



*The Organic God*

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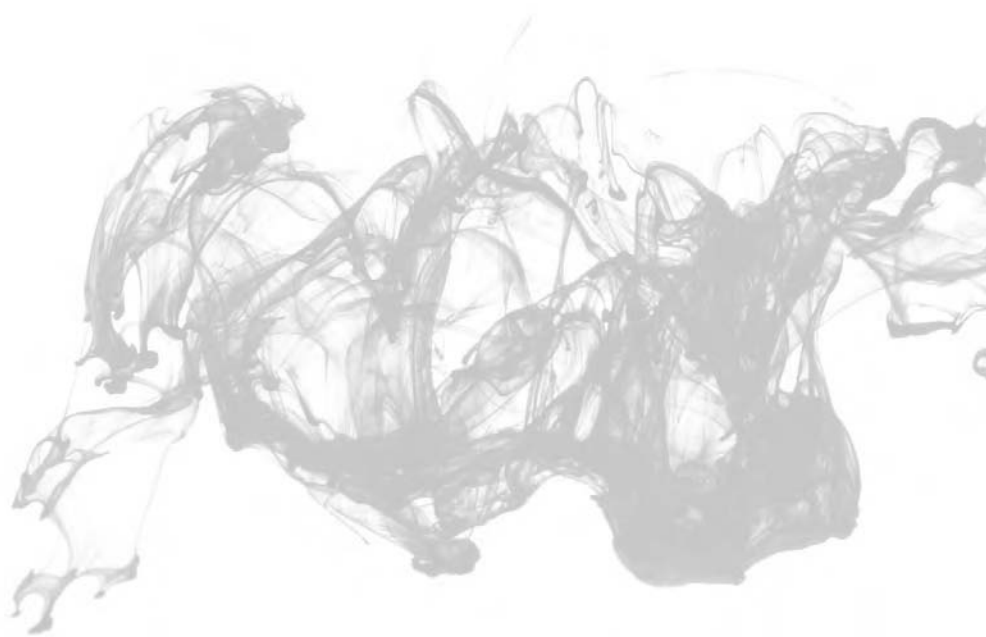
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.000 luminescence



The northern lights danced with all the mystery and marvel of midnight rainbows in the sky. Under star-filled heavens, Kacy and her husband Toby were enjoying a much-needed get-away on their thirty-four-foot, baby blue Tollycraft anchored near Auke Bay, Alaska. Sitting on the deck of their boat, Kacy looked into the sea and began to notice tiny, mysterious sparkles of luminescence. This magical light is known as bioluminescence, a process in which marine organisms produce light as a result of a chemical reaction involving the oxidation of a substrate molecule luciferin by a catalyst luciferase; the energy is released as sparkling blue-green light.

Like many of us who respond to natural wonders, Kacy wasn't interested in a science lesson. She didn't even care what the mysterious sparkles were called. She was too caught up in the beauty of the moment.

Kacy grabbed a broom handle resting in the corner of the boat, stirred up the water, and watched with glee as the sea came to life in all its secret shimmering beauty. "How could you not have told me?" she asked her husband with a blend of contempt and disbelief. Raised in Michigan, she had been living in

the waterfront town of Juneau, Alaska, for more than four years and had missed experiencing this luminous wonder until now.

