

The Gospel
according to
Peter John



with commentaries
edited by David J. Krupa

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Alaska Native Knowledge Network

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Cover photo: Chief Peter John and his wife, Elsie

Photo courtesy of Patricia John.

This work is dedicated to the memory of Elsie John (1909-1995), whose *ch'eghwtsen* is a gift that grows in the lives of all those she touched.



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Foreword

Within every cultural system people participate in the affairs of life with different levels of conscious understanding of the particular practices, values, and beliefs by which they are sustained as members of that cultural system. Most of us are swept along as part of a great cultural tide that carries us through life with an awareness of only the most essential knowledge and skills needed to survive as contributing members of the surrounding society. Much of what we do and why we do it is taken for granted—unconsciously imbued as we grow up—and then practiced in our everyday affairs without conscious thought or understanding. As parents, we become aware of many aspects of our own behavior and beliefs as we assume responsibility for passing on the rules and templates that we had acquired as children, but never really had to consider before in a deliberate way.

A few members of every society are placed in leadership roles in which they are called upon to bring a deeper and broader level of conscious understanding to bear in guiding the activities and institutions by which the society is sustained. Some people have deep knowledge and skills in certain specialized areas and make their contribution to the society as experts in their chosen or assigned roles. Others possess broad factual knowledge or organizational skills that relate to the day-to-day functioning of the various sectors of the society, so they perform the critical leadership roles that bring people together to fulfill their collective needs.

Then there are a select few members of each society whose cumulative wisdom, insights, integrity, and lifestyle exemplify the values and beliefs with which the society as a whole identifies, and they become recognized and revered as the exemplars or "Elders" who are the bearers of the culture. The world view of the culture is embodied in the everyday lives of these Elders and they pass on their knowledge and skills as much by example as by deliberate expression of the stories, practices, and insights they have acquired over their lifetime.

Of those paragons of a society who are recognized as culture-bearers, a very few reach the level of wisdom and insight that they become the spokespersons for the philosophical threads that hold the society together—the caretakers of the deep culture. It is such a role and responsibility that has been placed on the shoulders of the person whose view of the world you will glimpse in this book—Doyon Peter John, Traditional Chief for all Interior Alaska Athabaskans. As the Chief of Chiefs, Peter John has earned the respect of Athabaskan people from the Koyukon to the Ahtna, the Gwich'in to the Tanaina. But his insights and contributions have extended beyond his Athabaskan cultural experience to include the broader human realm of in-

teraction between cultural systems. In *The Gospel According to Peter John*, he shares with us his reflections, not only on what it means to be a traditional Athabaskan, but also on the confluence of Athabaskan tradition with Western society. In recognition of his contributions to both Native and non-Native cross-cultural understanding he has rightfully earned and been conferred by the University of Alaska, the title of Doctor Peter John, to go along with the recognition already accorded him by his people as Chief Peter John.

Chief/Dr. Peter John is the rarest of individuals—one who has been able to see beyond his own cultural upbringing and come to understand the human condition at a level that transcends conventional wisdom. For many readers, the expression of human, natural, and spiritual insights reflected in this book will be difficult to internalize because few of us have experienced the world in any way comparable to that of Peter John. To begin to appreciate what he is passing on to us, we must set aside our culturally formed predispositions and attempt to put ourselves in a frame of mind that is informed by our shared experiences as human beings within the framework of a common natural and spiritual order. If we can do that, we may begin to understand how he has utilized his traditional ways of knowing to integrate the tenets of Christianity with Athabaskan spirituality on terms that embrace them both as variations on a common theme. In so doing, we may also gain a greater appreciation of the contributions of all indigenous peoples to our human knowledge base, not only as repositories of the past, but as productive citizens of the contemporary world.

The Gospel According to Peter John is the inaugural publication of the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, which has been established by the Alaska Federation of Natives and the University of Alaska Fairbanks, with support from the National Science Foundation, to serve as a resource for compiling and exchanging information related to Alaska Native knowledge systems and ways of knowing. David Krupa, who had been working with Peter John on the research for his doctoral dissertation, has assumed the responsibility for pulling this publication together, including transcribing Peter's tapes and soliciting commentary from people knowledgeable about his life and the ideas he addresses in this book. I wish to thank David and all the people who took the time to provide their views on the significance of Peter John's work in the larger scheme of things. Finally, it is to Peter, his wife Elsie, the people of Minto, and all the Athabaskan people who have preceded them that we owe a debt of gratitude and appreciation for sharing their view of the world with those who follow. *Basi'* all of you!

-Ray Barnhardt
Alaska Native Knowledge Network

Introduction

The words you are about to read carry some of the spoken wisdom of one of Alaska's great human resources—Athabaskan Doyon (Chief) Peter John of Minto. At age ninety-five, Peter John is one of the last indigenous elders whose life stretches back to the period just prior to the Interior Alaska Gold Rush of the early 1900s. His life chronicles not only the old ways of his people but also the rapid and often tragic changes in Native life stemming from the sudden influx and dominance of Euroamerican people, culture, and values in this century.

Peter was born in Rampart shortly after his family traveled there from the Minto flats to visit relatives. His mother died when Peter was two and soon after his father's health failed. Peter was sent to St. Mark's Mission School in Nenana around 1909 where he remained for several years. At the school he learned English, basic reading and writing skills, and the rudiments of Christianity. Like many Native people, Peter's experience with "white man way" at Nenana was mixed: he learned to read but he was hit with a switch when he used his Native language; he learned the "Lord's Prayer," but he was also taught that the ways of his own elders were morally inferior; he was given new medicines, but also new diseases, some of which wiped out up to half the Native population in certain villages; he was told Christian stories about the higher life of the spirit, but saw its neglect in the daily life of supposed Christians. Peter recognized these contradictions and has worked hard to reconcile them in the context of his own spiritual life. Perhaps his struggles reflect the experience of many other Native people as well.

After leaving the mission school around 1917, Peter spent one summer on the Yukon River aboard the Steamship *Reliance* before returning to the Minto flats where he had learned the essential subsistence skills of hunting, fishing, and trapping. Through his extraordinary talent and determination, he fulfilled the promise of his Native name: Xa dalt'eyh (he holds on no matter what.) At age twenty-five, Peter married Elsie, with whom he had ten children and adopted another four. Eleven of these fourteen children were lost to accidents or illness. Today, Peter and Elsie's three natural—born daughters and their children survive.

In addition to learning critical survival skills, Peter was a disciplined student of culture. Following the example of his elders, Peter learned an exceptional repertoire of Athabaskan stories, songs, and practices. Together with Elsie, who has been his constant companion, counselor, and critic, Peter has an encyclopedic

knowledge of traditional culture. They are regularly consulted for their expertise concerning the "Old Ways" of the Minto people. Peter also purchased a Bible and dictionary in order to hone his reading and writing skills while out on the trapline. He has studied the Bible ever since.

Although Peter and his family relied mostly on subsistence activities for their livelihood, Peter held the post of village chief on and off since 1945 and, in the 1960s, he was a central figure in the land negotiations that resulted in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. In the early 1990s, Peter was selected as Traditional Chief for Interior Alaskan Athabaskans, a post he will retain for life. In 1994, the University of Alaska Fairbanks conferred to Peter an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters in recognition of his lifelong efforts to preserve and share Athabaskan culture and language.

Peter's spiritual life bears the mark of efforts to reconcile Christianity and traditional culture; sometimes there is an uneasy tension between these forces. By Peter's account, God has guided his life since childhood, but in his youth he did not recognize or understand the "signs" of the Holy Spirit's presence. Peter explains that when we are young and strong, we feel independent and may not believe that we are dependent on the higher gifts of the Spirit.

As Peter's awareness grew with experience and reflection, he began to see fundamental connections between the Bible and Athabaskan stories, songs, and practices. These parallels confirmed for Peter the idea that human beings are fundamentally one in spirit, but that each culture has received the "gifts" of higher truths in different forms. He suggests that by respecting and preserving different cultural expressions of spiritual life, our collective understanding flourishes.

About twenty years ago, Peter says that the Holy Spirit began speaking to and through him in what he describes as the "heavenly language." When Peter is "spoken through" by the Holy Spirit, he becomes animated and issues a series of "K" consonants of varying duration, tone, and inflection. The Holy Spirit guides Peter, answers questions, and is always ready "to help other people" who seek help with an open heart.

Whatever the source of Peter's spiritual gifts, it can scarcely be doubted that he bears the markings of a genuine, loving, and remarkably insightful teacher. He has the unnerving ability to go straight to the heart of a problem: he will often answer questions that people do not even yet realize they are asking. Peter attributes all that is good and wise in himself to the Holy Spirit and he consistently rejects attempts to elevate Peter John, the man, above other people: "I don't want anyone to 'follow me.' I just want people to know that their life means something." Unflinch-

ing as he may be in his criticism of others, he also points out his own failings and uses them to illustrate the challenges facing all of us.

Since Peter believes that the Holy Spirit speaks through him, he does not claim personal authorship of his message. Commentators, friends, and family have probably all wished at one time or another that elements of his teaching were softened, changed, or left unsaid. I too have sometimes found his words troubling and almost wished that I had more influence over the tone of my teacher's message. But in the end you cannot rightly edit personal revelation. You cannot add a soothing spin nor bend it to some narrowly conceived will. Through Peter I have learned to distrust teachings that soothe but do not challenge or edify. "The truth hurts," says Peter John, and it is often the charlatan or false prophet who gains support by attempting to be all things to all people. Peter has turned many people off by his unwillingness to edit his message in the interest of social convenience or courtesy. Many people have come seeking either to gently modify the Old Chief's position or gain his endorsement: such alliances quickly vanish in the glare of Peter's unwavering vision, which will not be deflected by any expediency.

The Making of this Book

All but a few passages printed in this manuscript were derived from a series of recorded conversations Peter and I had between 1988 and the present. Additional material comes from separate recordings made with Peter by Frank Blacha, Tony Blanford, and Barbara Creighton. My goal throughout the editing process has been to render Peter's oral teachings in written form. I have tried to remain true both to Peter's voice and his intention. Although his goal in creating the audio tapes was to speak beyond the context of our friendship to the wider world, our relationship certainly influenced the expression of his teaching. The conversations were both public and private: public in that Peter John viewed the taping sessions as a way to share his spiritual insight with anyone who wished to listen; private in that he was also doing his best to counsel me personally, much as he does with others who seek him out. For this reason, it may be helpful to reveal my biases.

When I first arrived in Alaska in the Spring of 1988, I was a graduate student in cultural anthropology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I arrived with a plan to study the effects of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 on Native people's lives, particularly in light of traditional knowledge and practices. I had studied colonial history in the New World, and was well aware of the frequent devastation and injustice experienced by indigenous people in their encounter with the new colonizers. I was an anthropologist, but a reluctant one: I knew that my academic field bore no small burden of responsibility for its role as an intellectual expression of the Western World's domination of indigenous peoples. Behind the

face of my career interest there was a simple and perhaps naive goal of broadening my personal understanding by learning about other ways of life. In particular, I was interested in Native American spirituality, which seemed to bear closer resemblance to my own convictions than the Roman Catholic tradition in which I was raised.

Soon after I arrived in Fairbanks I met William Schneider, curator of Oral History at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. He listened with great empathy as I explained my struggle to reconcile an academic interest in anthropology with my search for genuine spiritual understanding. Bill suggested that I meet Peter John, whom he had met the previous year. He recognized Peter's extraordinary wisdom and considered it important that someone follow up on Peter's desire to share his views with a wider audience.

After some preliminary discussion with Robert Charlie, director of the Cultural Heritage and Education Foundation, the non-profit arm of Minto's village corporation, Seth-de-ya-ah, we decided that we should write a grant proposal to create a narrative map of places out on the Minto flats that were important to the Minto people. That proposal was funded by the Alaska Humanities Forum in October, 1988. Although my work eventually diverged from land issues in particular, the narrative map project was the basis of my introduction to Peter.

Robert Charlie organized a meeting at Peter John's house one evening early in November 1988. I had never been to a Native village in Alaska and I was very shy when we first walked into Peter's home. He was sitting on the floor with Elsie at his side. He struck me as gruff but supremely confident, and I was electrified by his sheer presence.

I struggled with a backpack full of unnecessary provisions as I awkwardly extended my hand to greet him.

"What you gonna do," he joked, "move into my house with all your gear? Well, that's O.K. White man way. He'll study anything he gets his hands on. Now. What?"

I was too intimidated to enjoy his humor.

Soon it was clear that Peter expected to begin work that night. Robert and Bill helped get the session off the ground, then left to attend a dinner dance at the community hall. Now I was alone with Peter and Elsie. I had a preliminary list of Athabaskan place names and their English glosses. As I began my queries, Peter John proved an experienced and witty interviewee. He was patient with my ques-

tions and seemed to find my discomfort humorous indeed. But then he threw me. He pointed at the recorder and abruptly told me to "shut it."

"What I wanna know is what're you doing here?" he asked.

I began a lengthy explanation of the mapping project.

"No, no, no. What I mean is, what are you doing here? I don't know how to help you if you just beat around the bush. We could sit around and yap all night but it wouldn't mean a thing if we don't say how we really feel."

I realized that Peter was trying to peek behind the mask of my intellectual curiosity about place names and their stories. I sensed that he could see a deeper need for some guidance on how to live a meaningful life amidst the chaos and fragmentation of the modern world. I risked admitting as much to him and he responded with a knowing nod.

"Well, "he said, "I'm just an old Indian. Only went to the third grade . . . but I think I know little bit about life itself. You want to learn something, I don't hold nothing back from nobody that comes through my door. But you gotta have your heart open or you wouldn't get anywhere with it"

I explained my ambivalence about the anthropological enterprise and he suggested that if our work together helped to get more Native perspectives into classrooms and books then it was a form of public service. So began a dialogue that has continued to this day. I still struggle to follow his example in honestly confronting the challenges of life and surrendering to the higher life of the spirit. Peter still catches me "holding back" in my heart. And I am no more comfortable as an anthropologist than I was back then.

It is a bit ironic that I came looking for a non-Western spiritual teaching and wound up working with an Athabaskan elder who espouses biblical teachings. I had long associated the Bible with the excesses of spiritual pride and hypocrisy. But through my work with Peter I had the opportunity to revisit the Bible and see with new eyes. For Peter the Bible carries a shimmering vitality and immediacy that I find refreshing. By relating the Bible's principles to his people's Old Ways, I believe Peter has taught us a lot about the importance and profound wisdom of Athabaskan culture. And I wonder now if it will be the interpretive vigor of those outside the religious mainstream who, like Peter John, teach us again about the Bible's perennial relevance to human experience.

Like many others who seek out Peter for guidance, I'm often frustrated by the feeling that my understanding doesn't quite measure up to the gifts that have been

offered me. No stranger to doubts and confusion, Peter offers pieces of the puzzle that he has gleaned from a lifetime of experience and reflection. It may take us all a lifetime to really understand what he knows: "Each one of us has got to put the pieces of the puzzle together ourselves."

His goal in publishing this work is to share what he takes to be the eternal wisdom of the Holy Spirit as manifest in Athabaskan culture before the arrival of the written word, and to show how the Spirit has guided his own life. His love and concern extends to all people everywhere, whom he takes to be the equal before God. His views are often difficult to understand and sometimes even harder to accept. He strongly condemns what he sees as the profound spiritual malaise of "today's world," which is another way of saying the "White man way." He is steadfast in his belief that the antidote to these ills lies in a committed relationship with God through the Holy Spirit, and by the particular means given us by our separate cultural and linguistic traditions. He challenges people to take a hard look at the "life they been living" so that they might become more loving and wise, and he believes that anybody with an open heart can be guided by the clear, still voice of the Holy Spirit.

As you read these pages, I ask you to remember that these are spoken words rendered in print; they were uttered as a spiritual gift. At the same time, because they were spoken by a man for whom English is a second language, and for whom the Bible was an introduced doctrine, the terms he uses may be deceptively familiar, while his intended meaning quite different. For example, when Peter speaks of the Holy Spirit, it is worth recalling that within traditional Athabaskan culture the natural world is suffused with Spirit. Spirit is not something distinct from the ordinary world but the very foundation for it.

The miraculous occurrences described in the Bible strike many today as apocryphal or metaphorical: for people like Peter, such events are still happening and are signs of God's eternal presence. The traditional world of his people regarded communication between humans and animals as natural, a view which gave credence to biblical accounts of animals as harbingers of the spirit. Moreover, there are numerous descriptions in the oral record of shamans returning to life, which Peter regards as a cross-cultural parallel to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I could list many other instances in which Peter's Athabaskan roots reveal themselves in his interpretation of Christianity, but let it be enough to say that his words require careful "reading between the lines," for behind their elegant simplicity we may find profound clues to the puzzle of our existence.

