need to pay for keeping God will be that we must endlessly be giving him away?

June 3, 1930 - Begin to build heaven -

This experiment which I am trying is the most strenuous discipline which any man ever attempted. I am not succeeding in keeping God in my mind very many hours of the day, and from the point of view of experiment number one I should have to record a pretty high percentage of failure. But the other experiment - what happens when I do succeed - is so successful that it makes up for the failure of number one. God does work a change. The moment I turn to Him it is like turning on an electric current which I feel through my whole being. I find also that the effort to keep God in my mind does something to my mind which every mind needs to have done to it. I am given something difficult enough to keep my mind with a keen edge. The constant temptation of every man is to allow his mind to grow old and lose its edge. I feel that I am perhaps more lazy mentally than the average person, and I require the very mental discipline which this constant effort affords.

So my answer to my two questions (to date) would be

1. "Can it be done all the time?" Hardly.
- 2: "Does the effort help?" Tremendously. Nothing I have ever found proves such a tonic to mind and body.

Are you building sacred palaces for yourself? I meant to write "places" to be sure, but I think I shall leave the word "palaces" for that is what any house becomes when it is sacred. The most important discovery of my whole life is that one can take a little rough cabin and transform it into a palace just by flooding it with thoughts of God. When one has spent many months in a little house like this in daily thoughts about God, the very entering of the house, the very sight of it as one approaches, starts associations which set the heart tingling and the mind flowing. I have come to the point

where I must have my house, in order to write the best letters or think the richest thoughts.

>>> PAGE 11

So in this sense one man after the other builds his own heaven or his hell. It does not matter where one is, one can at once begin to build heaven, by thoughts which one thinks while in that place.... I have learned the secret of heaven building - anywhere.

This morning I read awhile about the tremendous consecration with which the scientists are studying the finest details about the sun, in an effort to find how to predict the weather, and to know how to use its power. And I feel that not yet have I thrown myself into the crucible of this experiment of mind with all the abandon of the successful scientist. We have heard the saying, "All a man's failures are inside himself." And I am willing to confess that as yet I have not "striven unto blood" to win this battle. What I want to prove is that the thing can be done by all people under all conditions, but I have not, proven it yet. This much I do see - what an incredibly high thing Jesus did.

A great lonesome hunger comes over me at this moment for someone who has passed through the same long, long channels of hope, and aspiration, and despair, and failure, to whom I can talk tonight. And yet - there is no such person. As we grow older all our paths diverge, and in all the world I suppose I could find nobody who could wholly understand me excepting God - and neither can you! Ah, God, what a new nearness this brings for Thee and me, to realize that Thou alone canst understand me, for Thou alone knowest all! Thou art no longer a stranger, God! Thou art the only being in the universe who is not partly a stranger! I invite others inside but they cannot come all the way. Thou art all the way inside with me - here -and every time I forget and push Thee out, Thou art eager to return! Ah, God, I mean to struggle tonight and tomorrow as never before, not once to dismiss Thee. For when I lose Thee for an hour I

lose and the world loses more than we can know. The thing Thou wouldst do can only be done when Thou hast full swing all the time.

Chapter 6 ENDLESS COMMUNION WITH GOD

June 16, 1930 - I looked at people with a love God gave I walk out in the street full of Moros, and if my soul is as full of God as it sometimes is, I see what happens as I look into their eyes and pray for them. No man need try to persuade me that God does not reach them, for I see the thing happen, and now I know that every person we ever meet is God's opportunity, if only, if only we were not so much of the time shutoff from God.

Last Monday was the most completely successful day of my life to date so far as giving my day in complete and continuous surrender to God is concerned - though I shall hope for far better days - and I remember how as I looked at people with a love God gave, they looked back and acted as though they wanted to go with me. I felt then that for a day I saw a little of that marvelous pull that Jesus had as he walked along the road day after day "God-intoxicated" and radiant with the endless communion of his soul with God.

>>> PAGE 12

June 22, 1930 - As simple as opening and closing a swinging door I have just returned from a walk alone, a walk so wonderful that I feel like reducing it to a universal rule, that all people ought to take a walk every evening all alone where they can talk aloud without being heard by anyone, and that during this entire walk they all ought to talk with God, allowing him to use their tongues to talk back - and letting God do most of the talking.