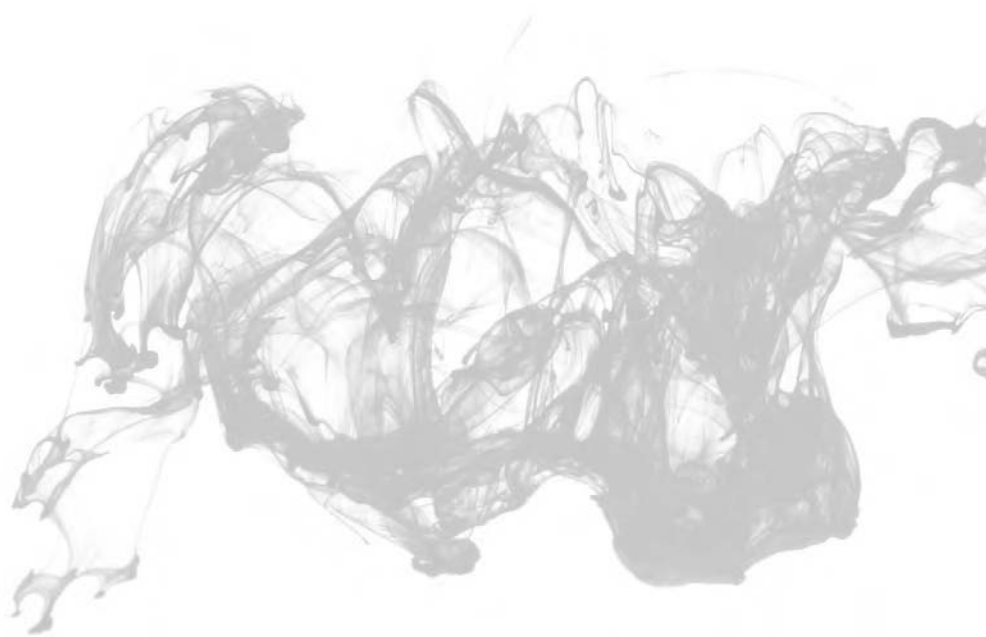
A week after the getaway, Kacy was still in awe of her find. As she recounted the story, she asked me, “Did you know? Have you heard?” I smiled, recalling the excitement I felt as a child during my first encounter with luminescence. I shared that unforgettable moment with my mom as she gently explained that these fireflies of the sea were actually living creatures. At that moment, something in me came alive that I can’t quite explain. Years later, I still carry the same sense of childlike wonder whenever I think about luminescence.

When I encounter something new that represents everything that is good and true and beautiful, something awakens inside of me. Maybe it’s a heart cry for the Creator or maybe it’s the Creator’s heart cry for me. I do not know, but such encounters remind me that there is so much more to do and experience and know—not just about my world but about my God.

This book is designed to take you on a journey and to illuminate the beauty of God in your life. It asks you to open your eyes to some of the things God has been doing all along that you may have missed or that no one has ever told you about. My hope and prayer is that through this book you’ll fall in love with God again for the first time, and that a part of you will come alive as you dance in all the brilliance of his design.

*Blessings, Margaret*

.001 an organic appetite



It was one thing for my Jewish father to marry my non-Jewish mother. It was another thing completely for both of them to become Christians within a month of each other eight years into their marriage. Let's just say that the decision did not go down too well with the Jewish side of the family. (Imagine *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* without the happy ending.) A month after their conversion, I was conceived, and less than a year after my parents became Christians, I was welcomed into a world of religious tension. I didn't know it at the time, but I became the bundle of glue that held the family together, because as upset as my Jewish grandmother was at my father, she wasn't going to give up access to her only grandchild.

As a result of my parents' backgrounds, I was raised in a Christian home with hues of Judaism. Think matza ball soup at Christmastime. I never knew how many gifts my Jewish grandmother was going to give—whether I would hit the jackpot with the stack-o-gifts that accompanies Hanukkah, or receive the one big present that inadvertently acknowledged Christmas even though it was still wrapped in Hanukkah paper. The

confusion ended when Grandma began giving the gift that embraced the fullness of my Jewish heritage: a check.

Throughout the years, I managed to learn a few random words in Yiddish, develop a quirky Jewish sense of humor, and inherit an undeniable sense of chutzpah. I developed a desire to know how these worlds that seemed so opposed in my childhood could ever get along. I also developed a hunger to know God. This hunger wasn't anything I conjured up but rather seemed to be part of the "me-package," like a strand of DNA, though it took years to fully manifest itself. My initial interaction with Scripture wasn't so much out of longing as it was out of desperation. I was having terrible nightmares—the kind you can't forget even when you're an adult.

On a sunny, breeze-softened afternoon, I was fishing alongside a creek in a forest filled with maple and oak trees. Sitting on the moss-carpeted shore, I held a thin wooden fishing pole. I felt a slight tug on the line and an unmistakable surge of excitement. I began pulling back on the pole. It arched at the weight of the catch. Without warning, a huge shark with beady eyes and enormous yellow razor-sharp teeth came out of the water and toward my face.

I awoke, breathless. Heart pounding. Body covered in sweat. I knew sharks didn't jump out of creeks and eat people, but now I wasn't so sure. I didn't want to fall back asleep ever again. Would the next nightmare be worse?



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These night terrors continued for months. My parents held me. Prayed for me. Comforted me when they heard my screams. But the dreams didn't stop until I made a personal discovery. Somehow, I figured out that if I read the Bible before I went to bed, I would sleep soundly. It's a strange equation:

*Bible before bed = No nightmares*

The concept made perfect sense when I was eight. I couldn't explain why it worked, I just knew that it did. And when you're facing man-eating sharks, you'll do whatever it takes to make them go away.