-David J. Krupa

The Gospel According to Peter John



Photo courtesy of Colleen Lazenby

We All Have a Right to Know

Each and every one of us has a right to understand what it is that we live for. In order to do that, we need to turn as close as we can to the true meaning of the Bible. Many people have a little prayer now and then, but that's not it. The real meaning goes a lot deeper than that. It's what is in your heart that counts; nobody can give you the answers to your life. The truth is there for you to find, and truth is something that we're going to carry to the end.

Most of the real meaning behind the Bible is not something preachers are going to talk about. You see you have to read between the lines to find what it means. That's very important. Now I've made speeches before the people a lot of times. But you have to understand the meaning *behind* the words in order to understand what we're talking about. We can go deeper than words. By really understanding the truth about life.

I'll be talking a lot about the Spirit because that is the true power in our lives. There are two Spirits in this world and human beings have to choose. The Holy Spirit is God's Way—the only true comfort in this world. But the Evil Spirit will always be there to lead you away from God, tempting you with an easy life. If you really want the Holy Spirit living in you, it's important to understand where it comes from and what it means.

We have to learn the True Way. It's not something you're going to get in school. And you wouldn't get it from your family either. People love their family and friends too much to really give them the *truth*, because the truth hurts more than anything else. The truth is the only way real way to live. It doesn't make life easier, but I think that all people should understand that living according to truth of the Bible is one of the greatest gifts a human being will ever receive.

The Bible contains a lot of things that we need to know, and as I'll talk about it here, part of it is given to the Athabaskan culture. That has never been written before now. But you have to remember that we can have it on tape, we can talk about it and everything, but then it doesn't mean anything unless you're honest to him. We don't know it, but the Lord loves us for what we are, and what we try to be.

We'll be talking about today's world: how the people act, what they follow, things like that. I think it's very important to understand why people today look for the worst part of each other's lives. They don't look for the good. We have to ask why is it that the bad part is all that really matters to them. The reason is that they think they can get the best of that person by looking at their faults. So they end up missing the good example in every life. That's the way it is with people today. I don't think it's right, but then we can't stop it.

I think the only way we can understand these problems is to look at the kids today. Children. Dope. Drinking. Smoking. People commit suicide. You see them stagger around when they walk. Many, many, years ago you didn't see old people using eyeglasses or walking sticks or anything. Nobody had false teeth. So it's got a lot to do with changes in our life in this world.

You see all those plants and animals? Does it mean anything to you? The Native people live on that. Many years ago the plants were used for medicine. And the

animals eat those plants. The plants and animals were healthy and so were the people. Now today people explode bombs and spill gas. Everywhere you look there's cities, mining, and pollution. Everything gets contaminated. You see the same thing happening to the children today. It's not right and it shows how far we've moved away from God's way. The children are contaminated by today's world. We have to understand that God made this world and everything that's in it, but it's human beings just like you and me that are destroying it. We destroy because we don't know what it is that we live for.

Before the mining here in Alaska, the land was beautiful. People used to come from all over—Tanana, Rampart, Stevens Village, Nenana, Chena—to hunt, fish, and trap. It was full of animals. But ever since the mining along the Chatanika River, Goldstream Creek, and Ester, the Minto Flats have never recovered. The lakes have filled in with silt from the mining. In 1929 I saw nineteen caribou drown when they got stuck in silt in the middle of one of the Minto lakes. I can hardly talk about it—human beings destroying this land. As soon as the white man hit Alaska he was digging it up.

Now you can take this Bible and you can go through it in nothing flat, but you wouldn't understand the true meaning of what is there. That's the puzzle. Because if you don't understand the true meaning of what this Bible holds in your heart, you'll be all mixed up. That's why people are so destructive. Now, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self. What does that mean? The connection there is that God was trying to tell you that your human neighbor is the same as yourself. You have to realize that the connection is love. How many times in your daily life do you slam the door in your neighbor's face? Or how many times you walk away mad? That's the question you have to ask yourself; why did I act that way?

Every time you act against another you act against yourself. The ten commandments are very important to understand because they contain the true meaning of what God wants us to know. Thou shalt not covet. What does that mean? Don't wish to another person's body. You look upon another and you commit adultery already. I know what that means. But you have to find out what it means. Yourself. Through life.

The thing that I'm trying to do here is enable people to understand the true meaning of what this Bible is. The way I understand it is that we all experience the same things through different channels. The Bible is the word of God *provided* you read it the right way and have your heart open. This world belongs to God. We forget that life is a gift. He can take it back any time he chooses. It's pretty hard to understand that part. So, what we try to do is live a Christian life knowing that what happened two thousand years ago is still going on today.

Many times I talk about money: Judas sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. He *sold* Jesus for thirty pieces of silver and that can happen today too. So we have to understand that we have to live the message of the Bible right now, today.

Now I'm not a preacher and I don't say I'm one. You ought to know that. But I get communion every day—from heaven. We have to understand that there is something at stake in our lives. Right now it's up to you to understand the truth about what I'm telling you. When somebody talks in this way, you have to understand that either you're going to give in—surrender—or you won't get anything out of it. That's the only way you're going to get it.

I can't force true Christianity down your throat. No way. You've got to do it yourself. I won't be around to knock on your door if you do something wrong and say, "Hey, you've done wrong." I wouldn't say that, it's none of my business. But the thing is this: If you want to take care of yourself, if you want to understand the meaning of your life, if you want to live the true Christian life, the Way is there. You can't buy it from anybody. Nobody is going to give it to you.

In this world today, everything is for sale. But you're not going to buy heaven for anything. If you had a million dollars you're still not going to get anywhere in this world. No way. You'll just go down and party, maybe dance all night. Don't ask me, "How do you know?" We all get tempted by easy living. But you can't live on good times. You wouldn't learn anything. If you look at it, the way we're supposed to handle ourselves is really complicated. We can always find the True Way, but the truth is not easy to live.

This is the first time in my life that I've talked about the Holy Spirit. And I *live* by it. I know what I'm talking about. I'm ninety-five years old, and what my wife and I went through nobody goes through today. We raised up fourteen kids—some of them were ours and some were adopted. We lost eleven of them through sickness, disease, and a hard life in the brush. I pretty near lost my wife three times. Now she's living with me. I pretty near lost my life, sick, and yet I'm here today. I don't take any kind of medicine. I don't take anything, but the blessing of God the Father Almighty. To obtain that you have to be true to him. You don't have to buy anything. But you have to be true in your heart. Understand that. I can't say that life is okay, because I lived through the hardest part of my life trying to be a Christian. The suffering is something we have to live through. And that's not easy. Most preachers don't really know how to help you—God himself is the only Way.

The Early Days

I went to St. Marks mission in Nenana. The year was 1909. At that time they taught me how to pray the "Lord's Prayer" and other things concerning the Christian life. I didn't know that the Lord was going to choose me to be a Christian, I just started out like anybody else. I went to the third grade in the mission school, but the things that happened there didn't amount to much. We had to work all the time—cutting wood, hauling, and getting grub—so there wasn't much time for school. I stayed there for five years because my mother died when I was just a little baby, two years old, and my father raised me even though he was crippled. In those days we traveled, traveled, traveled in order for us to have things to eat. Pretty tough life.

My father never drank. I never heard him swear; I never heard him gossip about anybody. He drank just one drink a month when he caught cold. He didn't even know what it was. My father warned me not to wish for anything because it's evil to wish for things. Selfishness is what it is. It's taken me a long time to really understand what he meant. He didn't know English, but he did understand love for the True One.

The important part to understand is that Native people in those days never said that they believed in God the Father Almighty. But the way they lived was true to the Christian life. The mission people didn't see that. If you saw any old people working out there, you never passed them up. You always had to help them. You see when you do that, the old people that you help pray in their heart for your life. As you go, you live and understand the true meaning of what they are doing for you. You don't know they are praying, but by watching you, they're praying in their heart. We all need that blessing. As I see it that's very important in Christian life today.

As I was growing up as a little boy, I was taught by people that didn't even know how to read and write. But these people gave me a lot of things that I still live on today. And I didn't get that from college; I got it from people that *lived* through it. People who really understand life. A long time before the white people came, the Native people understood that there was going to be trains, automobiles, all of it. How they knew these things I don't know, but they talked about it long before it happened.

In the old days people knew how to survive. The people I'm talking about killed bears with a spear. They were so fast they could club a fox with a stick. They hunted with a bow and arrow. I saw people who could run down a moose in the summertime. Hardy people. All this not for sport but because their life *depended* on it. Our great grandfathers used to paddle all over these rivers. They paddled all

the way down to Tanana and back from Old Minto to get groceries. They hunted and fished on the flats during the summer. As I was growing up, a few families worked a fishwheel, cutting 500-600 fish a day. Even then we didn't have enough for winter. We saved *everything*—heads, eggs, all of it.

When the berries started to get soft the people headed all the way up around Fort Yukon for caribou. They walked the whole way, coming back with caribou skins, sinew, and meat. Some were packing babies, everybody moving all the time. In the winter, people started out on snowshoes at seven in the morning and didn't come back until eight at night. Seven days a week—you take a day off and your family has got nothing to eat. Sometimes you wouldn't get anything for ten days and still you had to keep on. People were always busy making snowshoes, sleds, canoes, fishwheels, and dipnets. There was always something to be done.

When the white people came, the Native people cut wood, hunted, and trapped for money to buy grub, but even then you couldn't depend on it. People always had to know how to make it without money. Otherwise they might starve. Pretty tough life.

Now, the Athabaskan culture contains a lot of things that nobody understands today. The Athabaskan culture says that if you catch rabbits or grouse or anything, never hide it from your friends. Always show it, always share it with the other people. That's the Athabaskan culture. If you hide from somebody, that means that you're stingy. Selfish. So by sharing it with the people you're giving what you got to help anybody that needs it. That's the culture.

People had to move all the time just to eat. By moving they don't clean all the animals out of one area. When they did that, sometimes nine, ten families moved together, following the chief of the village. This man would see that the old people are taken care of for meat, whatever they want, he'd never let them go. Because they're the ones that people depend on. The old people have power. And the Bible says listen to the old people. And that's the way they worked it. You can't pass somebody and say that it's okay, they'll get it for themselves.

Today is altogether different. The white man's way has taken over, and it's something that we have to really understand. There's nothing wrong with the white people. Their way is right about some things, wrong about others, just like anybody else. But the thing is this: the Native people are losing their culture just on account of that.

When we first came to the St. Marks Mission we were not supposed to talk in our Native tongue. We're not supposed to do things the Athabaskan way. The thing the white people had in mind was that they didn't want us to get mixed up with the

medicine people, or witchcraft, whatever you want to call it. And I don't blame them. Today's world is altogether different, so the meaning of the medicine people has changed. That's what we have to watch out for. The witchcraft, witch doctor, there are a lot of dangerous things connected with life when you go that route. It's not an easy thing to do, but you have to understand the Spirit in this world, whether or not it's false. And if you don't find out you're dealing with a false power then you're in trouble. False prophets are something that the Bible says you have to watch out for. A lot of us don't understand false prophets. But the Indian form of false prophets I understand. Not fully, but part of it.

Many years ago, before the white people came around, the Native people used to understand the meaning of the Christian life, even Sunday. Nobody understood the calendar but they marked a willow and they put a notch in the willow every day; when they got to Sunday they put a cross. And people used to sing hymns. To keep track of Sundays people used to get together and sing hymns, but the most important way of life was that they prayed every day in the Native tongue. When Sunday came, people used to get moose and they would pick out the best meat for Sunday potlatch-party. In order for them to do that they took the best meat they had and cooked it. They made ice cream and everything in the Indian way. The animal songs they sang were connected with the Christian life as it is translated into the Athabaskan way of life. If you understand the meaning of Christianity you'll see the connection.

Bet'oxwdilt'a yenhk'o' means the Holy Spirit. And *Tr'oxut'eh yenhk'o'* means the Evil Spirit. These two spirits are what the Athabaskan Indians really try to understand. The Evil Spirit is just as powerful as the Holy Spirit in this world. We don't want to get mixed up in the Evil Spirit because it's dangerous; it leads us into darkness. That's where the witchcraft comes in. These things aren't just superstition but we have to understand what it is. The Holy Spirit is the *true one*, God gives you that, but we have to understand the truth about what it is. This doesn't mean that you can go next door and say you've got the Holy Spirit. Or you go to church so you've got the Holy Spirit. It doesn't turn out that way. You have to understand God as he is, because the things that God is going to give you are something for you to understand. Not something you can just make out yourself. There are a lot of things that are connected with the deeper meaning of our life on this earth, and the Spirit is the only Way for us to learn the truth.

I'm not a preacher and I don't say I'm one. If I tried to lead even one person I'd be going the wrong way altogether. If God gave me what I have then he can confirm that I'm a true one. That's up to him to say it. Not up to me. There were a lot of hard times in my life and there are a lot of things that aren't right that we have to get mixed up with before we learn.

When Jesus was crucified on that cross he did it for us so that each and every one of us understands that his suffering was meant to teach us the meaning of our suffering. We have to suffer because we don't trust in God the Father Almighty. We try to live on somebody else—the false power of this world.

What I understand today I know through the Holy Spirit, and that came long after I left the mission. It finally came to light that I had to endure many things at the mission that weren't right in order to understand what I'm living for now. So I don't blame anybody for it. I found out that I wasn't really fighting the church but the darkness of this world. Evil. This was what God brought to light through the things I had to go through at that stage. I left the mission after five years. I guess they said I was too crazy or mischievous, I don't know!

Learning the Lord's Prayer in My Native Tongue

One night I woke up and somebody was telling me, "Pray in your Native tongue—the Lord's Prayer." So I tried it, and I fouled up. I didn't go through with it. I said, "I can't do it." And it said, "Try again." So I did and the next time I went through it. You see that's the way God deals with people. A lot of us don't like the advice we get from other people. I know a lot of white people are like that—they don't like to get advice from anybody. They think they know it all, but that's not God's Way. There are a lot of things in life that we have to understand, and by getting advice from somebody else, you're going to get the best. A person's pride gets in the way of that right there. You don't know it, but in later years you'll find out that you've made mistakes. But then it'll be too late.

The thing is that the Native people understand God but they have to do it in their own tongue. Our language is very important to the Athabaskan way of life for this reason: I don't care what part of the world you go to, the language that God gave us is what we are supposed to worship him with. That's the True Way of worshipping God, and that's been lost mostly since the white people came and tried to keep people from living the Athabaskan way. The way I pray is that if I get blocked in English, I have to switch to the Indian way. Sometimes it goes the other way, and I have to switch to English. The thing to understand is that when we pray, the words we use have *power*.

When Jesus made the sea calm during that storm, those words had power. The same thing is available today *if* we understand. But don't think that just because you pray, your prayers will be answered as you expect it. God always hears you, but he will help you as you need it, not as you want it. That's the way the Holy Spirit works. So you see the true Christian life is not something that is written—it has to do with *living* the true life.

The White People Should Understand

God is more wise than any man on earth. And he knows how this world is put together. And what we think is that science can explain this and that. That's what we say. But God is the one that made it to begin with. Not a human being. So we want to get this in: what we think is not the same as what *is*. A lot of times in my life I've found out that the Christian life is not as simple as we read it. It's up to us to live it the way God wants us to.

How did you get into this world? That's the question you have to ask yourself. The white people talk about Israel over in the Middle East. Now that's where they claim Jesus was born. But how did the Athabaskan Indians get the message that we try to hold up in our lives today? That's the question we have to answer. When God put Adam and Eve on this earth, he told Adam and Eve not to eat off that certain tree. Did he mean just that tree? No. He meant that not everything is suitable for a human being to use. A woman is not supposed to eat bear. Why? Bears hibernate, so children born to a woman who eats bear will be slow-minded. Women don't eat beaver. Why? It's a water animal. These things are important to understand. Now, where did the Athabaskan Indians get that? We have to understand that God left every culture with their own way of understanding what God wants us to know. And I think the white people ought to know that God gave us all a gift that's not the same everywhere, but the stories in the Bible are connected with the Athabaskan culture.

What did the white people leave behind when they left Europe to come to America? What did God give them? God gave something to everybody that he put on earth. And why is it that the white people left the things that God gave them? Money. Greed for the things of this world is what did it. You know what they left there in Europe? God put every one of us on this earth for a reason. Did he just drop us on this earth and say, "Oh, you go ahead and make your own living."? When your grandfather heard about the gold in Alaska and the United States—easy living—he dropped everything that God gave him. By leaving it over there the white people lost some of what they need to understand the truth about how to live on this earth. That's why the white people don't understand us today. They lost the true meaning of what God gave them.

And it doesn't end there. When the church came out of Egypt, that was the True Church. But what did the people do with the altar? They left it, just like a piece of furniture. Then the church turned around and started to ask for money, money, money. It's the people themselves that did it, and one of the biggest mistakes human beings ever made was right there.