This seems to be the very thing for which I have been feeling all these weeks. You have followed my experiment and have seen many confessions of daily failure, as I tried to keep God in mind in the

second person. Well, today has not been a failure. The thought of God has drifted out occasionally but not for long. But this day has been a different day from any other of my life, for I have not tried to pray in the sense of talking to God but I have let God do the talking with my tongue or in my inner life when my tongue was silent. It has been as simple as opening and closing a swinging door. And without any of the old strain the whole day passed beautifully with God saying wonderful things to me.

July 2, 1930 - The reality all about you is greater than the imperfect symbols of things which you have in words. The newest experiment, and at present the most thrilling, is letting God talk through my own tongue and through my own fingers on the typewriter. I have been letting my tongue talk on Signal Hill behind my house and then have come home and written on the typewriter all I could remember of it. Here is one sample:

"I speak to you, not through your tongue only, but also through everything which you see in nature through the beauty of this sunset, through the little Moro boy who stands beside you without understanding what you are saying, and who wonders what you are looking at in the clouds. If I do not speak to you in words at times, it is because the reality all about you is greater than the imperfect symbols of things which you have in words. It is not necessary for your tongue to speak, nor even for any definite thoughts to light your mind, for I myself am infinitely more important for you than anything I can give you even than the most brilliant thoughts. So when thoughts do come, welcome them, and when they do not flow freely simply rest back and love, and grant me the shared joy of being loved by you. For I, too, by my very nature, am hungry with an insatiable hunger for the love of all of you, just as your love reaches out at your highest moments to all the people about you. So child, I, even I, God, whom people have foolishly feared and flattered for my gifts, I want love and friendship more than I want groveling subjects. So while we love each other, child, my share is as keen as yours."

>>> PAGE 13

Chapter 7 ONLY KEEPING READY SPIRITUALLY

I have written in this letter what my tongue said as I let it speak, not because I wish to recommend any of the above as prophetic, but simply because I think it may prove helpful to those who have been dissatisfied with their own contact with God and who may find this a helpful practice in making contacts with God. Day after day I find this very helpful in little intimate personal ways, which would have no value for others.

I am well aware of the probability of criticism because it is "mysticism" - as though any man could be a believer in Jesus without believing in "mysticism"! - or because many people think that the days of direct contact with God, or at least words from God, stopped with the closing of the New Testament. But then what a stupid world this would be if one never did anything different for fear of criticism!

July 9, 1930 - This is what all life can have if you are willing. Never did I so feel the need of a silent typewriter as at this moment, for every stroke clashes with the marvelous silence of the hills tonight. I am still under the spell of that hush and of that sunset. In all my life I have never seen a sight so beautiful as Lanao tonight. I suppose there have been equally beautiful scenes since the world was created, but not more beautiful for me. For it adequately reflected the passion of love which I feel toward the Lanao people as I look and pray from the hill.

And as I talked and tasted the sweetness of the luscious light, and told God that this was for me the masterpiece of his creation, he told me through my own voice:

"Ah, child, this is but the symbol of beauties, and wonders which I mean to give you when you are willing and ready. I must give them, I will give them, if only you will climb your spiritual hill and open your soul, eyes and look. This is what all life can have if you are willing. I

ache with longings which poor little people cannot even suspect, to open up wider and ever wider universes of glory to you all."

If asked my chief difficulty in meeting these Moros, I should have to reply, "No chief difficulty excepting to keep ready spiritually." And I wonder whether here is not the only serious difficulty anywhere. This year I am readier than I have ever been before, and perhaps this is why people seem readier also.

August 21, 1930 - "Important duties" which keep us from helping little people are not duties but sins I shall be forty-six in two weeks. I no longer have the sense that life is all before me, as I had a few years ago. Some of it is behind - and a miserable poor past it is, so far below what I had dreamed 'that I dare not even think of it. Nor dare I think much of the future. This present, if it is full of God, is the only refuge I have from poisonous disappointment and even almost rebellion against God.

