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*From Garden to Glory* takes the reader on a journey from Genesis to Revelation. Each lesson focuses on a few passages with depth, while explaining the theological concepts that weave the whole of God's Story together. Courtney Doctor's insightful and humorous commentaries will motivate both beginners and lifelong students of Scripture to dig deeper into the biblical texts. Her knowledge of Scripture and depth of theological study provide the reader keys to better understand what they read in the Bible. This is a unique and wonderful study; I've never seen curriculum like it. What a gift to the church!

**Tasha Chapman, PhD**

Director of Educational Studies, Covenant Theological Seminary  
Co-author of *Resilient Ministry*

I don't know of another book quite like this one. In over thirty-five years of ministry, I've read scores of books about understanding the Bible from various perspectives, but Courtney gives us a unique work which provides the essentials for understanding the Bible as one glorious, cohesive story of redemption. It is biblical. It is theological. It is devotional, and it is delightful. A treasure to all who want to know God through his Word, this book is an invaluable tool that will help you make the Bible "your own" and teach others how to do it, too.

**Donna Dobbs**

Director of Christian Education, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS

With wisdom and warmth, Courtney Doctor skillfully guides her readers through a 10-week overview of the Bible. She beautifully weaves together deep theological insights with engaging stories in a way that makes this study beneficial to women who have walked with the Lord for years, as well as those new to the faith. If you want to understand the story of the Bible, then *From Garden to Glory* is the Bible study for you.

### Melissa Kruger

Author of *Walking with God in the Season of Motherhood* and *Envy of Eve*.

Women's Ministry Coordinator, Uptown Church; Blogger, The Gospel Coalition

Courtney Doctor has given us an engaging study that makes the entire Bible accessible and exciting for students of all levels. The commentary and questions move logically and clearly through the Bible's big story to show why this is not only relevant but essential in understanding the Bible and deepening our knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. I recommend this theologically sound, doctrinally rich study for groups and individuals alike.

### Mary Beth McGreevy

Adjunct Professor, Covenant Theological Seminary

Bible Teacher and Author If you've ever wished that you could understand the "big picture" of the Bible, this study will help you know how to do it! Based on a solid grasp of the Bible and theology, and full of practical illustrations, *From Garden to Glory* will walk you through the overarching story that runs from one end of the Bible to the other. In doing so, it not only helps you to understand the Bible better, it also gives you a better understanding of God, his glorious purpose for his world, and how your life relates to that purpose. It is both helpful and hopeful, and those who go through it will reap rich rewards!

### Dr. Jay Sklar

Dean of Faculty, Covenant Theological Seminary

While the Bible touches upon and has a concern for right belief, personal piety and the moral life, none of these things capture its essence, the what and the why of the Word of God. The Bible exists to present the story of God's way with the world, and its primary purpose is to call and shape a people for the sake of his kingdom mission of redeeming a sin-sick world and restoring human beings to lives of personal flourishing and blessing to the world. Using colorful illustrations drawn from family life, movies and literature, Courtney gives us a readable and lively introduction into the heart of Scripture. Courtney gets it: God is not just talking to us; he is inviting his children into his grand redemptive mission. We are not just readers of the story. We are called to be actors as well. "...so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

### Dr. Michael D. Williams

Professor of Systematic Theology, Covenant Theological Seminary

Author, *Far As The Curse is Found*

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# From Garden to Glory

*A Bible Study on the Bible's Story*

Courtney Doctor

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To the five most important women in my life:

To my mom, Mary Ellen Randall. You are a source of endless encouragement to me! “Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her” (Prov. 31:28).

To my daughters, Shelby and Rebecca. May you continue to be women who are characterized by wisdom and kindness! “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue” (31:26).

To my daughters-in-law, Ruth and Jordan. You are not just blessings to my sons; you are true joys to our whole family! “An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels” (31:10).



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Last, but hardly least, I want to thank my family: my mom and dad, George and Mary Ellen Randall; my amazing children—Austin, Ruth, Bradon, Jordan, Shelby, and Rebecca; as well as my loving, kind, good, and praying husband, Craig. I am so grateful for each of you and all of the wonderful ways you love so well. My cup overflows!

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:20-21).