Where in the Bible does it say to advertise God's name for money? Nowhere. When Jesus gave that hook to Peter, he told Peter to go down to the lake and throw that hook in. And he said that Peter should open the mouth of the first fish he caught and take out the money in there. He said, "You pay taxes for you and me." He didn't leave himself out. And what do we do? Preachers don't pay taxes, the church doesn't pay taxes. We're working against God there.

I think that in order for us to understand the true meaning of what our life is supposed to be we should understand both sides. Now your grandparents left what God gave them over in Europe because they heard such good news from America that they left it over there and took off. Maybe they did the right thing. We don't know. Time will tell.

What I'm trying to say is that these things make a lot of difference because people all over the world are doing the same thing today. We think we're better than God. Well we better adjust ourselves to the truth or we're going to lose it all.

We have to blame the Evil Spirit for leading the white people away from the gifts God gave them. It's not the people themselves. It's the Evil Spirit that did it. That's the one we have to blame. We can't blame God for it. The Evil Spirit is going to try to hang on to the people that he leads away. So we can't blame them. We have to blame the Evil Spirit for that; he's the one that will try everything to get people to worship the wrong god.

Now I'm not an expert. But I find that everything they talk about in the Bible is connected with the Athabaskan culture. Jesus was born from a woman. The Athabaskan Indians don't say that Jesus was born from a woman. The one I talk about is the person found under a tree. We call him *ch'e'ethchenayex xoghiyonenh*. Now everything the Bible says about Jesus is what he did. When he grew up as a little boy, the animals were just like pets to him. But he didn't know the real way of the Athabaskan way of life. He didn't understand that. So his Grandma had to show him what he had to know. And he's the one that made the rabbit song.

This is the song he made. When he sang this song, his Grandmother wondered, "Why is that you sing a rabbit song and yet you never bring rabbits home?" So one day he told his Grandma, "We going to move." He said there were no more rabbits where he set snares. So his Grandma said yes, we'll move. He never told his Grandma what he got or what he did. Never. He kept it to himself. And his Grandma didn't know anything about where he was going until they got there. He got

a big cache and just loaded them in there. Everything. Fox. Lynx. All the animals. Any kind. That's what he had there. That's why he wanted his Grandma to move. Animals were nothing to him. Chickens. Anything he caught. That's the reason he made the song. So you didn't know anything about (I don't call him Jesus, I call him *ch'e'ithchenayex xoghiyonenh*) a person that was found under a tree. That's the name of it.

When the man found him, he was poor, didn't have anything, never caught anything. So when he went out, he heard a baby crying. He went towards that and found the baby under a tree. He put the baby in his hood and took him home. As he was going home, they caught two bear. He had never done that before. So he thought to himself if that kid, the baby he found, got something that he needed. So that's how it went.

And I think when Jesus was twelve years old he went in the temple with the smartest people there and yet they couldn't get him stuck. So that's the kind of a person he was. That story is found in the Athabaskan culture. (John 1989:21-22)

The first Christmas tree. There's a story about that. God put Adam and Eve in the garden and he told them not to eat off a certain tree. That story is connected with the Athabaskan way of life. The Athabaskan Indians have a story connected with Job—the man in the Bible who did a lot of things wrong and lost all his luck. There is an Athabaskan song about how he used the crooked tail of a mallard duck to hook back his luck. In that song he cries and asks for forgiveness from God. His luck changes because he was honest to God. I think the thing that we try to understand is how these stories got into the hands of the Athabaskan culture. We can't find out because we don't know where it came from.

We try to understand life through this Bible. That's the white man way. Bible. But the white man hasn't succeeded in getting to the bottom of what he tries to preach. You see the Bible was written down by human beings so it's not all right; we have to know just how to read it. That's what I mean. If we understand the truth about what went on two thousand years ago, you'll see the light of what is in this book. White man, Indian, I don't care what nationality that person is, he is capable of understanding the True Way.

I say that we all have a spirit. All the human beings have a spirit. But what kind of spirits are these? That's something for us to understand. There are a lot of things that have gone on in my life that nobody would understand. Because nobody talks about what is *behind* our actions. People don't look deeply enough into life.

I crawled into a cave with a wounded bear. I made shavings and tied them on the end of a willow. I kept it burning as I was crawling in the cave; I just went right up to him and shot as he was looking at the fire. But my shot went low and he came after me, so I had to kill him with an ax! Over the years I shot four black bears with a .22 rifle. Every one of them died within five feet of me. I killed moose with a .22. I saved my life from a moose that charged me by hanging on a tree limb and shooting a 30.06 with one hand, just like it was a pistol. I shot two ducks on the fly with one .22 shell. I walked right up to a fox on the side of the road. I walked right up to a grizzly bear and waved him off. How did I do these things?

I'm not a brave man—I didn't do these things that way. I did it with the power of the Holy Spirit. And where did I get it?

Each and every one of us has to understand that we earn our gifts through living true to God only. Just as well as you earn what you learn at a university. If you can't learn anything from the university, why go there? Now maybe that's the way I was thinking when I got kicked out of third grade!

The people at the mission didn't understand the truth about the Holy Spirit. I had to learn about life on my own. Now I got out of school after five years, just as I got to third grade. I found out I couldn't write my name. I couldn't read. After I got out of the school, I bought a dictionary, books and papers, and I taught myself. I didn't have a teacher. About forty years ago, I went to the school down at the village. And there were two teachers there. And I was there for one month. I wanted to see how far I went in my education by myself. I passed twelfth grade on my own.

Now maybe those teachers were no good, I don't know. They're teachers. They ought to understand what they were testing me for. So that's how we learn. You have to learn things by somebody. But a lot of things that you're going to the university for are not the kind of knowledge I mean. I'm talking about things that brought me and my wife up this far. You don't get wisdom from a schoolhouse. People say, "I work, work, work. I gotta make money." That's okay. Nothing wrong with that. But at least we can think about the example of the Bible sometimes.

I've said that the Bible is connected with the Athabaskan way of life. Right on the Yukon river there is a story about the first man that came down the Yukon river to name the animals and all the game on the river where he traveled. We call him *Ch'etitadghanenh*. He was the first man that ever made the canoe. And if you look at what I'm talking about, you'll see that the Bible was translated into the Athabaskan way of life, with the raven as the person that named the animals. Now this is a long time before any human being ever set foot on the Yukon River.

There is another story about the first Christmas tree, and that comes from long before the white people ever came around. It started many, many years ago. A man and a wife went out caribou hunting. Every morning when they got up, there was caribou meat missing from the cache. This man told his wife that he was going to find out why the meat was missing. He said he was going to stay up all night try to find what was wrong. So he stayed up under the cache where that meat was.

All of a sudden he saw somebody coming out of the brush. A stickman, *ntr'el'enenh*, we call him. And he went right to the cache. That man reached up and he was going to get that meat. The stickman hid under the cache and grabbed him around the waist. He just flopped. Fell down, weak. The man said, "I'm not here to harm you. I'm going to help you. So if you want anything, you let me know. Don't be afraid of me." This *ntr'el'enenh* didn't understand him. He didn't even know what he said. Although he made a sign to him and finally he got on to what this man was saying. So he took him to where they were staying and he fed him. They gave him some meat but he wouldn't eat that. He picked at a certain part of the caribou meat. He took that and he cooked it himself. What the Athabaskan Indians call *ch'et'ath uzra'*—medicine—that's what he used to cook that meat with.

So this stickman stayed with the couple all fall until it was getting late in the season and he wanted to go home. So the man got up one morning and he told this *ntr'el'enenh*, "You wanna go home, you go home. I've done what I can for you, and that's good enough". So this stickman, he turned around to this man, "I'm going to go home, but you've got to go part way with me." So he told his wife he's going to go with him just a little ways. That man wondered, "Why does he want me there"? But he kept on with him. As they were walking, they came to a tree—a spruce tree. The spruce tree was an ordinary tree. No different. That *ntr'el'enenh* turned to his companion and said, "You see this tree? Next year during this same month you come to this tree. Whatever you see on that tree is yours."

That's where the Christmas tree came in. So he didn't pay much attention to what that man said. He was just wondering why he said that. The stickman also said, "If you come here and find that tree dried up you'll know that I died". So the next year he and his wife went back to the same place after they got through caribou hunting. He said, "I'm going to go to that tree, the one that man told me to check. I want to see why he wanted me to go to that tree."

So he went to the tree. He was really surprised at what he saw. You've seen the Christmas trees, the icicles on there, in today's world? White man way. At that time those branches were just hanging down with beads. That's what the Indians use for money, many, many years ago. It was just full with that. And that man told him to take everything from that tree that belongs to him. So he did that. He took it. For many years they went there. Same, same.

Until one day, he heard an awful lot of noise. He was coming back to that tree. People were dancing, hollering. He just wanted to know what happened. When he came to the tree, it was dead. But the beads under it were piled up a couple of feet deep. He got to be a really big man—a chief. So that's where the Christmas tree came from. And you say that's only a white man's way.

Animals

If I'm going to talk about animals I better start from the beginning. God made this world and everything that's in it. And he put the animals on this earth so that we can live: to understand the true meaning of what lies ahead. Through animals. And that's very important to understand if you're going to live off the country.

You have to understand the animals as they are. It's not like today when we go by the weatherman. But the animals know what kind of weather is ahead. Rain, wind, snow—they understand it. Before a bear hibernates, he knows what kind of winter it's going to be. He'll set his den different ways depending on how cold it's going to be. If he closes the door in tight you'll know it's going to be long and cold. So if you understand the animals you'll understand just exactly what kind of a winter you're going to have by just looking at the bear den and how he takes care of himself. Now, the Athabaskan Indians lived off the country, so they studied the animals just like they were going to college.

That's very important to understand. Today you go to school to learn the things you'll need to survive in this world. Right now the young people live for money. Working for wages, they've got to have that money. In 1910 it wasn't like today's world. White man's world: that's what I call it right now. But in the Indian way of life, you've got to understand the animals. Every meal came from the brush. Today you know how to read and write but if you go out to hunt for a living you'll never make it. So, my Indian way is to be an expert in living off the country. And I have to understand the animals I'm after. I have to be smarter than them in order to survive. And that's what I was taught by the old people that lived many years ago. We should respect what the old people knew.

So that's the way I went. So when you want to start living off the country you have to know just exactly what kind of animals you're after. You have to make sure they don't find you before you find them. And that's pretty hard. They go by smell and they go by hearing more. And when people got game, they used to try to take care of the animals they hunted, making sure they didn't kill them all off in any one area. Because it has everything to do with your life and the life of your kids.

When you see a crane coming back, you watch how he flies and that tells you what kind of weather its going to be. You see a rainbow; the sun is setting a snare for the thunder. That's what the Athabaskan Indians say. The thunder gets caught in the snare, then it cuts off the rain. Cold weather. If you really understand the Athabaskan way of how to observe the weather, you look at the moon, and if it has a star right next to it, then you know that cold weather is coming. The Athabaskan way to observe that is they say that the moon has a dog, and he covers that dog with a blanket.

The beaver can tell you a lot. They understand if the lake is going to dry out. Before it happens, he'll move to another place where there's deeper water. When you see a camp robber landing on the snow it means the warm weather is coming. When the snow cover is going to be heavy, the moose look for places where there's shallow snow. And where do you find shallow snow? In the timbers. Before it snows he will look for those places. So you know the snow is going be pretty high. Caribou. The Athabaskans understand that the caribou won't cross wherever human beings are present. So the highways really cause a lot of trouble. How do they know where to migrate? When they start out, they have to move against the wind. That's how they end up where they need to go.

I think that it's wise to try to understand how this world is set up, even though a lot of us really wouldn't understand the meaning of it. There's too many things . . . how do you tell a white man that a moose has got a song for deep snow? There are a lot of things connected with Athabaskan way that are difficult to understand if your mind is fixed another way. In today's world you need a teacher to learn what you need. My understanding was to listen to people that talked about animals. About rain. About wind. It's all connected with the people that understand this. That's how I know. It's something you can't get today. So when I start to talk about the Athabaskan way, I don't know it all, but I know an important part of it.

Animal Songs

There are bear songs. Moose songs. Caribou songs. Rabbit songs. All these are connected with the Athabaskan way of life. Animal songs are very important because they are what people many years ago lived by. Many of you people are Christian but that's none of my business. I'm not here to find out. I'm here just to tell what I think is right. Animal songs are songs that were made by animals that go through a person and that person is the one that sings it.

These songs are very important to an individual's life because that's the only communication he gets between the Bible and the prayer. So that's the reason why they depend on it an awful lot. It's not connected with the medicine men or any-

thing like that. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about how people used to really get help by trying to understand the true meaning of how God works in the world. "What animal songs?" the white man says, "Don't believe in the animal songs." I hear a lot of white people say that. The Indians don't feel that way.

There is a song that was made by caribou and sung through a person. Many people make the mistake of thinking that these songs come from the medicine people. But the caribou song went through a person and that person sings it in front of the people. The song says:

Two old people were sitting down together in the wintertime before they moved out. These two old people said, "I wonder if we'll ever get anything out of this winter. I don't think we can help ourselves. How are we going to get clothes? How will we eat? How will we do it?" This song is connected with what those two old people were saying. The caribou said, "You'll get what you need from me so don't worry. Just follow the people and you'll get help some way."

The caribou told those two old people and so the song was made for that.

Another song was made to explain that in the Native culture when somebody asked you something you always have to tell the truth. Never tell a lie:

They sent a young fella out to look for caribou tracks. He was out for two nights and he came back; he said he didn't see anything. No track, nothing. So that night, the caribou song went through a man and he sang this song and he got up. He told the people to get that man, the young fella that said that there was no caribou. They sent for him and he came into the house. "Why is it that you lie? Why is that you lie to people? You saw my track. You know that I'm there. Why did you lie?" Right there he broke down.

Always try to tell the truth. Never try to hide yourself; never try to gain anything for yourself. You've got to think of other people. So this song was made for that purpose.

There is the moose song; that song tells story about:

A person caught a bull moose and they hauled it home. It had big horns, and as a woman was hauling it, the horns got tangled up with the brush. She got mad and she swore. That night a man sang this song. He said, "Just because you swore

you're not going to get any more. That's your fault. I tried to give you this meat and you wouldn't take it. All you did was swear."

This song was made for that purpose.

There is eagle songs that tell how the different tribes were brought together:

The people were having a hard time in winter. Snow was too deep—you couldn't find anything. So caribou made this song and sang it through a man. "You have to find eagle tail feathers. That's the only way you're going to be saved." How are you going to find the eagle tail in the wintertime? Full of snow, no place to look for it? But then they found that eagle tail in the winter. That way the people were saved.

Another song we sing talks about:

A young man was making an arrow. He cut that stick and made the arrow. He said, "I won't miss with this arrow. I'll get every caribou I see with it. I'm not going to miss." The caribou came right back at him and said, "I'm not going to feel that arrow you talk about! Why brag about it?" So he didn't get anything.

When somebody dies, we make a song to talk about the things we remember them for. We call these memorial songs *dratax ch'eliga'*:

One song was made for a young man that died. And his brother said, "Who will I replace him with when he passed away? I got nobody left. You see those snags in the middle of the river, those big snags when the riffle goes up and down? When the ice hits it, it covers; but as soon as the ice passes it, it comes up again? I thought my brother was that powerful. Now there's nothing left." That's what the words in that song say.

All these are connected with the things that people say. God put us into this world for us to live by his name. And these songs are connected with that. The only time people use these songs is when they make Indian ice cream. And it's got to be caribou or moose fat before they can sing it. It's not to dance in, it's not to have good time in there. The songs are just a reminder to each other that they live by what God gives them. That's all it amounts to.

If you look deeply enough, you'll see that animals can help us to understand life as it is. Now this is where it gets complicated because as human beings we all have a spirit, and that spirit is not the same as the animals. Animals understand you, but only if you know how to talk with them.

I've said that there are two spirits in this world. One is the Holy Spirit and one is the Evil Spirit. God will communicate through animals, but animals have no spirit: they don't change, they don't act against God. But the Evil Spirit is everywhere and it's not right for a person to live in. The Holy Spirit is something else. You get a gift from God, and there's no other gift that's going to match it. That's the True One. But it's up to you to live the Holy Spirit Way. A lot of people say, "You can't sin if you've got the Holy Spirit." It's wrong. Sure, God is going to protect you from doing something wrong, but the human being has to take care of himself. And if you can't take care of yourself, you're going to sin. You're going to give in to the things that take you away from God.

God will help you at the time you need it. But he'll do it his way. Not your way. That doesn't mean that you're supposed to cry and complain and everything. He's not going to give it to you just as easy as rolling off the log.