Here I was engaging in the most glorious action of all human and of all superhuman life - I was communing with the very God of the universe himself. He was showing me his very heart, even the angels can do no more than this. I forgot that my being choked down against the bottom, of an ocean like an octopus, and like an octopus in disposition, too, makes no difference at all. A prison or a dungeon makes no difference if one is with God. We preach and profess that as true, and it is true, but upon my word I do not see many people who seem to have experienced it. I am exactly like these Moro women and children. "Bapa," they say, "may I have this?" If I say "Yes," they forget to take it, but if I say "No;" they beg me for it.

>>> PAGE 14

Chapter 8 HIGH DAYS: HIS PRESENCE

September 2, 1930. - The Beauty of Immense Need -

Tip and I and God were together tonight on Signal Hill. Oh God, let me put on paper the glory that was there. The sunset was not more beautiful than at other times, but God said more in it. I suppose it was because I was trying to make this first day of my forty-sixth year high. And that I suppose is why all of us have some high days and some low ones. God is always awaiting the chance to give us high days. We so seldom are in deep earnest about giving Him His chance.

But the effort to say this colossal thing throws me into despair. It cannot be said, can it even be hinted at? There were black clouds which swiftly turned crimson and pale yellow. Now those black clouds are shooting out their fiery tongues through the darkness. Far off in the middle of the lake a long perfect waterspout stood like a colossal pillar from the clouds to the splashing water. It was the first perfect waterspout that I have seen from sea to sky. Above my head those black, angry clouds turned into glorious gold, from the hidden sun. But it was not this that made the evening wonderful. God was speaking.

I patted Tip's head as he nestled up under my arm, and told him: "We are two tiny insects in the midst of this terrifying universe. I know a little more than you do, you nice, black dog, but not much more. Compared with that gigantic being who wheels these awful spheres of fire through the sky I am as near nothing as you are. I know as little about God as you know about me, perhaps ten thousand times less. And perhaps you are wiser than I, for you are contented to be patted on the head and to hunt for fleas, while I am impatient to break loose into the universe. I thought, Tip, when I was younger, that Kant was wrong when he said the three greatest moral demands are God, freedom, and immortality, but now I believe he was incredibly right. My soul at forty-six demands immortality as much as it demands God. And it demands freedom from this prison we call the world and the flesh as much as it demands immortality."

Then out of the skies there came a silent voice, "Your black clouds give the sun its chance. It is surprise, it is escape from darkness to light that makes life so rich. Your prison is also your paint box from which all the beauty you know is pouring. Lanao, where you now sit, is one of the most beautiful creations in all the reaches of space. And here you have the privilege of opening eyes to see beauty, which otherwise would not see. It is selfish of you to desire to escape, until you can take humanity with you.

>>> PAGE 15

You are not Christ-like until you demand that even after you die, your soul shall stay and help others come through to the larger life. I almost fear that my nightly visions, much as I love to give them to you, are making you more selfish, more hungry to get, less eager to give. The most beautiful thing in the universe for you is Lanao stretching around this lake at your feet, for it contains the beauty of immense need. You must awaken hunger there, for until they hunger they cannot be fed. "Oh, tonight I so hunger to be able to tell what else happened. But that other thing was all emotion, a painfully sweet stretching forth of arms skyward to receive and toward Lanao to give."

September 21, 1930 - Symbolizing the truth -

Our search for God through narrow straits has brought a sudden revelation, like an explorer who has just come out upon a limitless sea. It is not any particularly new idea but a new feeling, which came almost of itself. Today God seems to me to be just behind everything. I feel Him there. He is just under my hand, just under the typewriter, just behind this desk, just inside the file, just inside the camera. One of these Moro fairy tales has the fairies standing behind every rock looking at the hero. That is how I feel about God today. Of course this is only a way of symbolizing the truth that God is invisible and that he is everywhere. I cannot imagine seeing the invisible, but I can imagine God hiding himself behind everything in sight. For a lonesome man there is something infinitely homey and

comforting in feeling God so close, so everywhere! Nowhere one turns is away from friendship, for God is smiling there.

It is difficult to convey to another the joy of having broken into the new sea of realizing God's "here-ness." This morning our theme was "Jesus' view of prayer." It seemed so wonderfully true that just the privilege of fellowship with God is infinitely more than any thing that God could give. When he gives himself he is giving more than anything else in the universe.

