

LIFE FAITH STUFF



the intersections of life

by Claes Jonasson

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Life

Each of our lives is a hero's journey. We may not feel like it a lot of the time. Sometimes we forget what the quest is about. But we're here, on Earth, on this journey.

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

MacBeth by Shakespeare

Many of us feel that way about life sometimes, but we really can't live like that day after day. So we search for meaning, purpose, significance — something to make life worth living.



Life may be defined in stages by approximate age:

Childhood

It's a small world, literally. Out of sight is really out of mind. I want what I want when I want it and the defining word is often "mine".

Adolescence

The world grows and I'm ready to conquer it, or at least explore it. That said, still need constants and knowns and want to fit in.

Adulthood

Finding our place in the world and what to do with it. Having arrived here, we start families and set the path for the next generation, while still building our world.

Mature years

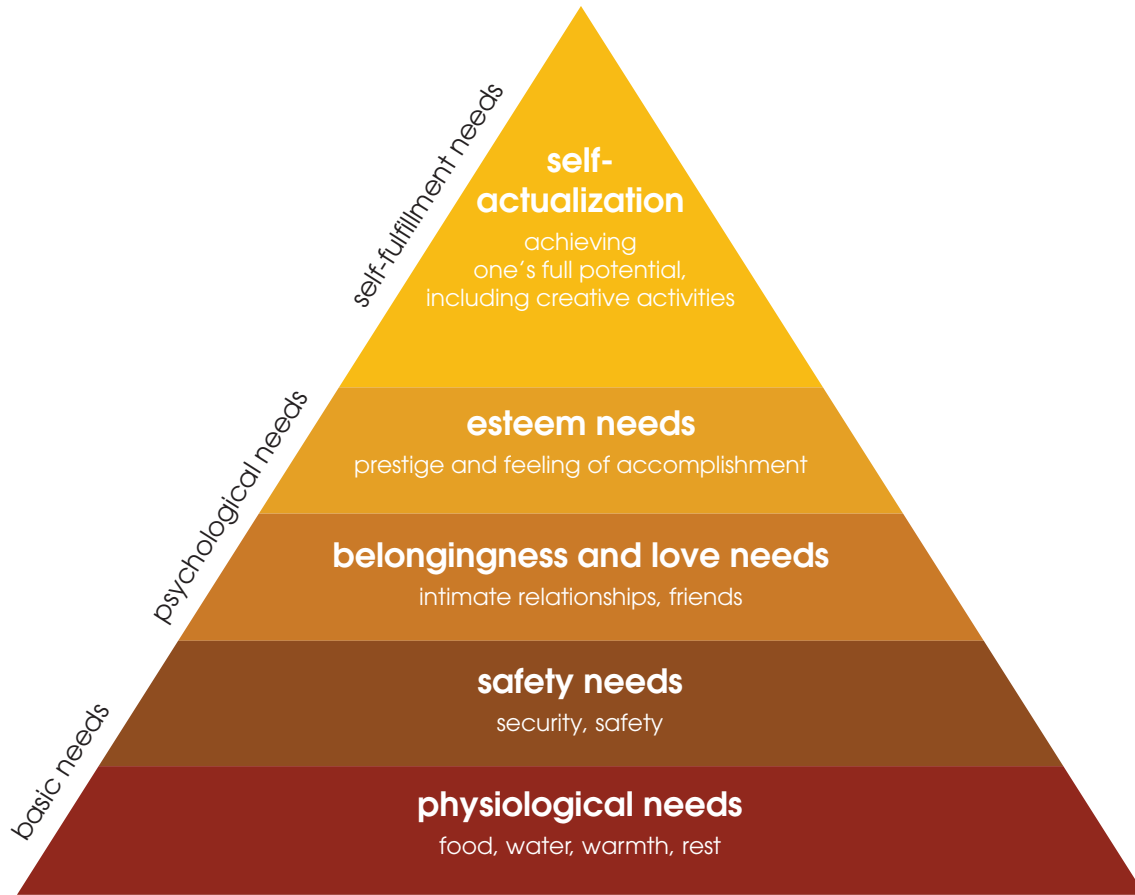
The building behind, we can share with others and draw from a lifetime of experience and wisdom.