## Why This Study?

For many of us, the Bible is a somewhat mysterious book. I look back and realize that, as a child, I was fairly superstitious about it. I owned a Bible—a white leather Bible that zipped. My grandmother brought it to me from Israel, which only added to its mystery. I thought it needed to be on a special shelf, by itself, and that I certainly should never put other books on top of it! I rarely took it off that shelf; but when I did, I would ceremoniously open it and hope somehow the “magic” verse would appear before me. I had great reverence for the Bible, but no love of it. I suspected it held deep mysteries and even treasures, but I had no idea what it was about.

God has given us his Word, not to be a mystery, but to reveal mystery. God is mysterious, but he has given us his Word to reveal himself—make himself known—to us. The question is how does he go about this? He does not merely make a list of his attributes in order for us to know about him (i.e. I am holy, eternal, powerful, good, loving, etc...). Instead, he recorded a story, a story that is ultimately about him, to both tell us who he is and then show us what that means. For example, he tells us he is “merciful, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” (Ex.s 34:6), and then he shows us what that means as we read the story about how he is merciful, gracious, loving, and slow to anger with the rebellious Israelites—and ultimately with us, by sending Jesus! The whole Bible is God’s story, and it has been given to us so that we can know him—who he is and what he does.

***God has given us  
his Word, not to be  
a mystery, but to  
reveal mystery.***

In the process though, we learn who we are, what we are to be about, and how we are to live. It is a book that is meant to be read, understood, loved, and applied. It is a story that is, first and foremost, about God. But because he is our Creator, and it is “in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28), we learn about ourselves as we learn about him. We learn that he is holy, and we are not; we learn that he is omnipotent, and we are dependent; we learn that he is the redeemer, and we are the ones who need to be redeemed. And we learn that, because we are created in his image and are meant to multiply that image throughout the world, we have meaning, purpose, and significance. As we read this story we are learning not just about God, but about ourselves, our purpose, and even our final destiny.

But when it comes to reading the Bible, it is not always easy to know where to start. If we are not supposed to just open the Bible and hope the perfect verse will appear before our eyes, how are we supposed to open it? My hope is that this study will help us answer that question. This study is intended to be an overview of the whole story the Bible gives us—a story that begins in a garden and ends in glory. It is a 30,000-foot view of the grand sweep of redemption (meaning that we are going to “fly over” the story in such a way that we can look at it in its entirety, from beginning to end). And my hope is that we will not only marvel at the beauty of the story, but that, in future studies, the details will make more sense because of this overview.

As we study from this 30,000-foot perspective, I pray four things will happen. First, that the Bible will become less mysterious and more loved as we learn to read it as the story it is. The individual parts only make sense when they are read in light of the entire story. Second, that your hunger for the word of God will grow as you discover how amazing and brilliant this story is. We will see how it began, how it ends, and how the pieces in between fit together. This study is intended to be both a spark that ignites in us a passion for studying the God’s Word, as well as a tool that equips us to do that in a more informed way. Third, I pray that each of you will come to a greater understanding of your own value and significance as you come to a deeper appreciation of how your life is wrapped up in this story. The Author invites us to know this great story and to enter into it because this story is our story, too. And fourth, that the God of the Bible—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—will be exalted, proclaimed, and worshipped because of our time together in his Word.



## How to Use This Study

This is a 10-week Bible study with each chapter broken down into five days of study (for an optional 20-week study, see below). You should plan on each day taking approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. At the beginning of each chapter is a brief introduction to that week's topic as well as a Scripture reference and prayer. The prayers are intended for individuals to pray at the beginning of each day of study as well as for groups as they meet to discuss that week's lesson.

Each day includes the following:

### Questions

Each day's study will include approximately 5-10 questions that are interspersed with commentary. Most of the questions have a Scripture reference that you will need to look up in order to answer the question. This means that you will need to have a Bible in front of you as you read. The questions are the most important part of the study because they are the place you will be interacting with the living Word of God, so don't skip them!

### Discussion Questions

In order to help facilitate small group discussion, certain questions in each day's homework, have been bolded. While it is important to answer each question in your homework for your own study, these highlighted questions are recommended for discussion. But these are merely suggestions—feel free to discuss any and as many as you have time for.

### Take-Away

At the end of each day there is one bullet point labeled "Take Away." This is meant to help you end that day's study with a reminder of the "Big Idea" for that day.