September 22, 1930 - There is no defeat unless one loses God - We have got to saturate ourselves with the rainbows and the sunset marvels in order to radiate them. It is as much our duty to live in the beauty of the presence of God on some mount of transfiguration until we become white with Christ as it is for us to go down where they grope, and grovel, and groan, and lift them to new life. After all the deepest truth is that the Christ-like life is glorious, undefeatably glorious. There is no defeat unless one loses God, and then all is defeat though it be housed in castles and buried in fortunes.

>>> PAGE 16

Chapter 9 GOD INTOXICATED

October 7, 1930 - Joy in endless giving -

It is that spirit of greed which Jesus said God hated more than any other. It is so diametrically opposite to the spirit of God. For God forever lavishes his gifts upon the good and bad alike, and finds all his joy in endless giving. You see, I feel deeply about us all. Beside Jesus the whole lot us are so contemptible. I do not see how God stomachs us at all. But God is like Jesus, and like Jesus, He will not give up until we, too, are like Jesus.

October 12, 1930 - Worries have faded away -

How I wish, wish, wish that a dozen or more persons who are trying the experiment of holding God endlessly in mind would all write

their experiences so that each would know what as finding as a result! The results, I think, would astound the world. At least the results of my own effort are astounding to me.

Worries have faded away like ugly clouds and my soul rests in the sunshine of perpetual peace. I can lie down anywhere in this universe bathed around by my own Father's Spirit. The very universe has come to seem so homey! I know only a little more about it than before, but that little is all! It is vibrant with the electric ecstasy of God! I know what it means to be "God-intoxicated."

How fine of these Moro boys to come and lean on one's knee, or run their fingers through one's hair - or rub the bald spots and ask why they are so! They know that we love them, but they do not realize what a gulf - at least historically - separates us. If they did, would they be so affectionate? If they knew all, if they knew the love of God in all its wondrous fervor they would!

And to think that less than a year ago we were writing about "the most difficult place under the American flag, if not in the world!" No, New York City is the most difficult place in the world, for in New York they demand ability, unusual ability, while here in Lanao, they demand only love - unusual love. And the love of God may be had for the receiving.

>>> PAGE 17

Chapter 10

PASSION REDIRECTED

October 15, 1930 - The pathway of true intuition -
Has God ever struck you as the great stirrer up? One thing He seems to have determined is that we shall not fall asleep. We make or discover paradises for ourselves, and these paradises begin to lull us into sleepy satisfaction. Then God comes with his awakening hand, takes us by the shoulders and gives us a thorough awakening.

And God knows we need it. If our destiny is to grow on and on and on, into some far more beautiful creatures than we are now, with more of the ideals of Christ, that means that we need to have the shells broken quite frequently so that we can grow.

My confidence that this earth is but a brief school grows into certainty as my fellowship with God grows more tender. As a discipline this world is admirable.

Jesus and Buddha had almost the same message about this life. Buddha said, "Abolish all desire." Jesus said, "Fix not your desires upon this earth, but lay up all the desires you can for a fuller life, which begins within you now, and is endless." Many people seek other escapes. Some in prodigious work, some in reckless play, some in drugs, some in insanity - for insanity is but an escape from pitiless, crushing failure. But I wish to tell all the world that needs a better way, that God on Signal Hill satisfies, and sends through me a glow of glory which makes me sure that this is the pathway of true intuition.

December 6, 1930 - The beauty of sacrifice is the final word in beauty -

Sometimes one feels that there is a discord between the cross and beauty. But there really cannot be, for God is found best through those two doorways. This grey-blue rolling water tinged with whitecaps, hemmed with distant green hills and crowned with colored clouds and baby-blue sky reveals God's love of beauty - and God is so lavish with his paintbrush in the tropics. He is lavish everywhere if one only has eyes to see Him at work.

But when one comes to personality, one demands more than a pretty face or even a soul that sings for joy. There is in the universe a higher kind of beauty. It is the beauty of sacrifice, of giving up for others, of suffering for others. A woman has not reached her highest beauty until she lay down her ease and chooses pain for bearing and nursing her child. A man has not found his highest beauty until his brow is

tinged with care for some cause he loves more than himself. The beauty of sacrifice is the final word in beauty.