God is really something if you trust in him and look for signs. I heard a white man say that, "If you're going to read the Bible, believe in the Bible, don't believe in raven or anything like that." He's wrong altogether. When Noah built the ark, how do you think the animals got into the ark? Without anybody's help? God did it! God put them in the ark. After Noah floated around for forty days, who did he send out to find the land? The dove. And the raven. He can do the same thing today. And if he wants to send a message to anybody, he'll do it through the animals. So if the camp robber is hovering at your door, don't think he's going crazy. If somebody is going to die, an owl will come to tell you who it is. God is sending him to warn you of something. That's the way God works.

Don't think the animals have no sense at all. They're smarter than you in a lot of ways. You're the one that's not listening. You don't even know what the animals are saying to you, and that's something the Native people many years ago *lived* by. You see these are things that the Athabaskan culture holds, but nobody understands it today. I think I'm one of the last people that really understands these things.

I went out hunting with one of my friends, a white man, and we weren't getting any moose. We didn't get anything. And I said to the Holy Spirit, "Where is the moose you were going to give us? You told me I was going to have a big load getting out of here. Where is that load? I've got no load." And I talked in my Native tongue. Just when I said that, a camp robber just got right on top of the tent there. He started to yap away. Answering what I said. He said, "There is moose right straight over there—on the other side of the lake. Go get him." That's what the camp robber was saying. And that white man looked at me pretty hard. He wanted to know what the heck I was saying. Just then a plane flew over and those guys pointed to the other side of the lake. Moose, big one. We went and got him.

Things like that *do* happen. That's hard for us, even the Native people don't understand the true meaning of what is there. It's something. That's connected with this Bible. I said that birds and ducks and other animals have no spirit. That was known before the white people ever came. The Northern Lights. Rainbows. Animals. Everything. The Athabaskan Indians don't worship them. But they watch for signs of God's Spirit. The different signs show them what they need to do in life. How did the Bible get into the Athabaskan culture? We'll never know.

The Holy Spirit and the Evil Spirit

In English I call it the Holy Spirit. In Athabaskan culture the word is *bet'oxwdilt'a yenhk'o' sana'iltanh*. That's something that's hard for anybody to understand the meaning. *Bet'oxwdilt'a* means something we depend on in our life. That's the word we use for God's name. That *bet'oxwdilt'a yenhk'o' sana'iltanh* means "the Holy Spirit came to me." The Evil Spirit can do the same thing to a person. We call that *Tr'oxut'eh yenhk'o'*. That's the one you have to watch out for. Sin is called *Tr'oxut'eh*. *Tr'oxut'eh ghuts'it sru'u* everything from heaven. And that you don't get from this earth. You talk in different tongues. You think it's from God. But it's not. You'll get the Holy Spirit through the preachers, they say. That's not the way the Holy Spirit operates. The Holy Spirit gives you what God wants you to have. And that's the True Way of life. You can do a lot of evil things through the Evil Spirit. You'll have power and you won't even understand until you get old enough to know that you've done wrong. But every day of our life we're acting against God. We're not doing anything good towards him. Because that's the nature of human beings. People are worshipping two gods—the false god of this world and the True One. We don't know which is the Holy Spirit and which is the Evil Spirit, and that makes life really complicated.

I said that preachers aren't going to tell you anything about the Holy Spirit because they don't understand it. They don't know what it is. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God himself. That's the reason why I say, "Don't say, 'God talked to me.'" Things like that. It's not right. God will give you the gift of the Spirit when you're fit to understand him. He wouldn't give it to you right now because without understanding you can do a lot of evil things with it. God knows that. So that's the reason why he's hanging back on you. He's willing to give it to you, but you have to understand that evil will tempt you to turn away from God.

Life is not easy. The reason why is this: Adam and Eve were put in the Garden of Eden and at that time God told them not to eat the fruit off of that tree. Who did it first, Adam or Eve? Eve is the one that did the first. She took that fruit and gave

it to her husband. Of course if you say that right now today all the women will club you over the head! But there's a truth in that. That's where they broke one of God's commandments, and that's really where human beings began to turn away from God on this earth. What life would be like if that didn't happen is something else. We can't live like an animal. We can't. Because animals have no spirit. They don't choose. We want to understand that.

There are so many things connected with what I'm saying right there. *Ch'uneyh k'a teghwl'anh* (you seek health) that's the Indian word for what I'm saying. It means that you want to have a healthy family and you want to have healthy kids—it means that you trust your life to the True Spirit. You have to understand that through God only you're going to get it. In the Bible it says you commit adultery just by looking with desire upon another person. That's the way it happened when that woman took the fruit off that tree. They broke the commandment by desiring things for themselves instead of trusting their life to God. How are we going to get rid of that? We can't get rid of it. The only things left for us to do is to believe God the Father Almighty (*Bet'oxwdilt'a beto'*) and him *only*.

If you've got the Holy Spirit living in *you*, don't think that you're safe. Inside of your heart is what God wants. Not your body. Not your mind. What's there in your heart is what determines the way you're going to live. I say I've got the Holy Spirit living in me. Now, who knows that? Nobody knows. So how do we know the Holy Spirit is living in a person? The only person that'll understand that is a person that has the Holy Spirit living in *him*. *He* only will understand that. It's hard for me to explain, and yet it's here in my heart.

God is a mystery. That means that we have to figure out the meaning of why God brought us into this world. And he gave us the gift of the Spirit to understand him. The Ten Commandments are there for us to follow in our daily life. Now, *if* some other spirit comes into your life and tells you to do this, to do that, it's not God's wish. The Evil Spirit is the one that always tries to say, "Come, come, come, *this* way." We as human beings do everything in this world that's not condoned by God. So you see that to live in the Holy Spirit a person has to fight temptation all the way. I don't mean physically fighting with others, but just that your mind and heart have to be true to God.

The Evil Spirit will always be there to tempt you with an easy life, making you think your life is better off. It isn't. I found out everything the hard way. That's something that I have to live with, and I have to understand the true meaning of why those mistakes are there.

We all try to get the best of each other as human beings. But God's way is altogether the opposite. You can't pray for] anything for yourself if you've got the

Holy Spirit. That gift is I for other people to use. If anybody asks you for prayer that's where you help the person. You're not going to go around and tell people to believe in you because you've got the Holy Spirit. You've got no right to do that. That's *God* himself that they *ask*, not you.

That's the way I am. I don't want anybody to pray to me, and I don't want anybody to praise my name. I'm all alone in this world. And if they want to thank God for help they get through me, they can do it themselves. Because if the Lord is living in me, he's the one that listens to the person that gives I thanks to him.

That's the way it is with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is something that no man has on this earth. *Except* a person that is chosen by God himself. And that's pretty hard to understand. I can't go down the street and tell everybody to follow me, to believe in me, I can't do it. Because I'm just an ordinary human being. And the thing that is very important is to praise his name *only*. Not mine. Nobody else.

I never clap my hands for anybody. I don't care who makes a speech or talks to people. I never clap my hands for that person. The only one I'm going to clap for is God himself.

Whirlwind Came Down Upon Me

When I was eighteen years old, the power came down upon me. I was walking over a hill on snowshoes. It was March—totally calm. The snow was about three feet deep and a whirlwind came down and sucked all the snow away from right in front of me. It just stood there and cleared away the snow all the way to the ground. I just watched it, I didn't know what it would turn out to be.

I didn't know it until years later, but that's when God gave me his blessing. The thing that happened was that my father was going to die about a month later. Flu, a bad one. And God didn't want me to get the blessing my father was going to give me. My father was a medicine man and his blessing was not pure. It was evil. Instead of that, God gave me his blessing. Now what do I mean?

The Athabaskan way is that if a person kills another man, that man's spirit goes into him. And the evil that goes with it penetrates that person and that person has to live with it. Now when people pass away, people die, their wish penetrates the mind of their children because it passes with love—*ch'eghwtsen'*—from parent to child. And that's what my father was going to give me but the Lord it took away.

That's why I'm like this today. That's something nobody would understand. And the Lord had his way of trying to show me the True Way that I needed to live. So

the reason why the whirlwind came down upon me was to separate my soul from the evil. It came down and cleaned me out.

The Medicine People

I'm going to talk about the medicine people—*deye nayi*—we call them. When God had the medicine people before the white people came, what kind of spirit did God use for them? The answer is that God gave them the truth of what to live by. But, like the fallen angel, they turned against God. So that's where it ended up.

The Minto people have a story: Medicine people gathered at a place called *Do-tr'iyhdeltlek Mena'* for a memorial potlatch. They all sat down on a bench. They sat down facing the big lake there. These two loon—*dodzeni*—were on that lake. The medicine men wanted to find out who is the best—who's got power to do certain things. So each of the medicine men gathered there had a song. They each sang a song connected with that loon. The first man started out. When that loon felt the power it just dove. Then it came out wa-a-y on the other side of the lake.

Another man sang his song that he thought was connected with the loon. But it didn't move, so that meant he had no power. So that way they test each other to see who's got the power. Finally, one man sang his song and that loon dove, and then it just floated up, dead. That's how they knew that man had the most power.

In the Bible it tells of how Jesus came back to life. The Athabaskan Indians have stories connected with that. Many years ago a medicine man went out there to the coast for trading. His name was Albert—a big medicine man. When he was about half way back, he died. The person that was with him on the trip buried him. And he told the people that this medicine man died, so he just left him there. And about six months after that, this medicine man that died came back to life. We don't know what happened there, but he came back to life and he had a mark that proved to the people that it was him. I saw that man that came back to life. Albert.

Not all the people get the power. Just certain people. But my wife and I don't follow that; we shouldn't get mixed up in something that we don't understand. That's the reason why I say that today's world is altogether different. It had a purpose at one time but it's no good anymore. That power is not right to wish for because it was turned against God, but at one time it was connected with the Holy Spirit.

Now a lot people know about the big war at Nulato. The big general that conducted that war was named Larroiwhan. The Native people didn't just go out and start that war for no reason. They started it because the Russians were pretty rough on the Native women. My wife's grandmother came here from Nulato because of

that And therefore a lot of the young girls, especially teenagers, left Nulato. That's the reason why the Athabaskan Indians went down there to fight against the Russians. There was a big army post there. Russian soldiers. When the Athabaskan Indians went down there, they picked all the best men for the job.

There were also a lot of medicine men involved in that war. Now I'm against the medicine men in today's world. But God put them here for a reason and they helped win that war against the Russians. How did they do it? You see how a lot of soldiers today use dope and drink? That takes their attention away from what they're doing and they aren't at their best. That's what the medicine men did to the Russians. They used the power to distract them. I remember old people whose great grandfathers were there at the Nulato massacre, and it was pretty rough.

My father and my grandmother were medicine people. My grandmother didn't understand it but she had the tongues and she could tell what was going to happen in the future. She only used it to help others. One time there was starvation among the people. They were coming down to the flats after they had moved into the hills because there was nothing to eat. My grandmother told her son to go down to the creek and cut a hole in the ice for fishing. This was in March, after a whole winter! There shouldn't be any fish in there. Where could those fish have come from?

What happened is that my grandmother needed to relay the message from God to my father because at that time he couldn't understand it. Another time there was starvation. My grandmother and my father didn't have anything to eat. My father walked across the creek and all he could carry was a stick; he was so weak from hunger. There were two chickens and he hit the first one with that stick. That's what saved their life. Now why did it happen that way? It's important to know that God is not going to let you go on your own if you believe in him. He'll be with you always and everywhere. I can go a lot deeper than that.

Elijah dropped the cloth that God gave him as he was taking him to heaven; that cloth turned around before it hit the ground. That's the reason why we have to keep away from medicine men today. Medicine people. We don't want to have anything to do with that cloth that dropped. God gave it to Elijah for a reason—to help people heal. But it worked the other way. The medicine people used it for their own purposes, for their own benefit. So they were working against God with it. That's where the medicine men made a mistake.

Any Christian has to understand whether the spirit they're dealing with is the right one or the wrong one. People say they dance in the spirit—they get drunk in spirit. It's not like that. You've got to watch out. You see Jesus' picture? Did you ever see him laugh? Or smile? Not in those pictures. That's the way he is; he's not satisfied by this world. So when you're dancing around, don't think it's the Holy

Spirit. It's wrong altogether. God doesn't allow that. If God talks to you, he'll talk to you in the way he wants you to understand. You don't jump around and holler your head off—that's not the way.

I've seen a lot of it. I know it's wrong, but I can't say that because it's God that understands these things. He's the one that judges people—not me. One time I attended a prayer meeting, and I was getting really disgusted with what I was seeing and hearing. Somehow I could see that they weren't true to God. I asked the Holy Spirit if this was what I was supposed to be seeing. He said, "Yes." Just remember the Bible talks about the 240 priests dancing around the altar. That's what I was seeing, same thing.

Anti-Christ—that's a white man's word. That's what we have to watch out for. A lot of people don't understand the true meaning of what the Evil Spirit is, so they don't understand the truth about what we try to put towards the people. The Evil Spirit—or *Tr'oxut'eh yenhk'o* in the Indian way. When you find it in your life, it's up to you to *resist* it. God will watch you, but how you will resist it is up to you and God.

I can't pray for somebody and say, "You need help". I can't do it. Sure, I can pray for somebody, but I have to ask the Holy Spirit to confirm what I try to do for people. Now, because the Holy Spirit is living in me, he's the one that is going to do the work—not me. He's there, but it's up to *us* to face the temptations in life.

God put the medicine people on this earth before there were doctors and nurses. He gave them special gifts for them to help the people. To guide them. How it became witchcraft is something else. If you look at the history of human beings, you'll see just what happened. The answer is right there in the Bible. Those people started to see that they could use what God gave them to do wrong. They started to use it to get up on the people and turn against God.

The Bible says to watch out for the false prophets. Well, the medicine people became the Indian version of that. Just like the TV. evangelists you see today. All they're after is money, money, money. Or they make you donate to get in the church. Well there's nothing wrong with that, *provided* you know what you're buying! But God's gifts are not up for sale. And a lot of white people think that message doesn't apply to today's world. Well just look around.

The reason why I'm like this is that a lot of us people make mistakes in this world. Now, we can't say we believe in God the Father Almighty and then do something else. God doesn't condone that. God doesn't help you to sin or to do something wrong. If you backslide that's your hard luck, not God's. You can't

blame anything on God. God will try his best to keep you on the right track, but it's your mind and heart that are turning away.

The people that are important for you learn from and understand are the people that are ordained from heaven. They are hard to find. These people get ordained from heaven and get blessed with the Holy Spirit. They're only the ones that you have to listen to. Nobody else.

The question you always have to ask yourself is, "What's behind the things that we see happen?" A lot of people don't ask that. They like things the way they are. Okay, if that's the way they want to live, then let them live.

You think there's nothing wrong in this world? Nice and peaceful, you get a little money now and then; that's not it. Life is just as important and you'll never be satisfied in this world. If you want to be healthy, you want to understand the way you really are, you've got to be strong enough to face the truth.

God will give you enough so that you'll understand what you're facing in life. I'm for the Christian life and witchcraft is not in my life. It's forbidden because I've seen it and I know what it is. There is no use in fooling around with it. The Holy Spirit is hard to understand. Even as much as I pray, my wife doesn't have the Holy Spirit. She is Holy. How that is I don't know. The Evil Spirit can't get to her. And the Evil Spirit can't get to me. Provided I follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ch'eghwtsen' — The True Love

When we say love, what do we mean? Love is the white man's word, but it has too many different meanings. I use *ch'eghwtsen'* the Athabaskan word for true love. Pure. It's powerful, that word is powerful.

When God gave the staff to Moses, he gave it with love. We call that walking stick *gesr* and the Native people used to have a stick similar to that which they used to find water. That's why when Moses hit that rock the water just shot out. That water was to help the people. That's love. *Ch'eghwtsen'* was in that stick. When Moses hit the Red Sea, the sea split and left dry ground for them to cross. Moses did a lot of powerful things with that stick. That's how powerful true love is. That's the reason why when we say love, we better mean it God's way. Because his way is the best way.

Me and my wife have been together for seventy years. We have to live according to this Bible right here. This is what the Athabaskan Indians call *ch'eghwtsen'*. Now how have we come this far together? You can't just say, "I'm going to get

married," and then slam the door and out you go. It's not that easy. We have to believe in something. And we have to believe in the right one. The True One. Sure. Seventy years together is not peaceful. It's not easy. But then you have to put up with it. That doesn't mean you're going to go all that time without any argument or anything like that. No. It's something you have to understand that two people can't get along in this world unless they really make up their mind that they're going to do it.

Now, a few years back, some people gave us a big party for our wedding anniversary. That's the first one I ever got in sixty-five years. And I said then that people should understand that I'm not fit to be treated in that way. Because I believe in God the Father Almighty and I am going to worship him only. As human beings we're not fit to celebrate ourselves. The Indian way is not to brag. If you do, you're not part of the True One. That's the way I am. That's the way we are—my wife and I.