### For Further Study (or optional 20-week study):

At the end of each day, there is a section labeled "For Further Study." This can either be 1) an optional exercise for those who want to dig a little deeper or 2) it can function to extend each "Day" into two day's worth of study. This enables you to turn the study from a 10-week study into a 20-week study. If you choose the 20-week option, I recommend that you still progress through the study in the same sequence, the only difference being that you will take two days to complete Day 1, two days to complete Day 2, and so on,

### Scripture Memory

Each chapter has one memory verse that is printed at the bottom of each day of study. I encourage you to challenge yourself to memorize these. They are each a vital part of understanding God's great story and can help us when we explain the story to others! At the end, there will be a page for you to write down the ones you can from memory.

### Points to Remember

At the end of each chapter is a bullet-point list to remind you of the main points you studied that week.

As an additional resource for churches, small group Bible studies, or even individuals, we are offering a series of eleven teaching videos. Each teaching segment is approximately 30 minutes long. The first video is an introduction and the other ten follow the chapter outline, offering additional information on that chapter's content.

I reference Disney's *Tangled* throughout the study. It could be fun and helpful for your group to watch this movie together before you begin the study.



## Introduction

If you saw *The Passion of the Christ*, you know that it evoked strong emotions. This movie told the story of Jesus' last 24 hours before the crucifixion. Most people were so moved by the depiction of Christ's sufferings that they left the theater either in silence or tears—or both. Some said that they didn't (or couldn't) talk to anyone until the next day. But not everyone felt that way. One young man, when interviewed and asked about his reaction to the movie, reflected sincerely and said, "I guess it was okay, but it didn't have much of a plot." That might strike some of us as funny at first, and as tragic as we let it sink in, but he has a point. If you grew up in the church or went to Sunday school as a child, when you saw *The Passion*, you sat down in the theater already knowing much of the backstory. You knew the movie was picking up a story line mid-way. But for this young man, it was like going to see *Tangled* (Disney's version of the Rapunzel story) and only seeing the part where Rapunzel is rescued from the tower. If he didn't know why she was in the tower in the first place or what was going to happen to her now that she was out, his understanding would be diminished. Or it would be like watching *The Lord of the Rings* and only seeing the scene where Frodo and Sam struggle up the mountain and throw the ring into the pit of fire. Surely, you would wonder why the struggle was so difficult and why disposing of the ring was so necessary. Maybe you didn't grow up hearing what Paul Harvey called "the rest of the story" and, like our young movie-goer, wonder what difference the horrible and gruesome death of a man on a cross 2,000 years ago could possibly make to you. Well, if that is the case, have I got a story for you!

But if you did grow up hearing the backstory, before you either chuckle or roll your eyes at this young man, we need to stop and think how, so often, we explain our Christian faith to others in a way that perpetuates this truncated version of the story. If you are like me, you have probably been taught to share your faith by explaining "Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins and take me to live with him in heaven for all eternity." And that is true. But that is not all! We are living in the middle of the greatest drama of all time and the Bible is the recording of how this great story began—as well as how it ends.

Herman Bavinck, a Dutch theologian in the 1800's, sums it up this way: "The essence of the Christian religion is this, that the creation of the Father, devastated by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God, and re-created by the Holy Spirit into the kingdom of God." Do you see what Bavinck did? He started with creation and ended with the consummated kingdom of God; he starts in the Garden and ends in glory. He shows that this great story involves God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He shows that the original creation was very good and the final re-creation will be very, very good, but that something—namely sin—has devastated that good creation. We see that something had to happen in order to rescue and restore that original good creation. And that is the story of redemption! As John Calvin said, this is the story of "God's works in our world on our behalf."

Before we begin, let me offer a word of warning. Please don't think that by calling this a story I mean it is not true. Sometimes we use the word "story" to refer to something that is made up or make-believe. Sometimes we use it to mean a lie (did you just tell a story?). But we also use it to mean the accurate account of something that has happened (have I told you the story of our crazy summer vacation?). It is in this last sense that I call the grand drama of redemption a story—not just a story, but the story, the one in which our very lives are anchored. But don't for a minute think that you get to just sit back and enjoy the show. This drama will invite you in, call you onto the stage, and transform you into one of its innumerable participants. So, without further ado, let the lights dim and the curtain go up. Get ready for the greatest drama of all time.

