

Thomas L. Jackson, Ph.D.

ME & US

*Your Journey of Self-Discovery
and Re-Creation*

A Guide/Workbook for knowing
where you've come from,
where you're heading,
what you want to be,
and with whom you want to live

From the author of
—*In Any Given Moment*—
—*Go Back, You Didn't Say May I*—
—*Moments of Clarity (Volumes I-III)*—
and
Life's Secrets

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Books by the Author

Go Back, You Didn't Say May I: Thirtieth Anniversary Edition

Moments of Clarity

Moments of Clarity, Volume II

Moments of Clarity, Volume III

In Any Given Moment

Me & Us

Life's Secrets

Life's Secrets, Part II

STOP! Before You Kiss That Frog.... [humor]

DEDICATION

This pilgrimage is dedicated
with utmost thanks and deep affection to
all of my teachers...both past and present:
my family and Community members
—adults *and* children—
who continue to be in my mind, heart, and soul;
to “clients” and Companions
who have continually reminded me,
in the risk of encounter,
that I am forever a “client” and Companion, too;
to my fellow-pilgrims along this labyrinthine journey who
—through these many years in many places—
have offered me abundant patience, radical love,
needed forgiveness, breathtaking kindness;
and, presently,
to *you*, the new pilgrim,
who prepares to tread this path
to the possibility of meeting your wondrous self
and your beckoning community....

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*What we call the beginning is often the end
and to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from...*

*We shall not cease from exploration
and the end of all our exploring
will be to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first time.*

*Quick now, here, now, always—
a condition of complete simplicity
(costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well
and all manner of things shall be well.*

T. S. Eliot

*If you want to identify me,
ask not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb
my hair,
but ask me what I am living for,
in detail,
and ask me
what I think is keeping me from living fully
for the thing I want to live for.*

Thomas Merton

[EXCERPTS FOLLOW]

SECTION ONE.
ME

CHAPTER 1: HELLO!

In its ancient, original meaning and sense, to say hello is to “hail” someone, to acknowledge their existence, their presence in your life, their relationship to you—whether casual or intimate or somewhere in between. But, perhaps more importantly, it is meant to be a *beckoning* to that “other” person—a tacit declaration that you want the relationship to continue and, if possible, to grow.

And so I offer an open and enthusiastic hello!

I beckon you to a wondrous journey—a pilgrimage—into an exploration of *you* and of the specific world you inhabit: your *history*, your *people*, your *struggles* and *joys*, your everyday and intimate *relationships*, your future *hopes*.

That beckoning, of course, includes *our* relationship; perhaps you will trust me enough—from this initial hello—to allow me to accompany you on the journey...to share guideposts, stories, questions, personal observations, perceptions of other pilgrims, perceptions, and, I hope, encouragement to journey on.

This beckoning, from me to you, is based on a personal conclusion: over a period of 35 years working in various areas of counseling and therapy, I have realized that it is possible for individuals—and couples—to promote a substantial part of their own continuing growth and discovery by using some “guideposts” that other people might provide.

Let me be more specific about some of the continuing experiences I have had that led me to this conclusion.

I get calls from individuals and couples who feel that they want or need to proceed with the possibility of working on some issues in their lives, but we discover that they live at an inconvenient distance...or they’re “not sure” they want to spend the time and energy that it might demand...or they can’t seem to get an appointment with the counselor I referred them to in their own town...or any of a large number of other reasons which deny the very *beginning* of the pilgrimage. Over the years, each time that has happened, I am left with a feeling of frustration and sadness...for them and for me. From the results (evident herein in the “Dear Tom” writings) of the “assignments” I have given pilgrims over the years—to read, reflect, feel, and write—I began to realize, then, that a Guide/Workbook could allow people to begin and proceed on their own basis...and I believe the results have proven that committed individuals are *certainly* capable of insight and resolve and fulfillment.

People who are in the process of “therapy” will tell me that they never knew that they had *choices* in their lives, partly because they had not taken the time, effort, and risk to slow down and observe their choices; and that always reminds me of the thousands (millions?) of people who want to do the same thing, but, for whatever reasons, have not done so. A Guide/Workbook, I believe, can provide the impetus and the structure to do so.

I believe that we *do* have the power to observe, alter, adapt and change most any behavior, attitude or learning we now have...and that belief is wonderfully encouraging to me in my own life and in the lives of those with whom I live and work. You will, of course, have to make that decision for yourself. As I have told many people, if I don’t

believe that we have the power to adapt and change, then I must assume that we're serving a life-sentence with no benefit of "parole"—*and* we must be lower on the evolutionary scale than the common household pet (because I see animals change their behaviors all the time!). Well, I refuse to believe either of those absurd assumptions about myself or you...and this Guide/Workbook, I hope, may offer direction in observing and possibly changing or adapting whatever we wish.