>>> PAGE 18

February 6, 1931 - The only doorway to the very heart of God -
Tonight, lonesome and half ill with a cold, I am learning from experience that there is a deep peace that grows out of illness and loneliness and a sense of failure. These things do drive me up my hill to God, and then there comes into my soul through the very tears a comfort which is so much better than laughter. It is "the peace of God that passes all understanding" unless one has it. God cannot get close when everything is delightful. He seems to need these darker hours, these empty-hearted-hours to mean the most to people. You and I have known that over the coffin. We have known it when we parted and our hearts were sore. We have known it when we lay in bed helpless. Is this a deep truth in the very heart of nature? We sing, "Nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee!
Even though it be a cross that lifteth me."

Is the cross the only doorway to the very heart of God?

February 10, 1931- We are what we are now
If there is any contribution that I have to make to the world that will live, surely it must be my experience of God on Signal Hill. This afternoon I climbed my way to the top weighted with a sense of remorse. Everything wrong that I have done in twenty years came back and made me feel like a dreadful sinner. I told God about it, but do not intend to write any confessions here. We are so eager to judge people by their past, and it is not fair. We are what we are now, not an hour ago, and what we are planning, not what we are vainly trying to forget.

As I stood on the top very much inclined to let the tears break out of my eyes, my tongue stopped talking to God and began talking from God to me. "Ah, little child, I have hurt you tonight, and now I feel

sorry with you. All you have confessed is true, but I love you still. I love you for coming here and telling me about it. I love you for hungering after me. I love you for being willing to be better. That is all I ask of people. Ah, I have wanted to do so much for you as soon as you would allow it. Now, with a sore and lonesome heart you are ready. And after this torture I must pull you close to my heart, tiny little one."

>>> PAGE 19

Chapter 11 RECONCILING NEEDED PAIN

And into my heart there stole another new love for God I never knew so strongly before. I felt like saying:
"God, I do not know You, nor this universe, nor even my self. Everything becomes more mysterious the longer I think about it. But I thank Thee that Jesus showed us that Thou art burning, yearning, eager to do more for us than Thou canst. Thou art like those plowmen who must break the soil and tear it apart before seeds will grow. Thou hast plowed my heart tonight until it is tender and ready for something to grow. I thank Thee, God, I thank Thee, because I could not have felt thine healing hand if the pain had not been so acute.

"God, how can we reconcile this need of pain with our effort to abolish all misery?"

The answer seemed convincing to me:

"If you abolish the physical suffering of the world, there will still be disappointed love, yearnings which cannot be satisfied, which will leave hearts bleeding even as they do today. Mansions have as many burning hearts as do poor houses. The things which drag men down to grossness and incessant selfishness must be wiped out. Then hearts will become sore over infinitely larger things than selfish needs. They will learn to bleed for a world with the heart of Jesus."

There will be more suffering than today, for only love knows how to suffer divinely. But the meanness of suffering for one's own selfish disappointments will be gone, and we will see a magnificence and sublimity in suffering that will make us glad.

February 25, 1931- Why do we not always hear Thy voice?

As I lay on the warm earth on Signal Hill last night I asked God the question: "Why is it that Thou dost allow us on this earth to do nearly all the talking? Why do we not always hear Thy voice, since Thou art so much wiser than we are?" Instantly back came the answer. I could see it, from beginning to end, in a second, though it may require more than a minute to write it down. So many of these thoughts from God are hurled at me in an instant like that:

"When you are teaching the Moros to read, your art is to say as little as you can and leave them to say as much as they will. That is why I leave you to do and say as much as you can, while I say little. You learn by doing, even when you make mistakes and correct them. You are to be sons and daughters of God, and now you are taking the first feeble steps of infants. Every step you take alone is infinitely more important than you now imagine, because the thing I am preparing you for exceeds all your imagination. So the talking you do to me is essential. The talking others do to you, when they are trying to talk up to your expectations is more important than the talks you give to them. This is the best way to act: Talk a great deal to me. Let others talk a great deal to you, appreciating everything fine they say and neglecting their mistakes."