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# 1

## Cliff's Notes

When I was a little girl, family vacations were great. But the process of actually getting out the door to begin the family vacation was not great. Usually, my brother and I were hyped up, eager to leave. My dad was focused on the goal—get everyone in the car and get on the road. My mom was running around making sure the coffee pot was off, the windows were locked, the vacuum was put away, and the pillows were straight. But the moment always came when we were finally all in the car and my dad was backing out of the garage. We were ready to go! Or so we thought. Inevitably, before we left the driveway, my dad would stop and look at the map (this was long before GPS) one more time to make sure he knew exactly where we were headed.

Chapter 1 of this study is somewhat like that. Here we are, gathered, ready to finally get going—but we are going to stop before we actually “hit the road” (in Chapter 2) and make sure we are properly oriented. We need to “look at the map” before we head out.

How many of you used *Cliff's Notes* (those handy little summaries of literary works written for students) in high school in order to pass an English class (don't worry, I'm not going to tell your English teacher)? If you are like me, you used them for all the wrong reasons—mainly so you wouldn't have to actually read the assigned book. But just because we might have used them wrongly does not mean they can't have a helpful purpose. *Cliff's Notes* are written in an attempt to help provide a framework for understanding. *Cliff's Notes* usually start with some of the fundamental elements of a story—information about the author, the setting, the genre, major themes, and purpose of the book—and then break down the individual chapters. That is how we are going to start this study. Chapter 1 is like reading *Cliff's Notes* for the Bible (but without the guilt!). Think of Chapter 1 as an overview of the Bible as preparation to actually study the Bible. We are going to look at the Author (and authors), the setting, the genre, the plot summaries, and the purpose of the Bible, so that we will have a framework to help us better understand the story. Like I said in the introduction, the Bible is a story; it is the story of how God, through his words and his actions, has revealed himself to us. So let's take some time to think through some of the fundamental elements of that story: who wrote it, what kind of story it is, where it takes place, and why it was written.

### Pray

“Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known” (Jer. 33:3). Let's call to God and ask him to open our hearts and eyes to the wonders of his Word and the glories of his work.

## Day 1: Author(s)

I was reading a plot summary for *The Fault in Our Stars*. One of the twists in the plot develops when the main character, Hazel, discovers the author of her favorite novel actually had an experience similar to the one he had written about. Knowing something about the author changed the way Hazel read his book. Has that ever happened to you? Maybe you know the author of a book, or have received a note from a dear friend, and, as you have read the book or the note, you can almost “hear” the writer’s voice as you read. Even if I don’t know an author personally, I like to know something about him or her. If I am reading a book on theology, I like to know about the author—what he or she believes, or maybe a little bit about his or her life. Knowing something about the author informs how we read their book.

***Part of the miracle and the mystery of the Bible is that God used ordinary men—their individual personalities, their unique life experiences, and their different cultures—to capture the very thoughts and words of God himself. He allows his people to participate in his purposes.***

The same is true for the Bible. But this can be a little tricky because when we talk about the author of Scripture, we can mean the Author (God) or the men who actually captured the words on the page (Moses, David, Paul, Peter, etc...). As the living Word of God, the Bible is different from any other book we read. It is not just the work of a human being or even a group of humans. The Bible is inspired by God (meaning God himself is speaking the words) and written down by numerous men over more than one thousand years. These men, however, were more than just transcribing the words of God. Part of the miracle and the mystery of the Bible is that God used ordinary men—their individual personalities, their unique life experiences, and their different cultures—to capture the very thoughts and words of God himself. He allows his people to participate in his purposes.

As we are sitting in our “driveway” orienting ourselves before we “hit the road” of our study, this is a foundational truth we need to know. This is a truth that will shape our understanding of exactly what we are reading as well as how we are to respond. As Moses said, these

are no mere words for us, they are our very life (Deut. 32:47). And why is that? Because they are the very words of God himself!

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:16. Who is the ultimate author of all of Scripture?

- What is the name of the man who penned this verse?

2. Read 2 Peter 1:21. How did God “breathe out” all Scripture? What are some other possible ways of saying (explaining) that?

- What is the name of the man who penned this verse?

3. Read Acts 4:24-25. Whose “mouth” was used? Who was the one using the “mouth?”

- What is the name of the man who penned this verse?

