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## **An Open Letter to an Atheist**

Your Father in heaven isn't too concerned about whether you believe he exists.

To meditate on the question of something's existence is a purely academic exercise. It's like asking "if a tree falls in the woods, and there's no one around to hear it, does it still make a sound?" Academically we know that it does make a sound – but what difference does it make and who cares?

Your Father in heaven knows that you can believe that he exists and yet that belief can make no difference in your life - or, worse, it can even make a negative difference in your life. This is what the scripture means when it says "even Satan and the demons believe that God exists" (James 2:19.)

Your Father in heaven doesn't want you to simply believe that he exists, he wants to share with you the fullness of his own life, the way a loving Dad shares his life with his kids. The Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (who we call the "Trinity") are in a dynamic relationship of active and loving embrace. Their life is filled with joy and patience and it is overflowing with committed, faithful love that never sins against others.

Whenever and wherever we experience that kind of life, we are experiencing and participating in the Divine Life of the Trinity.

And that is what your Father in heaven wants for you. Your Father in heaven wants you to experience the joy of this kind of life, the kind of life that he has always had and enjoyed with his Son in their Spirit.

So the secret of your life is that you are not excluded, you are included. In Jesus, God the Son has united humanity to himself, and therefore he has united us all to the kind of life he has with the Father and the Spirit. You are already included in the life the Father wants you to be a part of.

I know that many times in your life you do not feel like you are included in a life of joy, love, and embrace. But if you have experienced that kind of life, even if only once and for only one perfect summer afternoon in July, then you will forever know it when you see it and it will lead you home to the one who is the source of it. It will lead you home to the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, in whose existence you have existence and in whose life you have life.

It may take years for you to come to see that this kind of life is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus is sharing with you, as a blessing from his Father. When you're included in something it is difficult to sit outside of it and study it, trying to decide whether it exists. The dancers in a square dance don't look for proofs of the dance's existence. They dance. Birds don't study the five reasons that air must be real. They fly. A five-year old doesn't wonder if "mommy" is a mere mental construct which once gave him an evolutionary advantage and that he's now outgrown. He runs to her arms.

So I'm not going to tell you to try to prove that your Father in heaven exists and loves you. I'm going to encourage you to get on with the living of life.

Really love people, don't just say you do. Chase after work that inspires you and don't give up. Bathe in the beauty of art, don't just hurry past it. Walk slowly through gardens. Hear music, don't just listen to it. See the world, don't just live in it.

As you do, be aware of who you really are: be honest with yourself about what you really think and how you really feel. Stop lying to yourself and others, and stop pretending that you like things just because it seems cool, or right, or to your advantage to like those things.

To live this way is to live in step with the Holy Spirit, and it is very hard to do – very hard. If you don't know that yet, then you will find it out as you get older. If you are able, even briefly, to see the world with clear eyes and to bathe in beauty, then you will also see the pain. You will see the pain of our failure as human beings, how we always mess things up – even when we're trying to do the right thing.

And eventually you will come to see your own part in the causing of that pain. You will see that you're not that different from others and that we are all in this thing called life together. It may take you all your life to see this. You may not really understand it until you have passed through death and death has stripped away from you everything you ever loved and held dear and left you feeling alone, naked, and in the dark.

When the day comes that you see how we are all in this together, then you will at last see that you have never been alone and you have never been excluded. And you will see that none of us were ever alone or ever excluded. We were always in the dance of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

On that day - whether it is tomorrow or some day after you have died - you will finally see how your Father has thrown his arms around you and you will be able to hear what he has always been saying to you your life whole life long: "You are the child I always wanted, I am so glad I have you with me."

On that day it will be hard to remember all the logical reasons that use to argue against his existence, but it will be easy to remember the times you danced and the days you flew. And you won't wonder anymore whether the Father is real. You'll be too busy enjoying your life with him.

*~ Jonathan Stepp*