Two-plus decades later, I'm sometimes tempted to shrug off my miracle cure as an oddity or merely chance, except for the fact that those evening readings made God all the more real and personal. I'm humbled that God would so tenderly and intimately embrace a child with simple faith. And I am staggered to realize how God was preparing me, even then, to know him better.

Somewhere along the way, reading the Bible actually became enjoyable and not just a cure for nightmares. The stories of kings and queens and prophets and pilgrims came alive, and of course, the Jesus-man captured my heart as well as my imagination. What did he look like? What did his voice sound like? What did his hands feel like? I wanted to know.

Now there were a few years when I forgot about my experience as a young girl. I tried to run away from God and engaged in an extracurricular activity better known as partying like a rock star. I kissed too many boys and drank too much beer and enjoyed a thoroughly hollow good time, but deep down inside, I knew that partying wasn't the life for me. I returned to the routine I had learned at eight years old and began reading my Bible again.

More than a decade later, I still want to know God. The desire hasn't cooled. At times I have allowed myself to be overpowered by other desires. Busyness. Lesser loves. Laziness. And the temptation to let someone else do all the hard work of digging into the rich reservoirs of Scripture.

All too often I find myself tempted to live a distracted life. You know the kind—the one where, within the busyness of life, you still manage to perform the stand-up, sit-down, clap, clap, clap of regular church attendance; drop a check in the offering plate; hope for a new nugget of knowledge, understanding, or insight in the weekly sermon; and check off a random, albeit short, list of acts of kindness to others. Somehow I'm supposed to feel like I'm living the Jesus-driven life.

I don't.

That's when the hunger appears in my belly and overtakes my soul, grumbling that there must be more. Even in the

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mundane, I find myself wanting more of God. Surely I'm not the only person who lies in bed at night wondering, *Is this all there is?* I can't be the only one who looks at the seemingly rich buffet of everything this world has to offer and loses my appetite, because even with countless provisions, friends, and activities—many of which are not only good but could be classified as godly—I can't shake this sense that there's more.

The hunger growls that there's more of God not only to uncover but to discover.

The hunger cries out that there's more of this God-infused life to live.

The hunger reminds me that there's more.

I want to go there. But how do I find the way?

When I reflect on my life map so far, I realize that spiritual hunger, the enablement to love and long for a relationship with our Creator, is not just God's greatest command—it is also his greatest gift. It's the kind of desire that compelled the psalmist not only to ask, "Whom have I in heaven but you?" but to answer, "Earth has nothing I desire besides you."

That's why I began praying for spiritual hunger and haven't stopped. As my prayers funnel toward heaven, I can't help but reflect on my own spiritual journey and wonder how much of God I really know and how much of God I simply take other

people's word for or dismiss altogether. If God is bighearted, then why am I tempted to live with a closed hand? If God is surprisingly talkative, then why don't I take more time to listen? If God is deeply mysterious, then why do I sometimes lose the intrigue?

In the quietness of my own soul, I cannot help but wonder,  
*How much of God do I really know?*

If we met on the street, would I even recognize him?

In the humility of honesty and a soul laid bare: I do not know.

Such realizations shake the core of who I am. I'm pointedly reminded of the day an older woman I barely knew asked if my mother was Jewish when she heard my last name.

"No, just my father," I explained.

"Well, then you're not Jewish," she replied. "To be Jewish, your mom must be Jewish."

I was taken aback. I had a Jewish father, a Jewish grandmother who escaped Poland at the onset of World War II, and I knew how to make a mean bowl of matza ball soup. Even my best friend was Jewish. What more did you have to do to be a half-Jew?

It turned out that the nosy woman was right. Orthodox Judaism embraces matrilineal descent, or the belief that a child's

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Jewish identity is passed down through the mother. Only recently has the reformed movement within Judaism embraced patrilineal descent. Regardless, they still require that the child be raised Jewish—which I was not.

The incident left me feeling like a spiritual bastard child. Once the paralyzing effect of the conversation wore off and my mom assured me that I was my father's daughter, I grew an even deeper desire to understand how these two worlds—that of Jewish descent and Christian upbringing—intersect. It also left me hungrier for God. What does it mean to be his child? How does that affect my identity, my behavior, the very core of who I am? I knew he was the only one who could offer any resolve.