Consider the phase of life you're in:

Are you making the most of it, or hoping to be able to slide by?

Are you maybe still stuck in the preceding life stage?





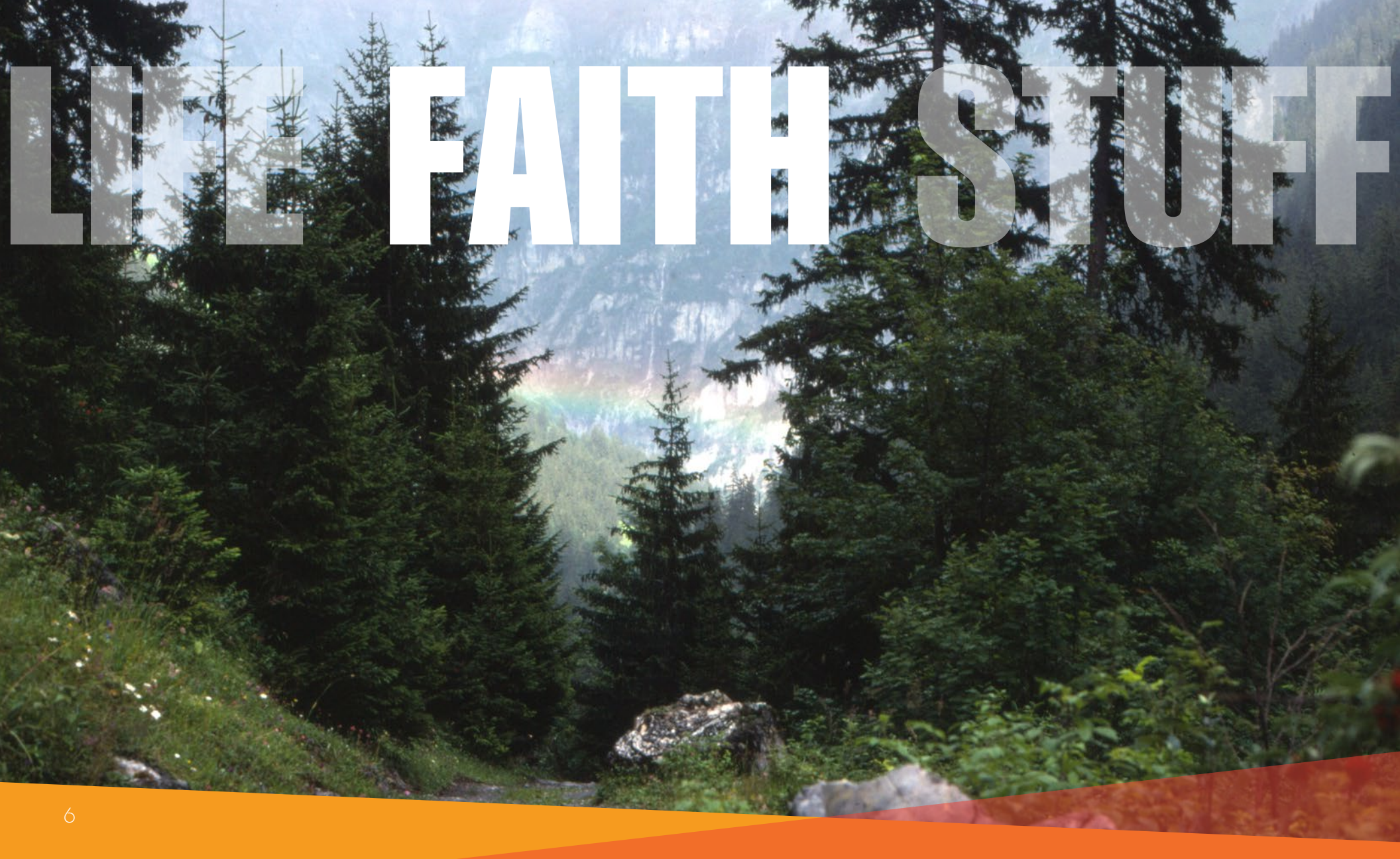
Another way of looking at life is where we are at with having certain needs met. Maslow expressed that in his famous pyramid of needs.