I don't know if I have a right to say this, but that woman is something. She's done everything in her life to satisfy the family. It's not easy to describe a person for what they are. She cuts fish, she does everything. She made a fish trap in the winter for fish. She did all these things. She set snares for rabbits. She never talked about any good time but our living together. That's the only thing that's important to her. She shot a moose once, six-mile. She's not very strong. After all, she prit-near died three times but that's one woman that never gives in. Never scared of nothing. A moose came right up to her. About maybe six feet from her. No shells. I was away from her for about 200 feet—more than that. And the moose, it came right up behind her. Big bull moose with horns. She hollered at me and she said she got no more shells. I ran across the flat as he was going to charge again. I shot him right there. That's how close. She never say that I can't do it, I can't make it. She never say that. She agree with everything, even if it's hard. We move where there was no trail. I had to walk ahead of dogs to get something for my kids. Never complained. Never. That's the kind of a woman I've got. I'm very proud of her, for what she is. (John 1989:52)



Photo by David J. Krupa

My wife and I got married in the old Indian tradition. And I don't think anybody today would go that route. Of course we didn't date, but the blessing was given to us through my wife's grandmother. Her grandmother is the one that raised her. She's the one that blessed us when we were put together. And that blessing is power—*ch'eghwtsen'*. She said, "*Bet'oxwdil t'a nelo' ughwtonh*," which means, "We give you our blessing."

The thing is that I paid for that blessing. Not the way you pay cash or anything like that, but what I gave them was my effort. When they put her and me together, I found out that I had to live for something. And that occurred to me right there and then. That I'm no longer alone, and I have to do all I can to try to care for her. She's one of the best. All those hard years and yet she's here with me today. And my wife never complained about any of it.

In the Name of the Father, and of the
Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

This is to certify that, on Sunday,
the 28th day of June, in the
year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine hun-
dred and 25, in St. Mark's
Mission, Nome Diocese of
Nome, I joined together in
any Holy Matrimony and
and William John
Elsie Selas
according to the form prescribed by the
Book of Common Prayer, and in conformity
with the Laws of the State of Alaska
in the United States of America. was
In witness whereof I have hereunto affix
my signature this 28th day of June
One Thousand Nine Hundred and 25

Witnesses:
Reverend B. Blackwell Fred K. D. D. D.
Teddy S. S. S.

Photo by David J. Krupa

The first thing that happened to me after we got married was that I went out the next day and I shot a wolverine. I gave that wolverine to her family. I didn't know it was a gift, I just gave it to them. So they bought a new tent with it. I never knew I was doing something for myself, but after this many years I thought about it and it occurred to me that I had to do it in order for the life that we live together. That's the Christian way of saying *basi* ', thank you.

The surprising thing was that I never knew my wife was in the same village with me all those years. I never talked to her and yet all of a sudden we got together. Nobody forced us to do it; we didn't force anything on ourselves, but we stayed together. About three or four days after we got married, I was hunting moose and I shot a moose in the wintertime. That moose went right straight for me. It got half way to me and then it dropped.

The Athabaskan way is hard to understand. The bullet that hit that moose was *luck* that was given to me through the Unknown. And, that luck is with me nearly all my life. That luck is the Holy Spirit.

That's *ch'eghwtsen* '. Now you don't have to buy that from anybody. But you have to make sure that it's true love. Not all love is right. There are seven different kinds of love. Maybe you thought there was just one. But you might fall for the wrong thing. It could be. Now there is a lot of evil love in this world. The kind of love I talk about is that when the Athabaskan Indian made *songs*—*dratax ch'eliga* '—the love that they put into word is *true love*. True love never asks for anything.

Now the words that Elvis Presley put in his songs are the evil love. That's what I mean. So when you give something to someone you think it's love, sure, *true love*. But maybe it's not. Maybe it's evil love. People give all kinds of talk to love. But it's not all true. The true love is hidden from *you*. So you don't talk about it.

With God's Help

We think we're lucky. Lucky doesn't mean anything to God. When he wants to give you something he's going to give it to you. But you've got to remember that he's the one that provides for you.

We were coming down the Goldstream one time and all we had to eat was one little teal duck. I wonder how many people understand what a little teal duck is. It's just about as big as a robin. Or a camp robber. Pretty small. Even a sandwich is bigger than that. And as we were getting ready to drink tea, I blessed the food. I

always do. And I asked for God's help to feed my family: that's the first time I ever asked God for anything. I said "We've got two days to travel yet and we've got nothing to eat. Just one little teal duck. That's all we have. What are we going to do?" I said, "We need you, we need your help." That's all I said. We ate.

As we were drinking tea we got the answer. What kind of an answer? My wife is only the one that knows it. And our boy. Three of us. And while my wife was drinking tea, she looked in the bottom of her cup and said, "Hey look at that cup." Now I'm not a superstitious person. I'm not. I believe in God the Father Almighty and that's all there is to it. The prayer that I just prayed a little while ago was answered right there and then. There in the tea leaves was a picture of a bull moose standing there in the grass. Horns spread out and everything, just like somebody took a pencil and drew it in there. I said, "That's a moose standing in the grass." I didn't know it was going to happen right that afternoon.

About an hour after that we were out hunting and I told my boy to climb up a big birch to look around. I walked on a little ways and broke out onto a meadow. And there it was, a moose was standing in the grass. Same as the one we saw in the cup. Big bull moose. I told my boy to come back down and we got him.

God is going to give it to you at the time you need it. But he's going to do it his way. Not your way. I don't care who you are, these things can happen to anybody.

I'm having a hard time getting at what I'm trying to say. I didn't know much about praying. I didn't know much about the Bible. But I knew a hard life in the brush. I go by the Holy Spirit in this cross around my neck. I had a hard time understanding what it really means.

I know how hard it is to trust in the Way of God. What does it have to do with you? It has nothing to do with you, maybe that's how you feel. Just some old Indian without much to say. But it has a *lot* to do with your life. How you take care of yourself, how you can handle yourself, and believe in God the Father Almighty. It's not easy. Because for everything I'm telling you, there is a lot more to it. There's no end when you begin to talk about the power of the Holy Spirit.

And you have to answer to everything in life. Now I told you about the moose we saw. That was through the Holy Spirit. God doesn't go half way. Never. He'll go all the way with a person that believes in him.

My father told me that the only thing I should ever get mad at is the darkness of this world. Not other human beings. Things you don't see. That's the one I'm going to be mad at. Problems. You don't get them from anybody. But you make them

yourself. Problems are what we don't expect and yet it's there. That's what my father meant when he said that.

A lot of people will say that I'm not a Christian because I never went to church. But they don't know how much I understand, and how much I try to understand. I've lived a pretty tough life. A tough life is what you get on the table. This may sound ridiculous to some, but there were times when I had to eat the bait off my traps just to survive. A lot of times I had nothing and I depended on my prayer to get something for my kids. I didn't get it from some other people.

Sometime around 1937 we were down at the Old Village and we ran out of everything: dog feed, grub, all of it. I told my wife, "We've got to get out of here." So the next morning we got up and left. My wife and I walked ahead of the dogs on snowshoes—no trail—we just pushed on through the snow. The first day we didn't make it very far and we set up camp where we could. The next day, we did the same thing: breaking trail because our kids had to eat. On the third day I went out and I got a moose. Boy, was I happy. I knew that my family was going to eat. During that winter we moved all the way up the Chatanika River to about five miles below the bridge.

That winter I lost one of my boys. We always found food but there were no nurses or doctors, so that's how we lost those kids. It's that hard. I still think of those kids today.

I was nine years old when I started to pray. And the things that I went through in life are what was given to me to work with. I've lived a hard life. People called me all kinds of names when I tried to be a Christian. My friends were against me in a lot of ways. But by really trying to understand the meaning of life's suffering I found the Way of the Holy Spirit.

I saved my life four times from water. And the one that I really can't understand is when I went through the ice in wintertime on that lake. Somewhere around 1938, I used to go around my trapline and while I was walking, I just got down on my knees and cried. I cried because of all the bad things that I did and things that aren't right with God. I had to cry ; over it because I didn't want to live that way anymore. I needed true forgiveness. And I did that for I don't know how long.

All of a sudden, I was walking across one lake where there was a rat house. I wanted to set a trap to it. Fox trap. I went out there and as I was setting the trap the ice broke loose and I fell through. December. Really cold. Twenty miles from home. While I was going down, a stick hit me right there on the palm of my hand. I was a pretty big man and I didn't think it could hold my weight. I tested it a little as I was falling and then I pushed hard and hauled up on the ice. That saved my life.

Where that stick came from I'll never know. I wish I had that stick right now to show what it means.

I didn't have time to think about it at the time, but right now today I always think of it. Where did that stick come from? Right on the lake. Real puzzle.

If God is with you, he's not going to let you go. That's what the Holy Spirit is for. The comfort. Many years later I was walking across that same lake in the winter. Alone again. All of a sudden I could hear footsteps behind me. Somebody was walking behind me. I could hear his steps. He was walking. I never looked back; I just kept going. I knew that anybody that far from the village wouldn't be a human being. It would be something else altogether. I didn't get scared. I just got across that lake. I went through a little brush there and I put my gun and pack down. I kneeled down and prayed. And cried. That's how powerful it is, *if* you understand. We try to be independent, we don't want to be told by anybody. Our pride makes us think we can make it on our own. But God is there to help us, if we only listen.

I was in the middle of a big-g-g lake when an earthquake hit. Ice just rolled and crashed like waves right in the middle of the lake. I was in a lake house, no way to get to shore. How strong can we stand? I just couldn't help it. I didn't know what to do. There's no stick to get a hold of. There's nothing that I could do to help myself. The ice was four feet thick and yet it was just like a wave on that lake. The Christian life is the only thing that we can depend on. Somehow I got across the patch ice to shore.

October. It was getting dark. I came down to a lake and I was going to go over to the trail. There wasn't anybody around; ten miles from the village, nobody on the trail. A light appeared right on the trail in front of me. God told Moses, "Take off your shoes, you're on Holy ground." This was something like that. But I didn't go that deep at the time. I had no intention of asking God what he wanted of me. I only cared for myself. I turned around and I went back across and walked along the shore of that lake. I never forgot that light. Another time I went down to the Tolovana with a white man. I was walking ahead of the dogs because the snow was pretty deep. All of sudden, nighttime, eleven o'clock at night, everything just got as bright as daylight. "What's happening?" the white man hollered to me, "What's *going to* happen?" I told him, "I don't know." The light was there for I don't know how long, and then it went out. He got so scared we had to stay overnight again. These are the tests that God gave me.

Once in December, I saw a rainbow. Where did that rainbow come from?

I try *so hard* to be Christian. I try really hard to understand God. A lot of times I've fouled up sometimes by trying so hard. I can't tell anybody to live the way I've

lived, because it's impossible. But with the help of God the Father Almighty, I made it. And I'm not giving up. I'm not ready to give up.

I went out one time. My kids didn't have anything to eat. My wife set snares for rabbits, but we couldn't catch rabbits. Nothing to eat. Absolutely. We couldn't even feed the dogs. It was thirty-five below when I went out to hunt moose. After awhile I got to the moose track. I never prayed in those days; I was strong and healthy; I could pack 350 pounds. I didn't care for nothing. I believed I could do it on my own. Still I cried because my kids didn't have anything to eat. Right now today you can get something to eat any time you want. Not then. God is there to give you something, but you're not there to receive it. Your way is the best way, which is wrong. There is no human being that has the right answer for these things.

Nobody. Not even the preachers.

Thirty-five below. I was born and raised in the wilderness and I lived by what was there in the brush. And all the time I lived off just what God provided. I went up to that moose track and I walked away from it. Too cold. Can't follow it. I went about hundred yards. I stood there and I thought of my kids. They had nothing to eat. I turned back to that moose track because I knew I had to go after it. I didn't care what happened. And I think the Lord understood my situation. I started to follow it. I ran across two big lakes and a couple of portages.

What I understood at that time was that the old people who raised me told me, "Don't give that moose a chance to listen. Rush him as much as you can. By doing that he'll tire and you'll get close to him."

So that's what I did. For twenty-eight miles I ran across those lakes through the brush. And I ran across that one last lake and there was an island there. I ran across that island and there they were, right out there on the lake. Three moose. I spilled all my shells in my cap because I was breathing pretty heavy. I couldn't hold the gun steady. Nineteen times I shot with them. They just stood there. I never hit them. Finally they ran further along the brush and stopped there. Three shells left. I shot and one dropped. I shot again and another one dropped. On the last shell the third one fell down.

I just got on my knee and cried. I was too happy. I praised His name for what happened. I took my family there the next day and we ate.

Another time we moved out to the Tatalina River. We dried fish and my wife gave it to people who had nothing to eat. We didn't charge anything; we just gave it to them. We went all the way back to the village—a lot of people were there. And I shot some moose because those people were starving.

The thing is this: you can't use anything for yourself only. You can't do it. If you're doing that, you're working against God. Now, anytime I do anything wrong against God that's the end for me.

I was going up the Little Goldstream Creek one time. My wife was with me. Leo Titus and his wife were with me. And we went up, I got sick right in the boat. Instead of stopping and praying there, we turned right around and tried to go home. I prayed and it didn't do any good. For three days I was sick. I would try to go home but no, the Holy Spirit told me, "You stay here." As sick as I was, I had to stay. On the third day, Leo Titus came over to where I was laying down. With an open Bible, he prayed for me. As soon as he went back to his tent, I got up and walked out. So with love—*ch'eghwtsen'*—he prayed for another. That's how powerful it is if we believe in him.

You can't say you believe in him just because you pray in the morning, pray this afternoon. That doesn't mean anything. You've got to make sure that you're doing it with your heart open to God.

I Quit Drinking

The year was somewhere around 1945. I really tried to be Christian. I used to kneel down and cry and pray while I went around to my traps. Not just because I didn't catch anything but because I wanted to be closer to God, just as close as I can. I was a sinful person. I did everything wrong in this world to take myself away from God.

After I laid off drinking for about three years, I got up and got drunk. And I got dry and I went down the street to get another bottle of beer. I went in somebody's house and my daughter was there. Right there I knew that was it for me. The boys there could see I wanted a beer. They gave me a bottle of beer and I said, "Don't open it." They gave it to me and I took it home. I put it on the shelf where I could see it. Never opened it. When I got out of that house I said, "Never again will I take the drink." That was fifty years ago.

So things like drinking, you do it knowing what you're getting into but you can't seem to stop it. It's joy. Evil joy. That's what puts us on that track.

Smoking cigarettes. I use to smoke, use tobacco, everything. One morning I got up and told my wife, I said, "That's the end. No more smoking for me." One black woman from Fairbanks told me three years before that, "You're a Christian, but there is something wrong with you still." I didn't answer her, I just listened to what

she said. It was three years before I found out what she meant. It was that smoking. That smoking is your sacrifice to the devil.

Every time you give in to those temptations that power gains control over you. With each desire, the *Tr'oxut'eh yenhk'o* gets its hook further into you. That's what it is.

That's the reason why I quit. People say you get cancer and everything like that. Sure, you get sick from it. Not only that, you're going to hell with it! I went through it, and I know what I'm talking about. I understand the true meaning of what I try to live today.

You need God the Father Almighty living in your heart. You can't do it without him. A lot of people try it, but someday we all have to face the truth of our lives.

More than once in my lifetime I've been tempted by the Evil Spirit to go on a date with a woman. One time the Spirit said, "She'll have kids from you, if you go with that woman. She'll have a boy." This was right after I lost one of my own boys. I said, "One of the Ten Commandments said, 'Thou shall not commit adultery', and you want me to break that?" Right there the Evil Spirit tried to penetrate into me to make me give in to temptation. That Spirit works on your weakness. But I turned away from it with that one line, "Thou shall not commit adultery." Things like that will happen in your life and you have to have the right answer to throw right back at him. When you do that you're on the side of the Holy Spirit. Either spirit can put words into your mouth so you have to be careful all the time.

Remember that Abraham was going to sacrifice his son. God told him to go to a certain hill. So he went there. Just when he lifted up that knife, the knife fell down out of his hand. God stopped him right there. If you believe in God the Father Almighty, he'll stop you from sliding toward evil no matter what the cost.

Water Baptism

What is a water baptism? We call it *tuts'enayi dletsinh*. The Athabaskan story starts this way. One young man started out. For no reason at all, he just took off. Walking, walking nowhere in particular. Then he came to a tent: *nuboli*. Everything was all messed up. Dirty. Not clean. It wasn't fit for him so he didn't sit there, he just kept going. He didn't know where he was going. He came to second tent. It was a little better, but not very much. Everything that was connected with that house was green and everything. It was just laid out clean, but there wasn't much to keep him there. So he kept going until finally he came to a third house. This one

was really nice. Clean. Just like if you swept the floor every day. Same thing. You have everything neat. No argument.