>>> PAGE 20

March 3, 1931 - How much of this glory can one carry into business? Oh, if we only let God have his full chance he will break our hearts with the glory of his revelation. That is the privilege which the preacher can have above others. It is his business to look into the very face of God until he aches with bliss. And that is how I feel this morning after two hours of wonderful thinking with God. And now on this "mount of transfiguration" I do not want ever to leave.

Choosing Christ brings mystery, rejecting Him brings despair.

I choose to look at people through God, using God as my glasses, colored with his love for them. Last year, as you know, I decided to try to keep God in mind all the time. That was rather easy for a lonesome man in a strange land. It has always been easier for the shepherds, and the monks, and anchorites than for people surrounded by crowds.

But today it is an altogether different thing. I am no longer lonesome. The hours of the day from dawn to bedtime are spent in the presence of others. Either this new situation will crowd God out or I must take him into it all. I must learn a continuous silent conversation of heart to heart with God while looking into other eyes and listening to other voices. If I decide to do this it is far more difficult than the thing I was doing before. Yet if this experiment is to have any value for busy people it must be worked under exactly these conditions of high pressure and throngs of people.

There is only one way to do it. God must share my thoughts of Moro grammar, and Moro epics, and type, and teaching people to read, and talking over the latest excitement with my family as we read the newspapers. So I am resolved to let nothing, nothing, stop me from this effort save sheer fatigue that stops all thought. One need not tell God everything about the people for whom one prays. Holding them one by one steadily before the mind and willing that God may have his will with them is the best, for God knows better than we what our friends need, yet our prayer releases his power, we know not how. I propose to make a strenuous effort of the will to concentrate upon each person I meet alone and to send him my thought of God. I propose to think as hard of the will of God as I can when in crowds. Thus I hope to prove by experimentation what this will accomplish toward making a better world.

This afternoon has brought a wonderful experience, all inside my own mind. I closed my eyes to pray and the faces of those before me, then those in the houses near by, then those down the line, and across the river, and down the highway to the next town, and the next, and the next, then in concentric circles around the lake, and over the mountains to the coast, then across the sea to the north, then over the wide ocean to California, then across America to the people whom I know, then over to Europe to the people whom I have met there, then to the Near East where my missionary friends live, then to India where I have other friends, to others in China, and to the multitudes who are suffering the dreadful pangs of cold and starvation - around the world in less than a minute, and for a time the whole of my soul seemed to be lit up with a divine light as it held the world up to God!

>>> PAGE 21

Chapter 12

AT ARMS LENGTH WITH GOD

I cannot get God by holding him off at arm's length like a photograph, but by leaning forward intently as one would respond to one's lover. Love so insatiable as the love of God can never be satisfied until we respond to the limit. Nor will He be satisfied until His aching arms receive my neighbors, too, and all the surging multitudes of the world, all of us together responding to Him and to one another.

September 28, 1931 - A gentle pressure of the Will -

When one has struck some wonderful blessing that all mankind has a right to know about, no custom or false modesty should prevent him from telling it, even though it may mean the unbarring of his soul to the public gaze.

I have found such a way of life. I ask nobody else to live it, or even to try it. I only witness that it is wonderful, it is indeed heaven on earth. And it is very simple, so simple that any child could practice it: Just to

pray inwardly for everybody one meets, and to keep on all day without stopping, even when doing other work of every kind.

This simple practice requires only a gentle pressure of the will, not more than a person can exert easily. It grows easier as the habit becomes fixed. Yet it transforms life into heaven. Everybody takes on a new richness, and all the world seems tinted with glory. I do not of course know what others think of me, but the joy which I have within cannot be described. If there never were any other reward than that, it would more than justify the practice to me.

Today I have noticed that when I forget other people I become fatigued rather quickly. When I am reminded of my, purpose and start again holding people, seen and unseen, before God, a new exhilaration comes to me, and all the fatigue vanishes.

October 11, 1931 - Deepening Discovery -

Knowing God better and better is an achievement of friendship.

"When two persons fall in love there may be such a strong feeling of fellowship, such a delight in the friend's presence, that one may lose oneself in the deepening discovery of another person." The self and the person loved become equally real.