I have often heard folks say to me: "You mean you and other people have these feelings, *too!*" I think that there is a sense of connection—of life-giving community—in realizing that our uniqueness does not negate our common and *mutual* thoughts, feelings, fantasies, hopes, and dreams. I believe that this pilgrimage offers ways and means of connecting to our community.

There is an ancient Hebrew expression: "Every child born into this world has a message to deliver." I think that we can celebrate both our uniqueness and community by determining, through this type of process, what our own specific message is...and whether or not we are delivering it.

A pilgrim once said to me: "I guess it's time I quit using my 'potential' as an excuse for not doing what I want with my life." Our "potential" might just be what we haven't allowed ourselves to know about ourselves. This journey, I believe, provides ways to seek out our selves...and perhaps offer a *wonderful* hello to the fullness within us and around us.

Years ago, as I was on my way to be with my father for the last time before his death, I noticed a large poster on a wall; it said: "There Is Too Much Silence Beyond The Grave." That not-so-subtle message provided me with a reminder which I carry with me to this day: that, regardless of what lies "beyond the grave," I need to be involved deeply in my present life, whether I want to be or not. Whether you know it or not, the same is true for you.

Each of us—you and I—could list *many* more reasons to proceed with the process of determining our own growth and knowledge and behaviors, but we know, too, that there is really only one reason: we are alive on the face of the earth. Either we come to terms with the excitement and possibilities of that, or we simply continue to count the hours and days, in isolation and resignation, of our own life-sentence without benefit of parole.

Without, perhaps, knowing you personally, I already know that you are an amazing, complex creature. When I say that to people, I often get a response of disbelief, something like "Oh, come on, you're just saying that...." But I continue to say that with absolute conviction.

How can I know that? Because I know that you have, within you, a *complete* set of emotions, whether or not you normally choose to express them; I know that, if you are functioning in today's world, you have a mind which is comparable to thousands of these computers we are using; I know that your mind has perceived, received, and stored hundreds of thousands of images, impressions, facts, and experiences; I know that you can control your physical responses by the use of your incredible mind (example: if you sometimes "shiver" as most of us do, you have proven that your mind can cause millions of skin pores to open and close on a moment's notice!); and I know, if you have read even this far in these introductory comments, that you are someone who is inquisitive about the possibilities of developing a more complete and satisfying life.

Those are only a few of the reasons why I already know that you *are* an amazing creature. Do *not* forget that.

And so, the choice to continue is clearly *yours*, and as I offer this hello—this beckoning—it’s time to look at your possible “mode of travel” on this exciting journey.

CHAPTER 2: OPTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

As I stated in my hello, this Guide/Workbook is a distillation of much of my own experience with individuals and couples, as each sought to find out more about themselves, their behaviors, and their possibilities.

I have called forth my own thoughts and feelings; my own notes about myself; the thoughts and feelings of various fellow-pilgrims with whom I have journeyed over the years (in both their verbal and written communications); and the perspectives of other therapists and writers and philosophers and advisers, from this present era and throughout history.

What you have before you, then, is not so much a book-to-be-read as it is a potential map of your *own* pilgrimage from your past to your present...and, hence, to your future. The pilgrimage is divided into two main sections: “ME” and “US.” The “ME” section will be devoted to *you*...and, if you choose so, the “US” section will allow you to be in intimate dialogue and presence with other people, especially the individual whom you have chosen (or might choose in the future) to *consistently* share your life.

This is meant to be an *active, experiential* process (as all true journeys are); in other words, you are being called upon to directly *participate* in the process of learning about your self. Consequently, it is my intent to directly beckon you to “insert” yourself—your thoughts, your feelings, your tentative or firm conclusions, your fears, and your resolve—into the scenario of your own life.

You must decide, then—at each step of the journey—whether or not you *want* to do that: to involve yourself in exploration, in self-discovery. And from this very page, you will make that decision for yourself as you are beckoned each successive page...or not.

Your options—your decisions about involvement in your *own life* in this process—appear to me to be among the following:

- to simply read through this book...and that may be what you’re seeking at this point in your life—some basic ideas and feedback for your continuing journey;
- to pause as you read, to reflect on what others have discovered and said about their own journeys, to briefly consider questions that are asked of you;
- to do some *hard work*, by involving yourself as completely and intently as you can in the process of *reading, reflecting, and writing* about your self, your history, your struggles, your epiphanies, your behaviors, your hopes, your

possibilities.