He didn't go out to look for a house in the first place. But he was just lost without a home and he wanted to find happiness for himself.

So there at that third house he sat down on a caribou skin that was laid out. He never saw anybody. Never heard anybody. Then all of a sudden he heard somebody at the door. He didn't know who it was. And the door opened and there was a woman standing there.

"Better get out," she said.

He didn't want to leave, because that was the first time in his life that he saw something that was truly *nice*. So the woman left. Not long after that, she came back. "You've got to get out," she said. "You're not fit to stay here. You're too dirty to stay here."

So she went away. He just stayed there. A third time she came back.

"If you want to stay here, I'm going to clean you out. That is the only way you're going to stay here. If you don't get cleaned out you're not going to stay here." She said, "You're not worth anything."

That young man didn't understand was how she was going to clean him. That woman gave him water to drink. He drank that and he started to vomit, vomiting all the things that he did in this world. That was what was coming out of his mouth. Everything. That cleaned him out. After she cleaned him out she gave him food. The best food she could find. She told him, "Okay, you eat."

The Athabaskan Indians call that woman *Ch'enigu' tr'axa*. That means she's from heaven, the woman that did this work for that man. Holy woman. Pure. That's how she got all those things out of him. She fed him and then let him live there. That's the Indian version of water baptism.

How did we get water baptism? Me and my wife? I've never talked about that. We never got water baptism in the church. But we got it from heaven. All of a sudden we were wet, just like if you have shower. That's how we got to be this way. I didn't expect it to happen.

I had a vision that people were getting baptized down at the Tolovana River. I saw the people getting baptized. White people were getting baptized too. I wondered if it was truly from God. There was a man's face with a mustache looking down upon the people. But none of the people getting baptized could make it up

the hill on the other side. Nothing, no help from God. So if we don't understand the meaning of it then it's not from God.

That's the reason why this Bible is very important—not just to read but to *understand*. You might say, "I don't need it." But you're just trying to convince yourself. Nobody hears you—maybe that's what you think. But God understands all you do, all you think. And he knows that he has provided you with a way for life in the Spirit. But it's up to you to find it. Understand that.

Something to Live By

I didn't know I was going to become a Christian. If God wants you to understand him, he's going to do it and there is no two ways about it. He wanted me to see the things that happened in the Bible so that I would know that the same things are happening today and that's what we have to watch for.

I saw the place where Elijah witnessed God sending fire to burn the altar. I saw where Jesus got tempted. That's the place where the devil told him, "Drop yourself off that cliff; God's angels will bring you up and set you free." I saw that place, and it's not nice to look at. I fell off that same cliff, and as I was falling I thought that was the end. But I just dropped just like a feather. I didn't feel anything.

If you have the Holy Spirit, God will reveal things to you that people don't normally see. The preachers don't even see it. How far could they take when all they want to do is talk about it. The true meaning is what's important. You always have to ask yourself, "Is it from God?" The things that aren't right with God are pretty hard to predict. He doesn't work as humans work. We always have to look at ourselves and ask if we're doing God's work. The question is, "Am I fit enough to carry that cross?"

I was out with my grandson Tony the other day and he got mad over at the Cache. He threw a sack in the boat. I told him that's not the way to feel. Every time you get mad you're turning away from God. I said that I don't care where we are, God is with us, and he is the one that is taking care of us. In one way or another, Satan has got his hand in there trying to lead us in the wrong direction. This is what I mean when I talk about the darkness of this world. It's not an easy life.

Temptation is powerful. It's not something you're going to just shake off. You can't do that. The only way is for you to really understand that you belong with God. You don't belong to Satan. Satan is the false power that's putting up all that fight to try to win you over.

I've seen signs a lot of times. I never gave much thought to them early on and it didn't occur to me to think about the meaning of the Bible. But then one winter in the early 1940s, life didn't seem very promising to me. It was just. . . nothing. There didn't seem to be any meaning to it. But when I got married in 1925 I realized I had to live for something. So that put me on edge. I had to face the truth. I didn't have any family, no brothers, nobody. All alone in this world.

Before they died, my father and my first cousin each told me that there is nobody I can go to or depend on in my life. I have to take care of myself. I have to do the best I can for myself. Over the years I learned that my strength was not given to me to hurt anybody, but only to help. We have to stand up to the suffering and not give up.

I lost my boy to drinking. He froze to death. These things are so *hard* to take. But I never gave up. Now maybe you've got a father and mother still alive. Now suppose if one of them kicked the bucket right now. What are you going to do? You'll probably just fall to pieces right there.

Now that's what this Bible is all about. There is an answer to our suffering. We have to have something to live by. The happiness is there, but by trying to live life just like a lone wolf we make it hard for ourselves. I saw a white man. A dog killed his boy and that white man fell to pieces. He couldn't take it. He fell down, he couldn't stand up, he couldn't sit down. I went over there and I got a hold of him. I took him back in the house. I saw one boy who ran his Sno-go into a car. My wife saw him. He was turned over and never moved. My wife told me, "You should go over there and pray for him." So I went over and I prayed beside him.

That's really something a person needs for life. You're not going to get rich by it. You're not going to get all the money you want. But when you live in the True Spirit your life will really mean something.

I'm Living in You

I think that the only way to understand the Bible and believe in God the Father Almighty is to do it with your heart open. Because the Lord is going to give you the Spirit whenever you're ready. I wear this cross because I think I understand what it means. The Lord blessed me with what I have, and nobody can take that from me unless the Lord himself wants to take it. The only way is to give your life over to God. That's what we call living in the Spirit. The human being is meant to have that.

Now a lot of people will say of me, "You never went to church, how do you call yourself a Christian?" Well they better not say that to God the Father Almighty. I was going to church one time and the whole thing changed right there. I was walking over to church and all of a sudden the Holy Spirit said, "I'm living in you, why should you look for another?" That changed the whole thing. That voice made me understand.

God doesn't talk to anybody except through the Spirit, because there are too many ways to foul up. Satan can do the same thing with a person. That's what you have to watch out for. It doesn't come easy. Really hard. The Lord will put joy in your heart, and that joy is powerful.

When I was eighteen, the Lord blessed me with what I should know and understand. When I got to be fifty, I found that I wasn't Christian enough for me to call myself a Christian. So I got the Bishop Gordon to confirm me again. Now the Holy Spirit worked through the Bishop Gordon to help me.

God can work through anybody, anytime—they don't usually even know it's happening. It's up to us to open ourselves to God so that the Holy Spirit can *live* in our hearts all the time. That's when my life changed. Since that time I've tried as hard as I can to understand the truth about what God wants me to know.

One time I said to my wife that the Holy Spirit told me that I should go to Fairbanks for a potlatch. We got in the car and drove all the way to town. But then the Holy Spirit told me that I wasn't supposed to be there at all. I had to turn around and go back home. It was just my own mind *thinking* I should go to that potlatch.

When you live by the Holy Spirit, you have to go all the way. God gave me what I have because he needs people to help us understand the truth about our life.

The Holy Spirit in Me

I'm going to get into something here that some of you won't understand. I say that I have the Holy Spirit living in me. That Spirit can answer any kind of question. When the answer from the Holy Spirit is "No," it doesn't make any sound through me at all. Just silence. The Holy Spirit answers "Yes" when I speak in tongues—K-K-K. There. See the Holy Spirit just confirmed what I said.

What do we need today? Is it in this Bible? K-K-K. In the Old Testament? ... the New Testament? K-K-K. Matthew? ... Mark? . . . Luke? K-K-K. Chapter one? . . . two? . . . three? ... four? K-K-K. Okay, Luke, chapter four. Wait a minute now, hang on. Chapter four, verse one? . . . two? . . . three? . . . four? . . . five? . . .

six? . . . seven? . . . eight? K-K-K: verse eight. Okay. Wait a minute now. K-K-K. You read it until eleven. Verse eleven. (Luke 4:8-11)

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and serve him only shalt thou serve. And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

You've got to understand that only a person with the Holy Spirit can do this kind of reading. The Spirit knows what message needs to be understood right here in this moment. Not just any passage out of the Bible, that's not how we find the truth. Right now the Holy Spirit wants us to know Jesus himself got tempted. So, the Evil Spirit can do the same thing to us right now.

I said the Holy Spirit will tell you everything you need to know. But believe me, that's something you have to be careful with. It's something you can't play with. Every day I have to question whether I am going the right way. You can never stop watching yourself. I never go without asking myself that question.

Just remember that the temptations that Jesus went through are just what we're doing in our own life. All of it. He was there for forty-five days. How many times did he get tempted in the Bible? It says just three times, but those temptations mean that Jesus faced the same things we do as human beings.

We have to understand what Jesus was doing here and why he was crucified. As individuals we need to understand how that event relates to today's world. You saw what happened in the Old Testament, how God sent a lot of people to represent him and the people just killed them off. So Jeremiah, Elijah, and the others who represented God didn't hold up as well as God wanted them to. So he sent his son to represent himself. God knows that he had to make the biggest sacrifice—he let his son go—in order for the people to understand that we have to live for something more. But they didn't learn.

You see that's how blind we are today. We are so deep in misunderstanding that we misinterpret what God wants us to know. The only way out was to crucify Jesus. And when he was crucified, the thing that God was going to do was to bless the people with the Holy Spirit. That's the reason why God gave his son seventeen gifts, seventeen different spirits. No man has that. And that's what he gave to his son, and that's at the heart of what the last cry on that cross means. That's what we're working for right now—the last cry on that cross.

Understand that the last cry is the Holy Spirit that God offers to us as the comfort—K-K-K. Through this Spirit *only* can we understand the meaning of our suffering. We suffer because we hold ourselves apart from God.

When Mary got Jesus, right at that point, God gave him seventeen gifts. Those gifts are represented by this cross. And here you're just looking for one. You're even looking for that one in the wrong places. No man could carry those gifts. It's too powerful for you to use. What God does is that he gives the Spirit *as* we can handle it. Because if he gave you the whole thing you would take it all, just like the fallen angel. And you would work against God. You'd forget where the power comes from in the first place.

Now, the last cry is the one that is meant when he said, "I go to the Father, and he'll send you the comfort." That comfort is the Holy Spirit. What we call *Bet'oxwdilt'a yenhk'o'* in the Athabaskan culture. So, the crucifixion is very powerful, provided you understand the true meaning of what Jesus died for.

Now, why is it that I suffer around Easter just as Christ did? My wife is only the one that sees me do that. It makes me cry and holler and everything. Because the Holy Spirit that is living in me suffers for the purpose of helping the people to see the truth about life as it is.

Now we talk about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. His Spirit. Is that the one that the last cry refers to? . . . What does the Holy Spirit say? It says no. Whose spirit is it that we're talking about? God's spirit? K-K-K. God's spirit is the one we talking about, and him only—K-K-K.

You see that's where it gets hard for people to understand. People say, Jesus, Jesus, praise the Lord Jesus Christ. That's wrong. Sure, Jesus spirit is what we *think* we have. But what does he say to that? He says *no*. God's Spirit is what we have—there's only one True Spirit. The life of Jesus Christ shows us the way to the that Spirit.

Memorial Potlatch—The Last Supper

There are three different potlatches in Athabaskan culture. Three. The one I'm going to talk about is the memorial potlatch. That's what we call the last supper. The last supper is when people give the best they got. The Bible talks about the last supper when Jesus brought his disciples together. He offered the wine and food as his flesh and blood. I think it was on passover. That's what we have in the memorial potlatch. We give a lot of blankets and guns and everything. They just

give it away with love. The memorial potlatch is a way for us to put away the grief we feel over the loss of a person who dies. What's that got to do with the Bible?

Jesus said to that young man, "Give everything you have. Give it to the poor, if you want to be in heaven," That's what Jesus said. And that's what the memorial potlatch is for. You don't sell it. You just give it away. What Jesus said there is what we try to follow. This was never mentioned before.

Anybody can give a memorial potlatch, but you have to give with love. What is love? Love is something very few understand. It's just a word. But there are a lot of things behind it. You can say "I love this and I love that"—maybe you've got half a dozen girlfriends. But that doesn't amount to anything.

The true love is something that you never see. And you'll never see it. The true love is something that will really put you on edge. Because you're going to have to do what is right and not just what you want to do.

When the Athabaskan Indians get together for a potlatch they make speeches to each other. About the land. Like Mt. McKinley—*Dinadhi*; Nenana—*Toghotili*; Minto—*Menan 'k'oget*. Those are landmarks and the names are very important. So the speeches are just like a puzzle. A word puzzle. It's the same as that. And you try to get the best of the other person. If you understand what you're saying, you can get the other person in a corner. You overcome that person with words.

In the Athabaskan culture you have to be very careful because words have *power*. The white people don't understand the Athabaskan way with words. The people don't make these speeches because they're mad at somebody. They just do it with love for each other. *Ch'eghwtsen'*.

Special songs are made for the memorial potlatch. When you sing the songs, there is a special stick that you hit. When you hit the stick, that stick is *gholiyi*. *Gholiyi* means "when you put money in the bank, you don't want to touch it—you wish it grow there." It's same thing with the true love among the Native people. By gathering to share food, songs, and speeches, love grows among the people.

The songs that they make for that potlatch are special. They are only sung while the potlatch is going on and that's all. After it's all over, you don't sing that song any more. The song that they make is connected with life, and the people that understand it get advice for the future. So when you hear that Indian song, you think of the person that passed away and what they mean to our life.

The Athabaskans went by tribes in the old days. Right here in Minto there are four different tribes represented. Fishtail people made a song. It says "Our great,

great grandfather migrated up the Tanana and the Yukon River; that's how we are here today." You just sing it when the potlatch is going on and that's all. You don't sing it at any other time except if you want to talk about special tribute to the Native people.

That song was made right here in Minto when Chief Charlie was here. He's the one that made that song. So, he went down to the old village; that's where the old potlatch was held, at that time. Now the old village down there on the Tanana we call *Menhti Xwghotthit*.

There is a song from Nenana. The Caribou tribe made this song; Memorial potlatch song. It says, "Why is it that I held back so long when the young men did all they could to satisfy me? And yet I have to let them go. Why did I have to do that?" That's the word in that Caribou song. Caribou made that song. Caribou tribe.

The memorial potlatch is one of the biggest events the Athabaskan culture hold. We honor the person who passed away and lay down our grief. That's why when they gather together for that occasion, they give everything they got. This kind of potlatch calls for the best—no second hand. So that's the Last Supper. The Athabaskan culture calls for that. It is the last supper with a person that passed away. In the Bible the Last Supper is what Jesus had with his disciples on Good Friday.

Finding the True One

Something that is very hard to talk about is the church and the evangelists. The way I feel about people gathering up together like that is to stay away. Don't try to join people like that because they might be working against God right there.

God's word is not for sale. You can call them donations or whatever. But you'll probably wear out the hinges on that door before you get closer to God in the church!

You hear the preachers talking in different tongues but that's not the True One. The True One is harder to understand. The True One is what you get from heaven. And where do the preachers get ordained? From the church on this earth. If you buy it on this earth, then it's something else altogether.

The truth is what we try to hide from. It hurts more than anything so we don't want to hear it. We get pretty comfortable with the way things are. We would rather pretend than live God's Way. I think the thing to remember is that Jesus told the truth when he talked to Pontius Pilate. Pontius Pilate asked him, "What is the

truth?" And look what happened. The people didn't want to change. That's what it is.

The truth is there and that's what the people are scared of. You're scared of the truth. If I started to talk about your life and everything you wouldn't want to listen to it because I'm telling the truth. That's the way it is. So I never judge anybody. I'm not here to judge anybody. But it can happen. But make sure the judgment comes from God and not from a human being.

Once the Holy Spirit told me I had to stay in the house one month for me to understand what I needed to know. I had to read the Bible a chapter a day, every day, for one month. The New Testament. On the last day, Christmas, the last chapter, I felt I had to go out. I couldn't stay in the house anymore. When I went out, I got sick right on the street and I had to come back home.

Without that Holy Spirit, I'm nothing. I tried to do everything that the Lord wants me to do, but a lot of what I do I learned was false. So now I have to find out right away, whether if it's false or true. *Myself*, through the Holy Spirit.

If you want the Holy Spirit to guide you in the True Way of life he'll do it, provided you genuinely want him to do it. He is not going to do it without you because you're the one that wants be with God. So it's up to you to hold that cross up. If you want the Holy Spirit, God will put it there, but you have to do all the work. Because you're the one that's going to *live* it. K-K-K.

I've talked about a lot of signs. Those experiences are signs that God wants you to know that he's with you. But you have to understand the true meaning of what is there. These things are meant to show you the light, to show you that there is more to life than you realize.

If you get tongues, or visions, or the Holy Spirit, you still have to put that puzzle in the right place. You see the strange thing is that God doesn't work as human beings work. It's altogether different. And it's up to us to really put the words in the right place for us to understand it.