Deep down inside I still hunger for a true, pure relationship with the Organic God—the One True God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In him is found the mysterious wonder of the Trinity. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one luminous essence in whom there is no shadow of change, stirred by the eternal and dynamic relationship of the three persons who live and love completely free of any need or self-interest.

Why describe God as organic? More and more I realize that my own understanding of God is largely polluted. I have preconceived notions, thoughts, and biases when it comes to

God. I have a tendency to favor certain portions of Scripture over others. I have a bad habit of reading some stories with a been-there-done-that attitude, knowing the end of the story before it begins, and in the process denying God's ability to speak to me through it once again.

If that weren't enough, more often than not, I find myself compartmentalizing God. He is more welcome in some areas of my life than others. Prayer, Bible study, Scripture memorization, journaling, and other spiritual disciplines become like items to be checked off a to-do list that is eventually crumpled up and thrown away rather than savored and reflected upon. The result is that my understanding and perception of God is clouded, much like the dingy haze of pollution that hangs over most major cities. The person in the middle of a city looking up at the sky doesn't always realize just how much their view and perceptions are altered by the smog. Without symptoms such as burning eyes or an official warning of scientists or media, no one may even notice just how bad the pollution has become.

That's why I describe God as organic. While it's a word usually associated with food grown without chemical-based fertilizers or pesticides, *organic* is also used to describe a lifestyle: simple, healthful, and close to nature. Those are all things I desire in my relationship with God. I hunger for the simplicity. I want to approach God in childlike faith, wonder, and awe. I long for

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more than just spiritual life but spiritual health—whereby my soul is not just renewed and restored but becomes a source of refreshment for others. And I want to be close to nature, not mountain ridges and shorelines as much as God’s nature working in and through me. Such a God-infused lifestyle requires me to step away from any insta-grow shortcuts and dig deep into the soil of spiritual formation found only in God.

Natural. Pure. Essential.

I want to discover God again, anew, in a fresh way. I want my love for him to come alive again so that my heart dances at the very thought of him. I want a real relationship with him—a relationship that isn’t altered by perfumes, additives, chemicals, or artificial flavors that promise to make it sweeter, sourer, or tastier than it really is. I want to know a God who in all his fullness would allow me to know him. I want a relationship that is real, authentic, and life-giving even when it hurts. I want to know God stripped of as many false perceptions as possible. Such a journey risks exposure, honesty, and even pain, but I’m hungry and desperate enough to go there. I want to know the Organic God.

I have this hunch that when God grants us a whim or a whiff of a desire to know him, we should take action—and fast—because those windows of opportunity may pass, and we may once again become satisfied with the smorgasbord of

this world, rather than the world to come. I knew I had to do something, but what?

I decided once again to read the book that God gave me. You probably have a copy too. Usually when I give a book to someone, I want to build a relationship—to develop conversation, share ideas, and grow together. The gift of a book is a tangible effort to take the relationship to a new intensity—so it becomes deeper, richer, and broader than ever before.

Recognizing that you cannot love that which you do not know and experience, I began my journey to know God more by going through key books of the Old Testament and the entire New Testament, recording every verse that described a characteristic or attribute of God. As you can imagine, I've filled dozens and dozens of pages. Along the way, I found unimaginably breathtaking aspects of God.

In some regards, the journey to know God isn't too different from a first encounter with someone you've never met. I want to know what God looks like and what his interests are. I want to know his likes and dislikes. I want to know what makes him tick and also what ticks him off. I want to fall in love all over again. I want to know God.

Through the Scripture, God invites us to discover the wonders of Jesus shining in its pages. But it takes work. Like peeling an orange, reading the Bible sometimes feels messy and



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sticky and time-consuming. But once you bite into its pulpy juiciness—oh, how its flavors dance on the taste buds.

And while we relish the taste, the nutrients also feed our soul. With the Spirit's enzymes, we unknowingly, automatically, miraculously digest the words on the page, until they transform our actions and even our attitudes. Indeed, the book God gives us is like no other. God seems far more concerned with transformation than mere information. If you look real close, you'll notice that scrawled on every page is an invitation to know the author.

The truth is—God glows. His glory illuminates the heavens. Jesus, by his very nature, is brilliance. The One described as the light of the world does not contain a shadow of darkness. And the Holy Spirit ushers the spiritual dawn into our lives. Like the fireflies of the sea that beckon our imaginations to another world, the truth of God invites us to embrace the fullness of the life we were meant to live. As we look to him, we can't help but become more radiant.

The vastness. The beauty. The power. The splendor.  
The glory.

It looks like luminescence is already beginning to surface.