Whichever choice you make is, obviously, none of my business; yet my hope is that you'll opt for the last one, as I believe that there's a part of you that *knows* that you're worth the effort.

If you embark upon this journey—following whichever option you choose—you will be asked to keep an open mind, to set aside (not discard, unless you choose so) many of the previous learnings, prejudices, behaviors, and attitudes which have been a part of your life until now. You will be asked to consider viewpoints and thoughts which may seem “foreign” or “unusual” to you...but you will *never* be asked to accept anything within this process unless you *yourself* decide that it might enhance your way of living.

In the continuing beckoning to your self, you will be called upon to ask yourself some very direct and penetrating questions...and to work *hard* at determining your *own* responses. As with all of us, it could be easy for you to “slide over” many of those questions and issues; however, it will be *work* to give yourself the real benefit of answering each with *attention* and *honesty* and *courage*. Again, you will decide that: *you* will decide if you are worth the time and energy.

I hope that you will allow me to encourage you as you continue....

CHAPTER 3: HINTS

Some *hints* about the first steps on our journey are likely found in some of the words I have already used:

- “Journey” [from Old French *journee*, suggesting travel over or through].
- “Pilgrim” [from Latin *peregrines*, foreign; *per* (through) + *ager* (land)].
- “Pilgrimage” [14th century: 1) a journey of a pilgrim; especially one to a sacred place; 2) the course of life on earth].
- “Explore” [from Latin *explorare*, to cry out; 1) to investigate, look into, to become familiar with; 2) to travel over (new territory) for adventure or discovery.

How is it that our lives can seem as a journey “through a foreign land”?

How is it that we can forget, in the vagaries of living, that we are, indeed, seeking a sacred place...a sacred understanding of our soul, our history, our hopes, our dreams, our relationships...a place that is *made* sacred by our crying out for familiarity with our own unique being?

How is it that our “post-modern” world seduces us away from a healthy contemplation, investigation, reflection, and action for our *own* “course of life on earth”? The resolution of these critical questions, it seems to me, is where we are headed.

In these first steps, too, please allow me to offer some preliminary suggestions which could provide you with a more fulfilling experience of your self:

- If you have never read *The Road Less Traveled* by M. Scott Peck, M.D., it would likely be tremendously helpful to your pilgrimage to obtain it and read it *before*

proceeding with this Guide/Workbook; if you decide not to do that at this point, certainly put it at the top of your “next book” list.

- Do yourself a *huge favor* by taking a look at the “Relaxation” addendum toward the end of this book; it might just allow you to find continuing tools for taking care of yourself during—and beyond—this present pilgrimage.
- Throughout the journey—and especially in the **THINK/FEEL/WRITE** inserts, *write as much as you can* about your journey. If uncertain, write; if confused, write; if excited, write; if “stuck,” write; if fearful, write; if joyful, write. As a pilgrim wrote to me: “After thinking about why I don’t want to fill up ‘Dear Tom letters’ and counseling sessions with everyday trivia, I decided there is a need to put everything down in writing. Now, this idea is amazing. I have gone from not even being able to write a letter to a friend...to filling up pages and pages on things I need to say. I don’t care if no one else sees them—and really prefer that because it allows me to say absolutely anything I want to...to me! That’s right: *to me.*” It’s important for you now—and it will be important to you as you look back on this present process—to have your thoughts and feelings and responses in a written form. *For yourself.* So it doesn’t have to be perfect—it doesn’t have to win the Nobel Prize for literature—it simply needs to be *you*. Don’t try to edit and change. Go with your first thoughts and feelings. You can always revise them later if you want to. All great explorers kept records and maps of where they had been, where they were, and where they were headed. And they found rewards in that process. Keep your own records, chart your own map! You will be immensely glad that you did.
- Some questions may seem repetitious as you make your way along your path—but please trust that they aren’t—they simply represent many layers of your self and your extensive world.
- Keep an open mind throughout the journey.
- Expect the unexpected.
- Accept, from the very outset, your own sense of power and uniqueness.
- Observe, throughout, your connection with other travelers.
- Keep a dictionary nearby, so that you may always look again at the original meanings of all those words we use everyday.
- Make yourself available to your self.
- If something is not clear to you, allow the time to “sit with it” until you make it part of yourself.
- Remember that “laziness” and/or “discouragement” are, often, simply ways to diminish your self.
- Maintain confidence that you *are* worth the effort involved.
- Encourage your self.
- There is no schedule for this process, except your own individual pace; *if you rush, you will miss many things that are important to you.*
- Again, *pace* yourself; do not get overtired by trying to write too much in any given sitting.
- You have your own story to tell; do not “edit” it to meet someone *else’s* expectations.

