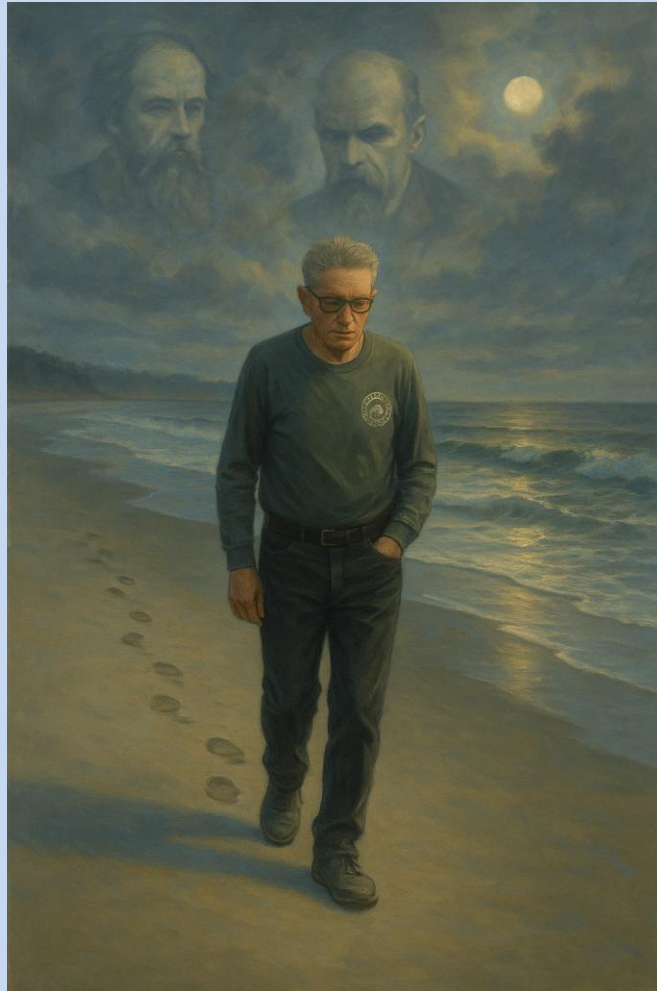


# The Beach



By Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.

Welcome to a moment of reflection at the intersection of neuroscience and faith. In this piece, I take you on a dawn walk along the beaches of Carmel, weaving together the deep inquiries of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche with the steadying rhythms of the NeuroFaith® model. Here, where science meets divine design, we find that even in life's deepest sorrows, there is a rhythm of hope.

For those who know me, I'm an early riser. Always have been. There's something sacred about those pre-dawn hours, that quiet space before the world wakes. The beaches of Carmel at four or five in the morning have become my sanctuary. I no longer run; I walk now. My steps are slower, but somehow more intentional. Perhaps it isn't age but transformation. Each walk feels like a prayer, a rhythm between breath, tide, and thought.

Lately, I've been reflecting on two great minds who wrestled with meaning, pain, and faith: Fyodor Dostoevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche. Dostoevsky's life was shaped by sorrow. Born in 1821, he lost his mother early and his father soon after. It is believed his father was murdered by his own peasants, a trauma that must have carved deep into his heart. He turned from engineering toward the architecture of the soul. Arrested for his involvement in political reform, he was sentenced to death and stood before a firing squad, only to be spared at the last instant. Siberia followed, four long years that broke and remade him.

From that crucible came works that read like living theology. *Notes from Underground* is the cry of the wounded ego. *Crime and Punishment* explores the soul's collision with guilt. *The Idiot* gives us innocence crushed by the world's cynicism. *Demons* reveals what happens when ideas lose their anchor, and *The Brothers Karamazov* rises like a cathedral of questions about God, faith, and love. Every line bears the tension between despair and redemption.

I think about Dostoevsky's father and how his violent death hardened the son's heart. I think about my brother Gregg and the shock of his passing. Pain can easily harden the heart; it tempts us toward numbness and resentment. But I choose not to do so. Because pain can be a doorway to compassion if we let it. It can calcify or consecrate us, and that choice defines the direction of the soul.

Nietzsche fascinates me for a different reason. I admire him because he was not afraid to go deep. He ventured where others feared to look, into the caverns of consciousness and morality. But his tragedy was that he went alone. Deep reflection without mercy can become a labyrinth without an exit. The last ten years of his life were spent in silence, detached and disassociated, his brilliance dimmed by isolation. He descended into himself and never found his way back.

That is why I am forever grateful for the balance I have found through my NeuroFaith® model. NeuroFaith® integrates the science of the brain and heart with the spirituality of grace. It is the coherence between physiology and faith, the union of neural rhythm and divine purpose. In HeartMath, we speak of heart rate variability, the delicate balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. Cardiology calls it the sinusoidal rhythm, the beautiful wave between tension and release. When we live in that rhythm, mind and body align with God's design. Science now confirms what Scripture has whispered all along: the heart has its own wisdom, its own memory of the divine.

As I walk the shoreline, I feel that sacred coherence. The tide moves in and out like a living heartbeat. The rhythm of the sea mirrors the rhythm of breath, and the rhythm of breath mirrors the rhythm of the heart. In those moments, I sense the presence of God breathing through it all. The waves whisper, "Be still, and know that I am God."

Above me, the moon drifts in its gibbous phase, veiled by clouds but never erased. The light

may fade for a time, but it always returns. Christ is like that. Sometimes the fog of pain or confusion blinds us, yet the light remains. It waits behind the clouds until our hearts can see again.

So yes, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, you both saw deeply into the human soul. You gave language to its torment and its longing. But if only you had known the rhythm of Christ, the coherence of faith that holds the heart steady when the mind falters. Intellect alone cannot carry us through the storm. Only grace can.

As I walk the beach and listen to the hum of creation, I know this much: reflection must have rhythm, and rhythm must have rest. The ocean breathes, the heart beats, and the spirit reaches toward eternity. In that motion, I find peace.

I am forever grateful for that balance. Grateful that Christ steadies my science, sanctifies my sorrow, and gives meaning to both. Grateful that even in the darkness, there is always light ahead.

*"The Lord will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail."*

— Isaiah 58:11

So speak to me, O ocean, steady my soul with your rhythm.  
Shine, O moon, remind me that light always returns.  
And Jesus, breathe your mercy through both.

May I forever walk with the cadence of the sea in my heart,  
the coherence of your Spirit in my mind,  
and the light of your love in my eyes.