

the On —ing series



On Living



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Dedication

This piece is dedicated to you, the reader, because you're alive. You get to share in the joy of this timeline with me. That was not entirely by fate — that was by choice. Thank you, eternally, for choosing life. If you keep reading, I'll keep writing reasons for you to live.

This is also dedicated to all the great minds of the past, who aren't able to share in the experience of life with me today. From friends and family, all the way to scholars and the timeless legends of music, art, science, and math. Had you all not paved the way for the rest of us, we might have been lost forever. You gave me a reason to live.



***To those still here,
and those who came
before — you are, all
of you, my reason.***

Before we begin



If you are reading this and the thought of leaving has its hand on your shoulder right now — I need you to hear me before you read another word.

Stay. Just for tonight. Just for the next hour, if that's all you can promise.

You don't need the words for it. You don't have to explain what you've seen, or carry it by yourself. There are people awake at this very moment whose only purpose is to sit with you in it until the weight lifts a little.



*In the United States, call or text **988** — the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Any hour, any day.*

*Or text **HOME** to **741741** to reach the Crisis Text Line.*

*Anywhere else in the world, **findahelpline.com** will point you to someone close by.*



This whole essay is only a longer way of saying what those numbers say faster: the world is better with you in it, and tomorrow is worth finding out about. I wrote it for you. Please stay long enough to read the rest.

What does it mean, to live? To live well. Mindfulness, is often the term used. Gratitude of life, from a different perspective. We have been given life, therefore we must make life beautiful for fellow man.

Why is it so difficult?

Because we're always one word away from being able to explain to the next person why we're happy. As I've said in my other works, words have a way of getting away from us when we're talking about something that excites us.

Sometimes, this makes existence incoherent. Not because the people around us don't understand, but because the people around us have different versions of the same words. Different understandings of the same reality laid out before us.

The sheer weight of a dual existence can be overwhelming. Something else I've spoken of from time to time are the few who have descended into madness trying to explain what they've "seen."

To me, it's a gift I will always keep to myself. Do I know the greater power? That may be a question I never need to answer to anyone but myself.

There is peace, in solitude.



What does it mean to live happy?

Life has a terrible way of dragging us through the worst of it. Kicking us when we're down. Even when we think it can't get any worse, along comes anxiety, depression, PTSD, and any number of phobias that line our vision with thorns as we attempt to navigate our path.

Why would a designer, who is supposed to be “cloaked in glory,” subject us to the sheer torture of existentialism? Nihilism, atheism, theism — whatever ruler you want to put next to it, living is sometimes the hardest thing we've ever had to do.

I've lost too many friends to things that don't make sense to me. Years ago, in my own darkest stretch, I came close to becoming one of them. I survived — twice — and at the time I couldn't have told you why, or what I thought I'd brushed against in those moments. I had no language for it yet.

That came later. Not in the dark, but in the quiet I built afterward — in prayer, in meditation, in the long discipline of sitting still and asking. Years on, somewhere in that stillness, I crossed over and came back carrying something like clarity. And I recognized it. It was the same thing that had flickered at me once before, when I had no words to hold it.



The distance between the attempt and the understanding was decades wide. I spent them researching, reading, listening — waiting on an answer I wasn't certain would ever arrive.

But I'd be amiss not to mention how rapidly life threw songs, poems, and signs my way, telling me to wait just a little bit longer. Something was coming. It was all going to make sense here soon.

Patience, in life, becomes the struggle. The veritable battle against time itself.

Spiritual warfare — and the victim and the victor are the same person.

How do we proceed?

One step at a time. Paying it forward, this gift I've been given.

The ability to have grown quiet enough to cross over and come back with clarity — for the first time in my life, and quite possibly the first time in a long time for anyone I've met. Although I'm certain there are more like me out there, and I'm so excited to live my life on the off chance I get to meet them. I've got this pipe dream of meeting Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson,



for instance. The opportunity to talk to another human who understands his own relativity gives me motivation to keep going.

Is it going to happen? Who knows.



**But how am I going to find out
what tomorrow brings, if I pull the
plug today?**



**Pull the plug? Or plug into the
stream?**



Do me a favor.



Stay.



We have much to talk about. I have much to say, and so do you. My ears are forever open, and my mind is forever a thought that yearns to help others.

Never stop asking questions. Never stop existing. Maybe someday, we won't have to worry about mortality anymore. Until then, understand that you're mortal — and start living like you woke up today.

You have the rest of your life to figure out why you're happy.



***Spend those days making a
memory you can die next to.***



On Living

from the ongoing On ——ing series

Set in Fraunces & EB Garamond. Composed in Lee's Summit, Missouri.

Jamison Johnson · June 2026

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*Series siblings: On Facing · On Rising · On Arriving · On Lasting · On Observing ·
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On Feeling*