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FOREWORD

It was years ago, my life bursting with grief at the sudden loss of my husband and daughter in an automobile accident, that I first met the power of the human heart. Finding the heart's "yes," its willingness not only to go on but to fully meet the great force of love moving through life, was a great challenge. Only decades later would someone use words that underscored that moment: *There are two things of great importance in life: Your intention and the opening of the heart.*

Unfortunately, there are no notes on this in school. To learn about the human heart, we all rely on life experiences and the guides we meet along the way. Eventually some of us begin to investigate for ourselves, allowing the journey to bring many things into question. Whether or not we decide to go deeper, none of us are exempt from the heart's invitation. At times the heart shouts its wisdom, but very often it assists us so quietly that we're at risk of not hearing its voice at all. One thing seems clear: To help the movement of love find its way in this world, we must develop a different and deeper relationship with the heart. We must risk our own

vulnerability and respond to the heart's beckoning. We must learn that whatever takes us to the limits of our strength is there for our own sake.

In these beautiful and spare reflections, Joan invites us to sit at the world's table and decide what our hearts will offer. She wisely reminds the reader that "there is no such thing as an isolated act." We are each responsible for "doing everything we can to make the world whole." Still, it's not necessary to do something heroic. In making a pilgrimage to the heart, we don't initially struggle with world issues and injustices; we wrestle first with the love struggling to break through our own unique circumstances. We notice how easily and reflexively the heart begins to close when we feel threatened in any way. We notice that bringing love when we confront hatred, as St. Francis prays, is not for the faint of heart. But the result of our effort to meet life fully is that we ourselves become the space through which love can move in the world. We only have to do one thing: Let the heart call us back to love.

These pages will help you recognize many characteristics of the heart: *A kind heart. A humble heart. A non-judgmental heart. A celebrating heart. A trusting heart...* They will assure you that the storms of life

are the very place to look for God. They will offer the wisdom that “real peace requires resistance to evil. But not in evil ways.” They will show that you must “risk becoming new.” They will help you acknowledge and value the treasury that is yours.

Under Joan’s expert and prophetic pen these powerful reflections are like an owner’s manual for understanding the power of the heart and the force of love. Her accumulated wisdom becomes the sub-text that reminds us that even though dedicated practice and saying “yes” to love won’t make our problems go away, it *will* help us recognize Light as it moves through the darkness, able to penetrate our struggles when they come. In the act of opening the heart, the deep, altering stillness of God begins to move. Live to the limits of your heart, Joan tells us. Since she continues to do this with her own life, these offerings have great power. Spoken from the authenticity of her considerable contribution to the world, her admonition “Today is the whole of life. Don’t miss it” becomes the guiding voice of these potent teachings. Slow down, she reminds us. Look around. Live life deeply. It is open to us all.

PAULA D’ARCY



The heart

**A good person produces good from
the treasure of the heart.** LUKE 6:45

EVERYTHING WE DO IN LIFE, the Scripture reminds us, goes into the treasury of the heart. The ideas with which we fill our hearts determine the way we live our lives. Those are the things we draw on in those moments when we need to reach down deep inside ourselves for character, courage, endurance, and hope. That's why what we read, what we see, and what we do from day to day counts so much in life.

The heart is not an arrow. It is an amalgam of magnets, all pulling in different directions. It is commitment to family, commitment to self, commitment to success, commitment to life, commitment to God, commitment to security, commitment to approval—all jangled and knotted and demanding.

Goodness is the ability to choose one over the other when it counts.

And when does it really count? It counts when someone else's life will suffer if we do not muster the courage to make the right choice in this situation at this time in this place.

The onetime Buddhist patriarch of Cambodia, Maha Ghosananda, saw his entire family killed by the Khmer Rouge. And he is the one who initiated the Walks for Peace through the Khmer Rouge countryside in the hope of bringing the country to reconciliation. Now that's goodness.

Courage can be a hidden virtue. Faith can be personal. Goodness is the kind of character trait, however, that cannot be practiced alone. Goodness requires a public posture. To be good you have to be good to someone else. And most essential of all, perhaps, to the nature of goodness is the fact that not to choose—not to get involved, not to decide, not to bother—is the most serious choice of all.



An attentive heart

**Let us so live that when we come to die
even the undertaker will be sorry.**

MARK TWAIN

IT IS ONE THING TO BE GIVEN LIFE BY GOD. It is another thing to live it in a way that is a tribute to the possibilities in life.

While we're working so hard and running so fast and buying so much and planning "for the future," today passes us by. Life passes us by. It becomes a list of things we'd like to do—but don't: see the plays, visit the relatives, invite neighbors to a barbecue, sit by the bank and fish, listen to the small, still voice of God in our hearts. But if that's the case, what are all those other things really about?

For life to be life, I must do at least one thing a day for my soul, one thing a day for my heart, one

thing a day for my mind. Count them every day for a month and you'll know what's missing in you when you hear yourself say, "There's something not quite right in me but I don't know what it is."

The key to today is to live it well, live it happily, live it with surprise. Something good is coming. All we have to do is to recognize it when it does. The good life is the life in which every single strain of it has been lived with a good heart, an open mind, and the faith that tells us that God is behind every new and different door.

Today is the whole of life. Don't miss it.



A broken heart

A rabbi always told his people that if they studied the Torah, it would put Scripture on their hearts. One of them asked, “Why ‘on’ our hearts and not ‘in’ them?”

The rabbi answered, “Only God can put Scripture inside. But reading sacred text can put it on your hearts, and then when the heart breaks open, the holy words will fall inside.”

SO MANY THINGS BREAK A HEART open in life. Sudden bursts of beauty lift the scales from our eyes. We begin to see differently. A rose enduring through early winter snow can do it every time.

A graveyard agony is sure to stop our stride a bit, make us think again about what life is about, shake us to our moorings.

Passion turns life a brighter gold than we ever

imagined it could be. It leaves us full of wonder, full of faith, full of the consciousness of a smiling universe.

Long, slow, unyielding burdens—a child whose problem no one can name, a purse forever thin, distance where we would hope for help—can be a challenge. Eventually the heart dries out from the lack of nurture, and the fissures begin to form. Then what happens to us? The rabbi in the story says it all depends on what we have been putting on our hearts all these years. If it is the Scripture, we will know that God is with us now as God has always been active in the world since the beginning of time. If we have stayed close to the story of God's presence in life, we can bear any burden, survive any loss, absorb however much beauty without dying from the breathless glory of it, and give ourselves to the other side of love—the side that gives as well as takes.