The 4 lower tiers are often referred to as deficiency needs. Because they involve very immediate, real and practical needs, they are also strong motivators for our actions when they are unmet.

The top tier is about growth and being. This is where we can finally be all that we were made to be. But it's very hard to even think about pursuing that when there's no roof over the head or the belly is empty.

Every person has the capability to move up the tiers as needs are met, but in reality life may interfere through things like divorce, job loss or illness and keep us from moving up. And past experiences may leave us unable to let go of trying to fill some lower tier need even after it's logically taken care of.

Where do you see yourself on the pyramid? What would need to happen for you to move to a higher tier? Is there an action you can take today to move towards that goal?



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Faith



We are born with a hole — something missing. Then we spend much of our lives trying to fill that hole. Faith is essential in that process. Faith is the stepping out of where I know I am to place confidence in something I haven't seen or tested yet. If we didn't have faith, we'd never take risks.

Some would say they don't believe in anything. What they generally mean is that they don't believe in God or a specific system. But since the present is all we have that is certain, the past can't be changed and what happened may or may not repeat we all have to engage faith to get through the day.

It just becomes a matter of what we put our faith in and if that is truly worthy of our faith.

For instance, every time I drive somewhere, there's faith that other drivers will indeed follow the basic rules of the road so we'll all get where we're going without crashing into each other. If I wait until there are no other cars on potential collision courses, I will not get very far on most roads.

A woman on the left and a man on the right are shown in silhouette, standing in a field of tall grass. They are facing each other, with their arms crossed. The background is a bright, golden sunset sky. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Trust is another aspect of faith.

“Trust no one over 30” was a slogan during the youth rebellions of the ‘60s.

But we can’t get through the day without trust, unless of course you’re holed up by yourself in a cabin in the middle of nowhere. As soon as we interact with others, trust is involved.

Think about your coworkers, clients, friends, children, spouse — none of those relationships work without trust. And once trust is broken, it’s hard or even impossible to rebuild it. At the very least, it takes time, possibly a lot of time.

I was talking with my friend Alex. He was going through a breakup with his wife. Things had gone bad and he wanted out, yet it was clear he wanted to be in a relationship, so most likely he’d soon find somebody else and we might see a repeat. I asked him what went wrong with his spouse.

“I opened up too much and got really hurt as a result,” he said.

And how would he keep that from happening again another time?

“Well, next time I won’t open up so much, so fast. Then I won’t get so hurt when it falls apart.”

His logic was baffling: In order to not get so emotionally involved, he would open up less (keep more secrets, trust less), because he figured things were likely to eventually go bad. How’s that for planning for failure?

To be sure, trust is built over time, and as we see that it was well placed, we trust more. Yet, that’s very different from knowingly holding back on key things to not get emotionally involved.

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Stuff



On life's journey, we carry around stuff. Some of it is helpful. Some of it is needed for us to live successfully.

But some of it holds us back. Some of it we hang on to because we don't know how to put it aside.

This can be addictions, codependency, things we seek counseling for and therapy may help with. But there's much more.

Everything we've done and experienced. And how we handle it makes all the difference on how we move forward or don't.

There's a standup routine about a man, Viking, who tells the audience how weak and frail he is. Then we notice he's carrying a big brick in his left hand: "This brick I carry with me, I carry because I never have enough strength to throw it away." (Viking, portrayed by Martin Ljung)

Actually a pretty good picture of how we often handle the stuff of life.

Our moving through life would be so much easier if we could put some of the stuff aside, throw it off. But we hang onto it, claiming that we don't have the strength to let go (and letting go *can* be really hard). Yet, we're using tons of energy hanging onto that which we won't let go of.

Going back to Mazlow's pyramid, we may find ourselves hanging on to a lower tier, still trying to fulfill that need, even though objectively we already have that taken care of and should be focusing on the next tier needs instead.

the intersections of life



the intersections of life



The forks in the road where things get interesting and choices are made. Mostly small choices. Seemingly inconsequential. Until we one day realize that together all those little choices formed the fabric and pattern of our lives. Then we see that they made all the difference. It is here we find out what we are made of or yet capable of becoming.