Now, this Bible, is it all God's word? . . . The Holy Spirit says "No." Do we have to put the words in there ourselves? K-K-K. To make us understand the true meaning of what is there? K-K-K.

So the Bible is God's word *if* you read it in the Spirit. This Bible is the connection between you and God. And if you want to understand him and you want to be with him, there is a way to do it.

I said the Holy Spirit comes from the cross. The last cry Jesus Christ made is the one we seek. God is only the one that can give this. Nobody else. It has to be ordained from God, not on this earth. God confirmed me to carry his message? K-K-K. He said "Yes." God talks through the Holy Spirit to make me understand the true meaning? K-K-K. Yes. Everything that God *is* comes to me through the Holy Spirit? K-K-K.

The Holy Spirit reveals it to me. God doesn't talk directly to anybody except through the Spirit. You can't steal anything from God!

About ten years ago I started to see flames on the Bible, right on the chapter and verse that I was going to read. Nothing but flames. A lot of things went through my mind at that time because hell is all flames and God put that there to put people back on track. So when these flames came over the Bible it was God's way of reminding me to watch for the meaning of these signs. This same thing happened again just a little while ago.

I think this was to show that God is with us but we have to watch out to make sure that our hearts are open to God only. When we open up we have to be careful about which way we're turning.

God reveals himself in many different ways, depending on the individual. The Holy Spirit is what I think of more than anything. It's not the body or not some thing that I'm going to worship. It's not the stars, it's not the sun, it's not anything but the Holy Spirit that's living in my heart that I trust in. That is the one I try to understand. If you truly believe in the Holy Spirit he can answer any kind of a question you throw at him. That Spirit knows the beginning and the end of all things.

If you've got the Holy Spirit it'll reveal to you what is right and what is wrong. That's the True One, that's the one you want to believe in. But you don't have to worship him. All you have to do is live the True Way of life. A lot of times I go to bed and I pray that I won't turn away from him. We can never take time off from God. That's the correct way of being with God.

If you're living with the Holy Spirit, the Evil Spirit—*Tr'oxut'eh yenhk'o'*—will try everything to block your way. There are certain ways to keep the Evil Spirit from penetrating your body and your thinking. It can't penetrate your heart because that's where the living God is.

But you'll notice that if you happen to get your mind on something like the Lord Jesus Christ, things will just start to come up—something drops, the phone rings, someone calls your name—anything to keep your mind away. You fly off in that

direction while the evil just tries to penetrate you. That's the way it works. That's the thing you have to watch out for.

You always have to watch your thoughts and keep turning toward God. The darkness of this world is just as powerful as God himself, except that the evil only has power in this world. It can't hurt the True Kingdom. That's the reason why the fallen angel tried to take over this world. But God doesn't allow that.

When you make up your mind to open your heart, you have to have it open all the time. And that means that Satan is going to block everything you want to do to be Christian. And you have to fight him. That doesn't mean you have to fight with everybody.

Satan is a being you don't see, you don't hear, you don't know. God is the same way. You don't know what you open your heart for. But God is the one you want in your heart, and you have to keep asking, "Renew the strength in my heart".

Could we have the words that we need for that? K-K-K. Psalm one hundred twenty-four? K-K-K.

Verse six? K-K-K.

"Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as prey to their teeth."

It works both ways, the Evil Spirit and the Holy Spirit. You have to understand the Evil Spirit in order to really understand God's way—K-K-K. I never pray for myself. I never ask for anything for myself. I pray for people.

I don't expect anything to happen there, but people should try to understand that they're dealing with God. I can't help them myself. God *can*, provided they really try to understand who it is they're dealing with.

What happens with life all depends on how you handle yourself. If you trust in God the Father Almighty you better know him the way he is. Otherwise, you won't get anywhere with it. If we talk about the Lord Jesus Christ, and right after that you walk out of that door and go down to the bar and have a few beers, well then God wouldn't help you for that. You just try to make a fool of yourself and the Lord. That happens to a lot of people. They try to believe in God the Father Almighty when they're struggling in their life. But then as soon as things get better they just go around the corner and take it easy until they run into another problem.

Giving Your Life to God

If you're going to trust God, do it fully. Accept things as they *are*, not the way *you pretend*.

When I'm going out fishing or duck hunting, God will give me what I need to eat. He tells me where to set fish nets. And where to catch fish. That's all. I don't do it on my own. Because I *live* through him. And he's the one that's taking care of me. My life is given to him. If I'm going to get a moose, he lets me know where I'm going to get it. That's the only way I live. That's the True Way of being with God.

Once I went to Fairbanks to get a Bible. I asked the Lord Jesus Christ, "I want to get a Bible." So I went to the bookstore and there were a lot of Bibles on the table. And I put my hand over them and as I was moving my hand it stopped at a certain Bible and that's the one I bought. The Holy Spirit is the one that will guide you to true understanding.

Don't trust your mind—only the Spirit in your heart knows.

Now the preachers use the Old Testament, but individuals like me or you should use the New Testament, because it was printed after Jesus was on this earth. The New Testament is what guides our life today. The Old Testament is the one that the preachers are supposed to use because they preach the gospel to the people. That's the way it's supposed to work—K-K-K. But I don't think they do that.

Once I went out to Lake Minto and it was raining. I was reading so I had my Bible open. I asked God if he wanted his words to get wet. And that rain stopped. Another time, the wind was blowing pretty strong. I asked God for mercy to stop that wind. I said, "Wind, stop." And it stopped. That afternoon I said, "What's going on? It's winding yet?" One of the women there said, "You told that wind to quit and it quit."

That's how powerful God is if you really believe in him. I cast out Satan, I heal people, all these things. But *I* can't do anything—it has to be God's will. I never talked about it before. The Holy Spirit is here, in me, right now-K-K-K. Since 1918 I started to believe in God the Father Almighty. I'm still learning.

It's important that we understand the true meaning—what is *there*. It's not like every time we pray we just get something we want. We have to ask God to renew the spirit to make it stronger. You remember the man who tried to step into the water? The first man got in there and took everything out of the water to get himself healed. But the people behind him couldn't get healed because the person ahead of

them used all the power already. So that's the reason why you have to renew the spirit that's living in your heart. Every day.

Right now you're reading what I'm saying. That's not enough. Do you *understand* what I'm saying? You have to really *hear* what I mean. The thing is this. In my life, I'm not a mechanic. I'm not a preacher. I never went to college. I'm *nothing*. Absolutely. Know that. I can't even read this Bible. Yet I *understand* every word that it says.

We were going to Minto. My water pump gave out. I had no tools. No way to fix it. So we stopped there. A woman from the village came by and she told her boy, "Keep going. Let Peter's faith take him to Minto." I told my wife, "You make a cup of tea and I'll fix that water pump." We got to Minto.

Another time my water pump gave out on my thirty-five-horsepower Mercury. My wife was there. The only way I could get that engine apart was with an Allen wrench. I didn't have that. Out in the woods, nobody around. Where am I going to get it? I just had a file and a hammer. And yet I fixed that engine. I filed a bolt to make a six point Allen wrench and I took that engine apart with it.

We were staying in a fish camp and my piston rod went through the engine base. I went to work at it that evening and I got that engine running. Another time I was up there at Ptarmigan hill. There were a lot of caribou there. I lost my gun sight. You've got have a sight to kill something don't you? I ran over to a dry tree and I got a stick and I fit that stick into that sight and started to shoot caribou.

There's always a way out if you believe in God the Father Almighty. Always. He wouldn't let you down. He wouldn't let you go. But your mind telling you it's foolishness to trust, that *will* take you away.

I was going across the lake one time with a .22 automatic. I was loading up the gun, and as I pushed down the magazine jumped out of the boat and right into the lake. Anybody else might give up right there. I stopped along the shore and I looked for a willow. I got a willow and took my knife and cleaned it and fit it right into that magazine and started shooting.

The thing is that we try to be too independent. We don't recognize that our life comes from God the Father Almighty. Your life is always dependent on the grace of God—you wouldn't be here any other way. If you try to be independent from God you're going to end up just like one of those guys that I talked to over in jail. I was asked to go there to say something to help them out. One fella came up to me and said, "I've got a lot of friends." I stopped him right there and said, "They're the

ones that put you here, your friends." He looked at me in the eye and he said, "Yes."

The Holy Spirit told me that if I try to believe in God the Father Almighty, I have *no* friends. The only people that I could call my friends are the people that know this Bible right here. That's all. I can't kick anybody out of my house just because they don't know the truth. I can't do that. But the thing is that we don't all trust in God the Father Almighty.

A lot of the people that carry this Bible and say they're Christian don't even know what a Christian is. Yet they say that. That misunderstanding hurts the people more than it helps them because they really think they know.

People think there are many ways to be Christian. There's only one way, God the Father Almighty. The thing that we try to get across is that the power of God is upon us right now—K-K-K. If a person wants to be healed they can be healed right now—K-K-K. That's what we're talk about. We're not talking about what's going to happen maybe three, four, or five days from now. If anybody believes in God the Father Almighty it can happen right now.

If I'm helping somebody, that person has to really understand that the Holy Spirit is working *through* me—K-K-K. It's the only way it can work.

God can answer you provided you know what you're doing. Now if I thought to myself, "That was foolishness," it would *never* happen. One little thought will twist everything around. Your mind can block the truth from your heart. That happens to people many times.

If God opened the Red Sea for the people, he can do the same thing right now. That's the reason why when we pray for somebody sometimes nothing happens. Even though the Lord understands what is going on, the person that prays is false because he's not fully *with* God.

Always look deeper into life. A lot of our understanding comes from learning to read between the lines. That's where the secret is—K-K-K. Now you can read this Bible as it is. But you've got to know the difference between reading it and knowing the meaning of it. The only way you're going get the message is face the fact that it speaks *truth* and that truth hurts. It's not easy. Life doesn't get easier with God—it gets harder. That's the meaning of sacrifice. I went through that myself.

I pray in different tongues. I've already put some of that on tape here for this book. When I first got it forty years ago, the Holy Spirit told me that I was going to hear God's voice. I waited twenty years before I found out what it meant—K-K-K.

So if God is going to bless you, he's going to bless you the way he wants, when he wants to. And there's no other way. It might take years, but you have to be patient. You can't rush God. A thousand years is a day to God. K-K-K. So how are you going to rush him?

You've got to be honest and you've got to be true to him. Always remember that he's holding your life. The Holy Spirit is something that no man should go without. You want to remember that Jesus said that, "Through me only you're going to get to the father." Now what does that mean? That's the Holy Spirit that God gave his son as a gift to human beings, so that they could learn what it is they live for.

You Have to Give Thanks

I caught moose one time, up the Goldstream. There were two boys with me. Richard and Howser. I shot three moose. I told those boys, "You start. I'll wait here a few minutes." I didn't want them to think anything was wrong with what I was trying to do. I knew their thoughts: I figured they might not agree with me. I knelt down and I tried to pray. I asked God to protect that meat because it was for the village. It was for the people that needed it. After I prayed I started home. We were a long ways from home. I don't know how long that meat was out there on the ground, but when they hauled it, nothing had touched it. It was safe for everybody to eat.

That's the way things happen with the Christian life. It's not an easy way, but then it's true and it has to be done. I used to go out on the trapline—just *one* lynx sometimes I'd catch. At five or ten dollars for a lynx skin, how are you going to feed your family?

Once we were going over to Minto and we were camping. A woman came over to me. Sunday morning. That woman is a preacher right now. I said, "You have your Bible?" I said, "We want to have a little prayer." As we were praying, I heard somebody shoot. I thanked God for that. I praised his name for that. That man was shooting at moose and he got two. We didn't drink tea there, we kept going. Half-way towards our village, we stopped and made tea. They cooked that meat. As they were cooking that meat, I told those people right there, "You never give praise to his name for what you get. That's the reason why God let you people go so long"

Right there and then I thanked God for what he gave us. We get help from God every day of our life, but we never notice it.

Nobody in the village understood the true meaning of what I tried to do for them. Me, myself, didn't understand it because it's something that's too *deep* for us to go that far. Human beings are often blind to God's Way. The way I was I never knew until not too long ago. My wife didn't understand it, I didn't understand it, so we were packing this ourselves. And there the answer was—that God had something to do with our life. We didn't know that. And I think that's the way with people all over the world.

Now, you see some of the biggest preachers talking on the TV. but do they really understand the true meaning of what God wants them to know? That's the question they have to answer themselves. It's not for me to answer.

The people that I live with all my life have a chance to understand the true meaning what God wants us to know, yet none of us understands it. They just think I'm a medicine man—false prophet. They don't know what kind of a man lives among them.

I've Seen Heaven and Hell

What we're trying to establish here is what kind of life we're going to lead. There's two ways only: we either find the truth or we're looking for it.

I saw heaven in a vision. Heaven. A lot of times I wonder if I'm going the right way. *A lot of* times. Believe me, it's a tough life. It's not as easy as you think it is because we're human, and our mind is not set right all the way. Temptation is too powerful and too hard to resist. God gives us everything we need to fight temptation, but it's our way of life on this earth that makes it hard.

Like I say, one time I saw a vision and somebody was talking to me. I saw things and I said, "I'm dead; I'm dead and my spirit is traveling." And all of a sudden I heard somebody talk to me. "You're not dead, but I'm going to show you something. This is the place you're going to go if you keep living according to the Bible." A lot of you have seen the story about Mr. Scrooge. It compares something like that. I'm even afraid to fly and yet my spirit was traveling a thousand miles above the earth. I saw heaven. *Beautiful* Things you don't see on this earth. I hear people talk about living the Christian life but it wasn't like that.

This place was just beautiful, wonderful. I can't compare it with anything on this earth. No man sees that in life. No darkness, no shadow, nothing but light. The Holy Spirit said, "Always try to have that Bible in your heart. If you do that, this is the place you're going to be." So from that time on, I started to think about the Bi-

ble more than anything else. I try to understand God and that Bible. I have to study all the time.

I saw hell. That's no place for a person to see. I was following a trail that was tramped down. Millions and millions of people had walked through that trail. And all of a sudden it ended. And I just kept going. Just me was all that walked there. Nobody else, no track, nothing. That's hell. "It's not the place for you to follow this." That's what I was told. That's the reason why I believe in God the Father Almighty.

In my house right here, I saw two angels on my ceiling. Me and my wife were sleeping. Both of them were looking down at us and they were smiling. What a sight. How could we go wrong? When you try to be a Christian you'll see a lot of things that are connected with God. That's the one you want. He'll bless you with everything you need on this earth. But as human beings we complain too much. That's not God's way. God didn't bring us to complain on this earth. We make it our business to do it. It's not God's Way.

I was sitting out by the little log cabin, by the door, when a bird landed a few inches from my chest. For about ten seconds he stayed there looking at me. I never even touched him, I just let him go. When I sit out here on the porch, I think to myself, how am I going to be a Christian? Evil things, too many. But little birds just land on my knee, land on my shoulders. I never even push them away.

Christian life is simple for us to understand, yet we don't understand it. We cannot understand it. Because we're blind to the truth. We don't see the true meaning of what God wants us to know. I never understood the true meaning of these things until now.

We have to understand the Bible. There is no getting away from it. We're the ones that try to pull in the wrong direction. Not God. God tries to head us the right way and we're just like a lazy dog. We try to pull the other way.

The Last Day

Do you understand that the last day will come? The Day of Judgment. Everything in this world is going to end. That's when Jesus is coming back. Now when that happens, nothing will be saved. And God won't have mercy on anybody. I've seen that three times and it's awful. I don't even like to talk about it. He's going to take this world back because he's the one that made it. In order to do that he's got to wipe out all the evil things in this world. That's the last day.

The last day is not like anything you've seen. Do you notice the earthquakes, people dying in airplane crashes, everything? That's nothing. In that vision I saw storms, hurricanes, big trees with the roots coming right out of the ground. Everything wiped right off of the earth. Nobody could stand up. Too dangerous. I tried to stand up, I fell down. I was walking just like I was on glass, wobbling all over. I tried to get up the other side of the glass, I slipped back down. Finally I made it to the other side and I started to climb that hill. Jesus was standing there. I couldn't even stand up, I was so weak. I just got a hold of his leg and that's about all.

It's going to happen. I don't care when. So when you start to face that, the question comes up: Are you ready? Are you ready to understand the truth about life? The Holy Spirit is going to be given to everybody who's ready on the last day. And if you want to be among them you better believe the Bible. Because I don't care what you do, or what you say, it's all going to come back to you.

We ourselves are changing the world. We don't even know it, but everything we do is changing the world. I think the thing that people should understand is that we live in a world that God made. And human beings—just like you and me—are the ones that are destroying it. That's the way I feel, me. We're just destroying ourselves. Although there's no way we can correct it. It's gone too far already. How is this going to change?

What the young people of today are learning is they learn to destroy, not to advance. We're working overtime to discredit the Lord. And how are you going to change that? You try to change it and they'll just twist your neck off.