There are, therefore, three questions which we may ask, "Do you believe in God?" That is not getting very far. "The devils believe and tremble. Second, "Are you acquainted with God?" We are acquainted with people with whom we have had some business dealings. Third, "Is God your friend?" or putting this another way, "Do you love God?"

>>> PAGE 22

It is this third stage that is really vital. How is it to be achieved? Precisely as any friendship is achieved by doing things together. The depth and intensity of the friendship will depend upon variety and extent of the things we do and enjoy together. Will the friendship be

constant? That again depends upon the permanence of our common interests, and upon whether or not our interests grow into ever widening circles, so that we do not stagnate. The highest friendship demands growth. "It must be progressive as life itself is progressive." Friends must walk together; they cannot long stand still together, for that means death to friendship and to life. Friendship with God is the friendship of child with parent. As an ideal son grows daily into closer relationship with his father, so we may grow into closer love with God by widening into his interests, and thinking his thoughts and sharing his enterprises.

Far more than any other device of God to create love was the cross where the most loving person the world has known hangs loving through all his pain. That cross has become the symbol of religion and of love for a third of the world because it touches the deepest depths of human love. All I have said is mere words, until one sets out helping God right wrongs, helping God help the helpless, loving and talking it over with God. Then there comes a great sense of the close up, warm intimate heart of reality. God simply creeps in and you know he is here in your heart. He has become your friend by working along with you.

So if anybody were to ask me how to find God I should say at once, hunt out the deepest need you can find and forget all about your own comfort while you try to meet that need. Talk to God about it, and - he will be there. You will know it.

January 2, 1932 - Learn to hold God by the hand and rest. In school a teacher lays out work for his pupils. I resolve to accept each situation of this year as God's layout for that hour, and never to lament that it is a very commonplace or disappointing task. One can pour something divine into every situation.

One of the mental characteristics against which I have rebelled most is the frequency of my "blank spells" when I cannot think of anything worth writing, and sometimes cannot remember names. Henceforth I

resolve to regard these as God's signal that I am to stop and listen. Sometimes you want to talk to your son, and sometimes you want to hold him tight in silence. God is that way with us, he wants to hold still with us in silence:

Here is something we can share with all of the people in the world: They cannot all be brilliant or rich or beautiful. They cannot all even dream beautiful dreams like God gives some of us. They cannot all enjoy music. Their hearts do not all burn with love: But everybody can learn to hold God by the hand and rest. And when God is ready to speak the fresh thoughts of heaven will flow in like a crystal spring. Everybody rests at the end of the day, what a world gain if everybody, could rest in the waiting arms of the Father, and listen until he whispers.

* * * end of "Practicing His Presence," Frank Laubach portion * * *

Epilogue

Final reflection by Frank Laubach:

Below me lay the rice fields and as I looked across them I heard my tongue saying aloud, "Child, just as the rice needs the sunshine every day, and could not grow if it had sun only once a week or one, hour a day, so you need me all day of every day. People over all the world are withering because they are open toward God only rarely. Every waking minute is not too much:"

A few months ago I was trying to write a chapter on the "Discovering of God." Now that I have discovered Him I find that it is a continuous discovery. Every day is rich with new aspects of Him and His working. As one makes new discoveries about his friends by being with them, so one discovers the "individuality" of God if one entertains Him continuously.

One thing I have seen is that God loves beauty. Everything He makes is lovely. The clouds, the tumbling river, the waving lake, the soaring eagle, the slender blade of grass, the whispering of the wind, the fluttering butterfly, this graceful transparent nameless child of the lake which clings to my window for an hour and vanishes for ever. Beautiful craft of God! And I know that He makes my thought-life beautiful when I am open all the day to Him. If I throw these mind-windows open and say "God, what shall we think of now?" He answers always in some graceful, tender dream.

And I know that God is love hungry, for He is constantly pointing me to some dull, dead soul which He has never reached and wistfully urges me to help Him reach that stolid, tight shut mind. Oh God, how I long to help you with these Moros. And with these Americans! And with these Filipinos! All day I see souls dead to God look sadly out of hungry eyes. I want them to know my discovery! That any minute can be paradise, that any place can be heaven! That any man can have God! That every man does have God the moment he speaks to God, or listens for Him!