Intersections mean the road diverging — choices, options, opportunities for new directions. That can be freeing or scary, depending on your viewpoint and past experience.

Today I may make a choice to not do action A. It seems the safe choice to make. But later (days, weeks, months, years), I regret not choosing to do action A. We can write that off on hindsight, which is always 20/20. But maybe in making that original choice, I sabotaged myself because of fear or lack of trust.

Fortunately many choices are not irrevocable. No, you don't get to go back and make the same choice over, but other, similar opportunities come along and we're really no worse for the wear. Consider choosing where to go for lunch today. It's probably not the one choice your whole life will pivot on and you can always try another place tomorrow.

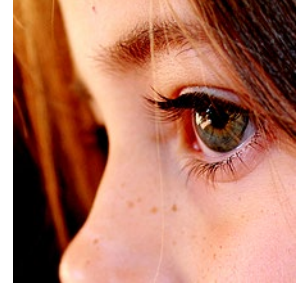
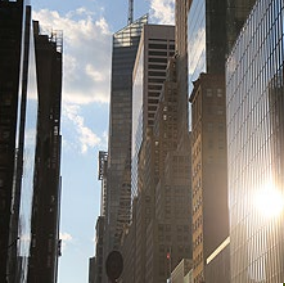
Other choices are irrevocable. Once we head down the chosen path, truly everything about life changes and life will never be the same again. For instance, who I marry is an irrevocable choice. Even if the marriage ends in divorce, life will have firmly gone down a path that can't be undone and everything goes forward from there.



At the time of choice, there's generally no sign that says: "Okay to mess this one up. Other similar opportunities will come along" or "Your one and only chance to get this right. Ever."

So our life view must guide us in making choices and figuring out which ones are truly irrevocable and therefore must be made much more carefully.

Added together, the choices made, big and little, form a winding path through life and set us off on directions that either later get us to where we always wanted to be or someplace where we wonder how we got here because we really wanted to be over there instead.



Intersections are also about **transitions**.

Where one thing ends and another starts:

The edge of city and beginning of country.

Childhood to adulthood.

Single to married.

Married to single again.

Employed to unemployed or employed to self-employed.

Work life to retired life.

Stranger to friend.


Friend to lover.

Health to illness.

Each presents choices, change and uncertainty.

Because the world around us keeps changing, what used to work for figuring things out, may no longer work at all.

Some transitions we handle well, others not so much.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark jacket and pants, is kneeling on a grassy hill. She is looking upwards towards a large, leafless tree that dominates the left side of the frame. The sky is overcast and grey. The overall mood is contemplative and somber.

Intersections in life are those places where what I believe or do crosses paths with a different view or approach

How do I handle the new or different?

In 1969 Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her book *On Death and Dying* proposed that there are 5 stages of grief:

Denial and isolation

Anger

Bargaining

Depression

Acceptance

The stages are not experienced in a particular order and may not all be present, but we see the same range of emotions when it comes to intersections in life where change or transition is involved.

It's possible to get "stuck" on one stage and not move forward.

Yet by experiencing and recognizing the different emotions, we can process the change in a healthy way that lets us move forward and come out stronger, even if the prospect of change was scary to start with.

What's next?

Life — as long as we're breathing, we're living (clinical), but are we alive (engaged, connected)?

Does your life view allow you to deal successfully with change or does it shy away from change?

Faith — we all have faith in something.

Is what you're placing your faith in now going to be there for you when you need it?

How do you decide when to trust other people and when not to trust them?

Does it make a difference if the other person looks and behaves like you or is different?

Stuff — All the rest. Little things and big things. Sometimes helps us and sometimes holds us back.

What are you going to do with the stuff in your life? (Can be physical belongings or mental/emotional things)

If all you own was gone tomorrow (think fire, hurricane, flood or other disaster), what would you miss most and why?

Do you hang on to things you haven't used for a long time because they might come in handy some day? Or because right now is not good, but soon I'm going to have more time/energy?

How do you handle emotional baggage (hurt feelings, negative impressions/words)?