- Do not to hide from your self.
- Perhaps keep in mind that wonderful old line: “If you’re not scared, then it isn’t brave”...so if you encounter something in the readings or the questions that “discomforts” you, remind yourself that such reactions are usually based in a *fear* (usually a fear that was taught to you)...and simply be brave to your self by setting the fear aside for a while; on the other hand, if the fear seems to immobilize you on the journey—or cannot be set aside for adequate functioning—then certainly see the note below regarding professional help.
- Nurture and support your self *each day*, knowing that you are giving your self a great and wonderful gift!
- If your spouse/partner is also embarking on their own journey, remember that each of you must do your *own* work separately...though you may “connect” in the “US” section later, if you wish.
- Although you may certainly write within these pages (in fact, I would encourage you to mark words or thoughts that ignite strong emotions within you!), it would enhance your work and your journey to have a separate, private notebook...one that you will likely wish to keep for the rest of your life—the remainder of your journey—so that you may look back in reflection, continuing growth, and delight.
- If there is someone you especially trust—whose viewpoint and response you especially value—you might want to ask them to read your writings—either to “feed back” to you or, perhaps, to simply “receive” your writings, with *no* comments.
- If you determine at some point that your journey would be enhanced or feel safer in the presence of a professional therapist or an experienced pastoral counselor, there may be several available to you in your own community.
- If you find that you would like to read more about or by any of the many authors quoted herein, be sure to consult the “Resources” section toward the end of this book.
- And, certainly, feel free to read the “About the Author” notes at the end of this book, so that you might ascertain whether you wish to allow me on this journey with you!

Now, proceed in peace...be strong and have courage...be gentle with yourself and others...the journey of your self will give you life!

About the author

Thomas L. Jackson, M.Div, Ph.D., has been the Abbot of The Order of Christian Workers since 1990, and founded the “mother-house” of the Order—St. Dismas House—in 1993 in Tyler, Texas. A graduate of Culver Military Academy (Indiana), Washington University (St. Louis), the Protestant Episcopal Seminary in Virginia (Alexandria), and the American Institute (California), he has also studied at Ohio University, and completed his clinical training at the University of Michigan Medical Center. He has had the honor of studying with such mentors as Dr. Ian Alger, Dr. M. Scott Peck, Fr. Dan Berrigan, Fr. Richard Rohr, John Lee—as well as thousands of Companions who have offered their wisdom and stories to his life, as both priest and clinical counselor.

Over the past thirty-five years, he has actively worked as a priest in urban, suburban, campus, and specialized ministries; a counselor in private practice, mental health agencies, and diocesan settings; a businessman; a carpenter; a designer; and author.

“Fr. Tom”—as he is known to most of his world—is married to Patricia Jackson, and is the father of Jenny, Peter, and Lisa, as well as the stepfather of Patton; there have been many “foster children” in his life over the past thirty-five years.

For the past many years, he and the St. Dismas Community in Tyler have worked with/lived with people with AIDS, people in recovery, the poor and homeless, as well as immigrants. There are now nine Houses in Tyler, as well as several throughout the United States.

Fr. Tom also convenes “Gatherings” at sites and parishes throughout the United States, in which folks come together for one to three days to share their lives and stories; groups recently have included Congregational, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Unitarian, and Unity gatherings, as well as non-denominational groups; for further information: www.CommunityPilgrimage.org.

Fr. Tom also wrote and designed a six-color poster—*To Follow The Christ*—a thousand of which have already been shipped; information is available at the website: www.OrderOfChristianWorkers.org.

His odyssey in and through his various vocations and avocations has been recorded vividly in at least two books: *Go Back, You Didn't Say May I: The Diary of a Young Priest* and *In Any Given Moment*, both of which reflect the daily actions and the inner pilgrimage of his many callings. Three other books—*Moments of Clarity, Moments of Clarity, Volume II* and *Moments of Clarity, Volume III*—are so-called “commonplace books”: collections of stories and wisdom from throughout the world and history. A work that has been in progress for fifteen years, *Me, You, and Us*—a narrative and a “guide” for those seeking a reflection and consideration of their history, character, beliefs, and possibilities—has recently been published. Fr. Tom is also working on a larger edition of the spiritual book he’s written for use by the Order: *A Book of Prayers, Liturgies, and Learnings*.

Along with his other activities, Fr. Tom will also be traveling between Texas and Indiana, not only maintaining his role as Abbot of the Order in Tyler, but also working as “Chaplain to the Community” at the Culver Academies.