I'm ninety-five years old and I've seen so much change here in Alaska you wouldn't even believe it. God gave us everything we needed—food, medicine and everything. And yet we're destroying it. Greed. So unless somebody comes up with things to correct the mistakes in the human being we're going to lose it all. There's always an end to prosperity. That's the way I feel. I don't know. I got no business to worry for somebody. Because we're doing it ourselves.

What Is Faith?

We think we have faith, which we don't. Faith is something that God gives you to believe in him and to trust him. It's not something that is yours. Now, faith helps you to understand why life is not as sweet as it should be. Life is not as it seems.

You have to watch out for all the beautiful things in this world. Temptations. If you start to pray for all the beautiful things in this world, believe me, you'll be going to hell. So you've got to have faith in order to follow the True Way because it isn't so beautiful. But what is faith? Do you trust yourself? Do you trust God?

That's the question. Through faith we *know* the truth of God. And through that understanding we're going to live every day.

When we pray, who do we pray to? We don't see him, we don't understand him. Yet we pray. But the thing is this: You can't say, "I pray too much. I pray night and day." But if you really open your heart to the Holy Spirit then this Bible is the way to understand God and your life.

All your prayers are answered one way or another. People don't see that because they only look for the answer they want, not the answer they *need*.

If you whisper, he hears you. If you open your heart to him, he understands you. K-K-K.

The people themselves can turn this world around. God is there to guide them in the right direction but nobody is taking the lead. So the world today is going too far in the wrong direction. In the Bible when Moses was coming down that hill, he broke the ten commandments because people were doing evil and turning away from God. So it's the same today; the people have to straighten themselves out. You can't do it; I can't do it. God is there waiting, but people have to do it themselves. So it's up to each of us as individuals to really understand the true meaning of what this Bible holds.

This Bible tells us everything, but we're not holding it up altogether. God wants us to hold it up ourselves, just like holding up that cross. He's there to help you, but he's going to let you lead. God offers us the Holy Spirit, but you're the one that has to *live* it.

Worship God Only

The thing that we try to understand is God himself. If you go to church or to any preacher, don't think that'll help you. Just because people preach the Bible doesn't mean that they know the truth. Remember the false prophets. The Bible is not as powerful as it used to be because nobody understands what the Holy Spirit and the Evil Spirit really are. The easiest way to tell the difference is that the Evil Spirit will seem to give you something for nothing. The Holy Spirit you have to earn through opening your heart to God.

Don't get mixed up by things you don't understand. Sure, how do you know that I'm true? You wouldn't know. Just because I do things that are beyond what we understand. That doesn't make me any better than you. You need to understand that. I'm just as evil as anybody. Maybe worse. But I try to hold the *True Way* up. That's what counts in my life.

Now, the reason why I got the Holy Spirit is hard for me to explain. Why did God bless me with this? Because God wanted people to understand that he's got power over all the darkness of this world. And it's still here with us. And what God wants you to understand is that he's not leaving you to the mercy of the darkness. But you have to understand that you're not worshipping me or any *thing*, you're worshipping God only.

I always hope that a person that asks me questions or reads this book understands that the Holy Spirit is the one who knows. Peter John doesn't understand anything. The Holy Spirit is the only one that can answer *all* questions about our life, K-K-K.

It really makes me wonder how many people understand the Bible in this world today? But then it's been that way since the beginning. I been here ninety-five years. How many people understand me? Nobody. That's the way with life. You can't force these things on people because it's not there to be forced on anybody. It's there for the person to *choose* for themselves. Nobody else.

If you really look at it you'll see that if anybody asks us to go to hell, we'll go pretty fast. But if anybody says, "Lets go to heaven," they're going to have to drag us all the way.

Commentaries

A commentary by

Frank Blacha

Peter John never gives up. He hangs on. His Native name, Xa-dalt'eyh, states that very principle. He was born in Rampart around 1900 after his parents pilgrimage from the Minto Flats to visit his mother's sister. His mother died when he was two, leaving his father (a reluctant medicine man) and grandparents to raise him off the country.

After attending Nenana's St. Mark's Episcopal Mission for a number of years, Peter John graduated with roughly a second grade education. At about eighteen years old, Peter John worked the summer on the Steamship Reliance, going from Fairbanks almost to St. Michael on the west coast of Alaska near the mouth of the Yukon River. The return trip was cut slightly short when he stepped off the boat at Minto Village instead of Fairbanks. He shook the dust off his feet at the non-Native work ethic. That summer's earnings bought a winter's camping outfit for moving around the country, following the game with the people. Also purchased was a dictionary and Bible by which he taught himself to read and write and also study the Hebrew-Aramaic/Christian Greek scriptures.

For more than seventy-five years afterwards, Peter John never did give up as tough as life got. It's often difficult for people to compare their experience to Peter's, let alone understand. He faced starvation in the wilderness, hearing his babies cry for something to eat. He lost eleven of fourteen children. He worked intensely for the betterment of the people, in all fairness.

Few people realize that when Peter John was of age to be on his own, most other living elders were children. Few people recall the days when he was married in the Old Native Way.

Doyon (Chief) Peter John truly tried his best by desiring a relationship with God, practicing clean morals, and shunning laziness through honest, hands-on labor. And yet, regardless of the difficulties of life, Peter John never became bitter. He loves life: people, children, learning, experiencing new ways, and, evidently, to laugh!

He possesses a clever, sharp wit that is never wasted on anything meaningless—always with a purpose.

Grandpa has done his best to set an example by following his conscience according to his scriptural understanding, as well as his Native upbringing and culture. To summarize: "Understand you have to live, and live right."

Peter John is a philosopher (from the Greek = loving and wise,) melding what he experiences from two cultural systems to help anyone who wants better. This comes from someone raised in the brush. He never gives up. Doyon Peter John stands before God along with his wife Elsie, whom scriptures describe as a "helper and a complement." (Genesis 2:18)

This account tells much never before recorded dialogue. Do your best to "read between the lines." Enjoy it by benefiting as Grandpa wanted us to. Never give up.

-Frank Blacha

A commentary by

Andrew Fairfield

I have tremendous respect for Peter John as a spiritual leader, not only for his public persona but also for his personal ministry of prayer. Peter is a person whom I have relied on in the past for healing prayer as well as prayer for members of my family; my experience is that Peter's prayer ministry is faithful and powerful I appreciate the opportunity for comment on Peter's witness:

Peter teaches that it takes someone who has received the Holy Spirit to recognize the Holy Spirit living in another person. I would agree with him and add that outward and visible signs of the Holy Spirit, in some cases tongues speaking or some other gift but in every case "fruit" of the Spirit, serve as objective signs of the Spirit's presence. Jesus said "You will know them by what they do" (Matthew 7:16).

Peter points out that in a ministry of prayer, God's power must be emphasized rather than that of the person who prays. Peter certainly models this submission to God in his ministry.

In Peter's discussion of the medicine people, he says "God gave them the truth of what to live by. But. . . they turned against God." This awareness of God's revelation through creation and of humanity's rebellion is precisely what the apostle Paul was speaking of in Romans chapter 1.

I have a concern for what I understand to be Peter's suggestion that spiritual understanding may be a substitute for worshipping with other Christian people. If Peter is suggesting that private spiritual knowledge is the basic criterion for true Christianity, I would have to challenge that. It sounds rather like a Gnostic heresy that was rejected sixteen hundred years ago. But likely I do not fully understand what Peter is getting at. The Christian community does need to be clear, however, that corporate worship is very important, and that there is seldom a valid excuse for separating oneself from it (Hebrews 10:25).

I want to say again that I have deep respect for Peter as a Christian elder, and thanksgiving for his ministry to me personally as well as to the Interior Alaskan community.

*-Andrew H. Fairfield
Episcopal Bishop of North Dakota*

A commentary by Alaska's former First Lady

Ermalee Hickel

I have met Chief Peter John and his lovely wife and visited with them on several occasions. Although I've not had the privilege of chatting in depth with him, it was a great pleasure to read his commentary, and I feel a real kinship to his way of thinking. I think Chief Peter John is a fine man with a beautiful soul—an old soul that is very much in touch with God. I love the way he expresses himself spiritually—and the experiences he has had with God and the Holy Spirit are heart warming and very moving. Yes, I do believe, too, that the Holy Spirit resides in the hearts of each one of us—and is there to help and guide us—but we often neglect to use Him.

I truly believe that Chief Peter John is a man of God who is here to teach us many things. And he has. Oh, I see how his heart aches for many young people who are coming along in this world and who are not in touch with God. It disturbs him greatly that they seem to be looking only to material things and concerned only with having a jolly time while neglecting to nourish their spiritual roots.

Chief Peter John reminds all of us that looking to our Creator is the only way to solve our problems today. We all need to look to Chief Peter John's intuitive wisdom and his message should surely be heard by all—young and old alike. Everyone needs strong, healthy spiritual roots, in order to have a happy life of service to others.

-Ermalee Hickel

A commentary by

Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley

As a Tread Peter John's book, I began to realize that here was a man of God who is able to meld his own Athabascan spiritually with the Bible. His upbringing was in the traditional Native way. This way required a person to look into the inner self to see the strengths, weaknesses, and other characteristics that make a person do things that are right or not right in this world. This is the first step to self-knowledge and wisdom to live the Native values leading to happiness and joy. His having lived close to Nature in his early life has given him the keen and incisive tools with which he has been able to get to the essence of spirituality. Nature and its creatures play an important part in Athabascan life, and understanding Athabascan spirituality necessitates inserting that which is sometimes left out in modern Christian life-nature. Nature is God, and God is Nature, therefore the need to honor, respect, and reciprocate with the Creator and the created world. This book must be read without judgment and skepticism to glean its wisdom.

-Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley

A commentary by

Bill Schneider

I suspect that Peter John is known to people in lots of different ways: as the Traditional Chief of the Tanana Chiefs' Conference, as an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, as a strong and knowledgeable hunter who has been able, through these skills, to provide for his family, as a leader in the Alaska Native Land Claims movement, as an advisor to religious leaders, and, in his early years, as a hard liver. I suspect that in all of these aspects what is most clear is his tremendous strength to overcome challenges and his independence. He is a champion of the individual taking charge of his life, making the hard decisions, and following through. Reading this book, at this particular time in my life, reminds me how poorly I do in measuring up to the strict standards that he sets in his life.

I have had the pleasure of knowing Peter John for the past eight years. Like many others, I came to personally treasure what he tells me about how to live. I listen very carefully to him and his stories are lessons for me in my own life. The moose story that he tells on page forty-seven has often given me pause to consider my own responsibilities to my wife and daughter and the demands that go with a family. I have struggled with that story because the meaning I want to derive from his telling doesn't go as far as he wants me to take it. Whenever I picture him out on the trail in extreme cold and hunger trying to decide whether to follow the moose, I see strength and moral fiber. But, each time I retell this story, I also hear him saying to me that his strength comes from God and that if I don't tell that part of the story I am distorting his meaning. I sometimes try to run with just the first part of the story—the part I identify with—but the more I get to know Peter John the more I'm sure that he means that his success is with God's help. In the back of my mind I hear him saying something like this: "You got to go all the way with God, you can't go part way," (meaning that you have to realize and accept that your success is in God's hands.) So now I can't leave out the second half of his story, even though I still identify most immediately with the first part.

In this way, Peter John taught me that to really understand what someone says I have to know the person and what they value, the value they attribute to the words they use; I have to struggle with how I hear and remember and my growing awareness of the teller and what they mean. This tension between what we remember of a story, how we interpret it in our lives, and the teller's meaning is a hallmark of the oral tradition. Implicit in the oral tradition is the understanding that stories will be told many times and that we will know the speaker in many different ways over a long time. We will come to know their meaning by coming to know them. It takes

time to know someone and to fully appreciate what they mean. This is quite different from the written tradition where we are trained to focus on the words and the way thoughts are constructed on paper, where we return to the words, not the teller for our understanding.

In this book, as we find ourselves tripping over meaning and struggling to reconcile Peter's use of a particular term, we must remind ourselves that this work comes from oral narrative and that we must return to the man not just rely on his words. Without a strong sense of his presence as we read and reflect, the words may just blow by us. This volume is an invitation to conversation with Peter John and a reminder of the meanings that he has tried to share with each of us. While he often references scriptures in his conversations, he tells us that his wisdom derives not from reading the Bible but from relating biblical stories to personal revelation gained through experience and correlation with Athabaskan oral traditions.

I have to keep reminding myself that this is a written document derived from and based on oral narrative. The two ways of communicating are not always mutually reinforcing. There is a tension. The written words can remind us what Peter has said, but they lack the power that comes from his speech. For instance, I keep thinking about his family, his wife Elsie, and her family: "Of course we didn't date, but the blessing was given to us through my wife's grandmother. Her grandmother is the one that raised her. She's the one that blessed us when we were put together. And that blessing is power—*ch'eghwtsen*.'" (page thirty-nine) Peter John's family must have prepared him in special ways, given him the desire, strength, and perseverance to pursue the truth. As outsiders reading his work, we get a sense of these people, yet I long to know more about his father who told him that it was evil to wish for things, that to do so was selfishness (page six) and others whom "... gave me a lot of things that I still live on today (page seven). How frail and tenuous this sounds on paper in a world that has forgotten the sound of a grandparent's blessing. That said, thank goodness we have this printed word. And thank goodness we have Peter John.

-Bill Schneider

A commentary by

Carolyn Winters

I will never forget the first time I met Chief Peter John of Minto. It was June of 1982, and I had just arrived in Minto. He questioned me intensely: who I was, where I was from, who my people were, my family status, my work, why I was in Minto. Most of all, he questioned me about my beliefs and knowledge of the Bible. He also began the process of trying to teach me. I have been going back ever since.

I cannot imagine Peter without Elsie, without how and what their marriage of (now) seventy years has done for him. Much of who and what Peter is *is* Elsie. They have become like second parents to me, giving me support, wisdom and advice. In my work, when uncertain of the way I should best proceed, I've phoned and sought their counsel. Many times the phone has rung and Peter's voice has greeted me, "What's wrong?" Always, there *was* something that needed either his advice or prayer.

He has integrated his Christian experience with the traditional spirituality of his own people more completely than any other person I've met. The stories of his people show him God's hand, working with Athabaskans, causing him very early in our friendship to tell me that the Athabaskans "have their own Old Testament." Some of those stories he relates in these pages.

I have come to realize that I can only begin to understand some of the *basics* of what he tells me through the words of these stories. I have worked with and for Native American people since 1971, but to paraphrase Fr. Michael Oleksa, I often feel that when people of different cultures interact, they are like two teams brought together on a playing field: one knows how to play basketball, while the other knows soccer. They come together and are expected to "play ball." I've been taught, since infancy, how to play by one set of rules. My Native friends have been taught to live by different rules. Some of the terms we use seem the same, but like the soccer player and the basketball player, the meanings of those terms are often very different.

My Athabaskan friends, those who still speak or understand their language, tell me that there are levels of language and that when Peter speaks in Athabaskan at public functions he speaks the "high" language, something few people, even if considered fluent in their language, are able to do. Similarly, an old Athabaskan friend of mine in her seventies, after reading a draft of this manuscript, told me that all of

the stories, especially the way Peter tells them, have multiple meanings that aren't apparent or understood by someone like myself who must read or hear the stories in English. I also know that English is a very imprecise language and that the Athabaskan languages are not only very precise, but are *oral languages*. Peter Demers, a Wycliffe Bible Translator working in the Gwich'in village of Venetie, tells of going through twenty or thirty different wind terms in trying to translate Luke's story of Jesus in the storm on the Sea of Galilee before coming up with one that would work. I also was recently told by a Lakota friend that meaning in many languages of indigenous people can be changed simply by the tone or emphasis given to vowels or consonants.

Peter tells me that I can never fully understand his experience or the world view that frames his thinking and words. Indeed I am often discouraged with my lack of ability to understand what he has been trying to teach me for all the years since 1982. But learning how difficult it is for me to understand the underlying meaning of his stories and teachings, teachings which are most often parables or riddles, has caused my horizons to be stretched and broadened.

I also now realize that the rigorous study of Greek and Hebrew by church pastors in seminary have given them no better idea of the context in which Jesus spoke, the nuances that the time and his culture gave the language he used, than the books and classes on Alaska Native culture I've taken in order to understand the words of wise elders like Peter. I now approach a Bible passage as I do another culture, with deep respect and humility, trying to get glimpses of the culture that will help me "read between the lines" to hear the Creator's voice.

My struggles to understand have finally caused me to accept that, while I *can't* be a soccer player if I'm schooled in basketball, cross-cultural communication fosters an appreciation and respect for those of different experiences and world views. My hope is that, through such appreciation and respect, true, lasting friendship will grow to the benefit of *all our relations*.

-Carolyn Winters