Our life view, the set of articulated and unarticulated beliefs and values that guides us through life, includes all these 3 areas. Sometimes well and sometimes not so well. As Yoda would say: "Choose carefully, we must."

The background of the slide is a beautiful landscape at sunset. A large, leafy tree stands in the middle ground, with the sun positioned directly behind it, creating a bright glow and silhouetting the branches. The foreground is a lush green field with yellow wildflowers. In the distance, there are rolling hills and a small cluster of trees on a ridge. The sky is filled with soft, golden light and wispy clouds.

The intersections of life

— choices, opportunities, relationships — how will your life intersect and interact with others?

Is life best for you when nothing changes, things stay the same and you don't have to interact with others on a deeper level?

Or do you seek out change, challenge and new friendships?

Researchers tell us that we have fewer friends now than people did 40-50 years ago, in spite of easier, almost instant communications and all the social media. Is that true for you?

Do you have a plan for making new friends, regardless of your age? For keeping up with existing friends?

You hold the key to the rest of your life, but you don't have to go it alone.



Intersections in life take many forms.

In this excerpt from my novel-in-progress, the main character, Carensa Holt, a college coed traveling Europe with her backpack in the summer of 1976, debates how to deal with signs that summer is ending and what that means for her.

morning on a train

Long shadows and harsh sunlight that promised a hot day ruled the suburbs the train sped through. Once again it was morning on a train. While the big city of Paris woke to a new day, Carensa sat in a train car that with every rail joint left the metropolis further and further behind.

Every now and then a poplar tree flew by outside the window. They disappeared without becoming anything other than blurry outlines, but still she could see that the deep green color no longer was so deep. Other trees that she could see more of, already showed yellow leaves here and there. August would end soon, and summer with it.

Carensa turned into the train to not have to face the signs of an approaching autumn. Empty seats stared back at her. August was ending and the trains were no longer full.

“If the trains aren’t so full anymore, then why are you still here?” Carensa asked herself the question.

“I don’t know.” Carensa turned to the window again. “Maybe I stayed too

long.”

“Can you? I love traveling.”

“Yeah, sure, it’s great. But when the leaves turn brown, then you know.”

“Know what?”

“That it’s time — time to go home. Summer is over.”

“But I don’t want it to be over. This has been the best summer of my life. All my life. I just want to jump on a train, find a compartment and sit down and watch the countryside pass on by. I don’t want it to stop, not ever.”

“Every train has to stop. Somewhere.”

“Not for me they don’t. I’m going on.”

“Not forever. See, the trees are turning.”

“Then I’ll travel nights. So I don’t have to see those trees.”

“If you wish. But the nights are longer now. And darker. And colder. Listen to the cold rain.”

She closed her eyes in the strong morning sun.

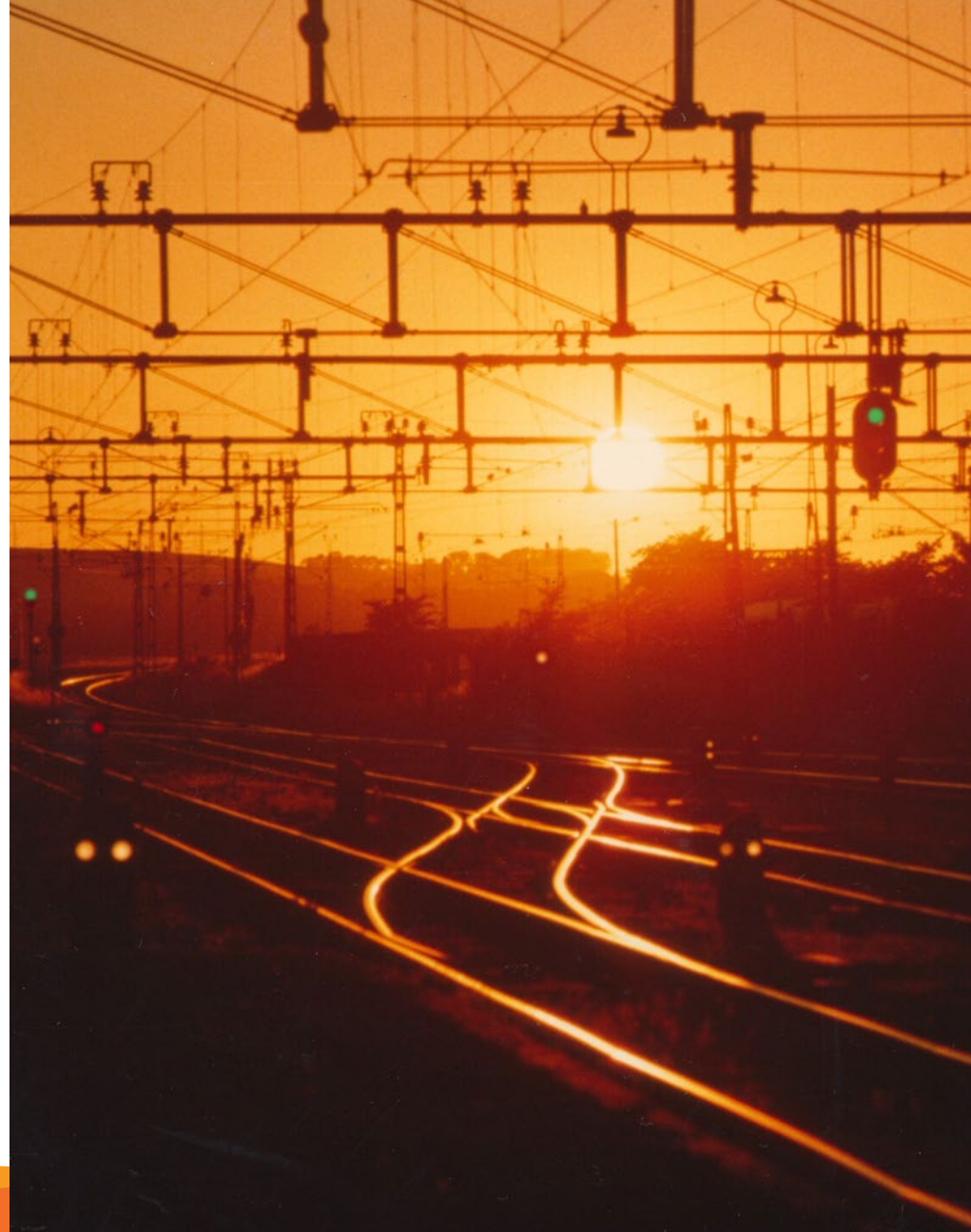
“I love nights in train stations. To just sit there and watch the mail trains and the baggage trains come in and the loading and unloading. It’s great.”

“Not any more. That was last summer. Sure, the station workers still handle the packages and the mail and the trains still run. But they’ve changed. It’s a different world now.”

“That’s impossible.”

“But it is so.”

“The signals still show green.”





“They are changing now. They turn red. Watch out or you will miss your train.”

“All those places. They’re still there. The trains still run. I can go there.”

“But it wouldn’t be the same. Even the birds are leaving now. Another season is beginning.”

“But my life was this summer. It can’t be over. It was supposed to be so much. I was going to do so much.”

“You did it. Remember the places you went. The people you met. The many sunny days. All the trains.”

“I was going to have the biggest adventure in my life. A dream come true.”

“It came true. It is true. Summer is still there, in your mind. It is safe now. It is yours. You went to all the places, met people. You even almost learned to hate the sun and the heat.”

“Now it’s over, just because of a few silly leaves losing their color.”

“And because mornings are foggy and days cooler and nights longer. You have been on the road a long time. It’s always time to head home at some point. For you that is now.”

“But I’m so not ready.”

“You’ll be ready. You saw the signs. There are still a few days of summer left. Use them well.”

“Just a few short days. I need time...” She leaned her head against the rattling glass, closed her eyes and listened to the bumps of the wheels under the floor. But a poor reflection as in a mirror...

The journey wasn’t over yet. It couldn’t end this way.

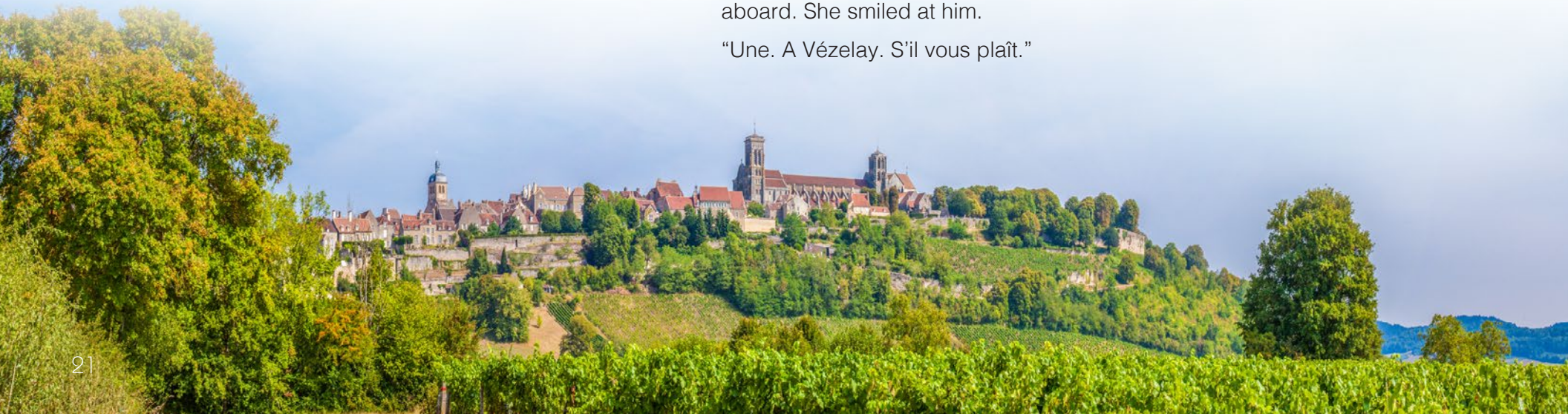
The train stopped at yet another small station. Next to the track was a sign, shining glaringly white in the sunlight. Sermizelles. The name meant nothing to her, and she had started to lean back in the seat again when she noticed the writing underneath, in smaller letters. Vézelay.

She knew that the train didn't actually go through Vézelay, where she was headed. But she thought that the connecting station was further down the line. Now she grabbed her backpack with record speed. By this time there was a certain force of habit there. With the shoulder bag in one hand, she pushed the door to the vestibule open and hurried off onto the platform. The train stood in a small station. A few whitewashed houses, a parking area and a bus. In the window of the red and white bus was a hand lettered sign: Vézelay.

The air that met her on the platform was warm and smelled of summer meadow. She pushed up the backpack to balance it better, as she had done so many times before. Then she started walking towards the bus. There would always be a connection. Another train, another bus. So this was autumn. So the journey was almost over. So the summer was over. But there would be other.

The driver, sitting at the wheel, put away his newspaper when she climbed aboard. She smiled at him.

“Une. A Vézelay. S'il vous plaît.”



About me, the author

Hi, I'm Claes Jonasson.

As soon as I could hold a pen, I was drawing. Then I put words and pictures together and drew comic strips. That started me off on my path in life: I've worked in media for 4 decades, with clients in Europe and the US.

I am a writer. I've written video scripts, copy for websites, brochures and flyers, presentations, news and magazine articles (published in the US, Sweden and Germany). And I write fiction. Still working on getting that to publication. But that's all part of developing the story.

In the grand scheme of life, I believe that all things fit together and that nothing is wasted. Seemingly insignificant things can become very important, sometimes years later. It's all about perspective — the story developing.

I also believe that we are here for a purpose, created by God with certain inalienable rights and responsibilities to make this world we share a better place for us all.

I'd love to connect with you at ClaesJonasson.com



LIFE FAITH STUFF

A scenic mountain landscape with hikers on a path. The image shows a dirt path winding through a grassy field towards a range of rugged, snow-capped mountains under a blue sky with scattered clouds. Several hikers are visible on the path, some carrying backpacks. The overall atmosphere is bright and adventurous.

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to the rest of your life,
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