4. Read Isaiah 46:9-10. What does God declare from the beginning, according to v. 10? What will he accomplish?

Only the Author of a story knows where the story is headed before he starts writing! It is the will and the intent of the author that carries a story from beginning to end. This is true not just of the overall story of redemption (God knew the end before he began), but it is also true of our individual lives. God knows what he is doing before he ever begins.

*Only the Author  
of a story knows  
where the story is  
headed before he  
starts writing!*

5. **In what ways does the thought that God, the Author of your story, knows the end before he ever begins, change the way you view your current circumstances, challenges, suffering, and trials?**

- **Read Romans 8:28-39. What hope or confidence does this give you?**

The temptation to which we are all vulnerable is to read the Bible as if it were all about us. Most of us have been taught to read the Bible as if its main reason for existence is to give us a little encouragement for the day. We look for verses that give us a little “pick-me-up.” But is that why the Author has written this book? We will talk more about this on Day 5, but the reason the Author has written this book is to both reveal who he is and teach us who we are. One of the first things we learn is that he is sovereign over all things and he, the Author, knows what he is doing. He knows where the story is headed and he will accomplish all of his purposes—which is the ultimate encouragement we all need.

## Take-Away

God is the ultimate Author of the entire story—he is the One who knows the end from the beginning.

## For Further Study

1. Of what else is God the author?

- Acts 3:15

- Hebrews 12:2 (“founder” can also be translated “author”)

- Genesis 2:3 (what did God “do”)

2. Write a sentence or two explaining why it matters that God is the author of each of these:

- Scripture:

- Life:

- Faith:

- Creation:

## Scripture Memory

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God  
as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:21

## DAY 2: Setting

I have a friend who is an archaeologist. He is like a modern-day Indiana Jones and has spent considerable time in different parts of the world digging for artifacts. If he were to find a Roman coin as he was digging, what factors would affect the conclusions he could draw about that coin? For starters, his geographical location would matter. A Roman coin found in Egypt is going to mean something different than a Roman coin found in Texas. Also, the layer of his dig would matter. If he were to find that coin in a dig where everything around it was from the 1800's, his conclusions would be different than finding that coin in a layer from the first century. His geographical setting informs his understanding of what he finds.

If my friend said he had found the remains of a unicorn, what would you think? For most of us, we would think, "Wait a minute. A unicorn?" We would think that he had lost his mind! Why? Because we know that unicorns are mythological and, in an archaeological dig, he should only be finding things that are real. An archaeologist can only dig up the remains of something that actually existed in a certain place at a certain time. So historical reality is also a key to his findings.

Like my friend on his digs, several things are important to us as we study to understand God and his word. One of those things is the historical reality of the Bible—God works in real people, in real places, in real times—real settings! As Mike Williams puts it, "The biblical authors . . . knew that faith without real world, historical fact, is not faith but mere superstition."<sup>1</sup> This is important to keep in mind because we need to know that God's revelation to us is grounded in events that really happened! We are saved because a real man was really born, really died, and really rose again. Paul reminds us of this when he says "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). What Paul is saying is if the crucifixion and resurrection did not really happen to a real man (Jesus) at a very real moment in time (circa 33 AD), in a real location (outside the city of Jerusalem), then our faith is pointless. That makes the historical setting of the Bible a pretty big deal!

***God works in real  
people, in real places,  
in real times—  
real settings!***

If we don't take some time to anchor the story of "God's works in our world" in settings of real time and place, then we can read the Bible as a group of moralistic stories that may or may not have actually happened. Or we can read them as mythology that displays nothing more than the consequences of both good and bad behavior. In such unanchored stories, God and his actions on our behalf can become like that unicorn—a really fun idea, but nothing we need to take too seriously. But, praise God, the events in the Bible are actual events that took place in locations that we can even visit. This means, when we read the Bible, we are not merely reading good ideas on how we should live, but we are reading about a living God acting and working for his people. And that very same God is acting and working for his people in our very real world today.

In the introduction I shared a quote from John Calvin that said the Bible is about "God's works in our world on our behalf." The God who created it all does not stand far off and throw moralistic ideas at us but, instead, engages and steps into his creation—God working for us in real time and space!

1. Read Genesis 1:1. List a few things that you learn about God, time, and the world.

2. **Read Deuteronomy 1:1-5. In your own words, discuss why you think the chapter doesn't just begin in verse 6 (what is the point of all of those names)?**

3. Read Ezekiel 1:1. Again, what is the point of the details? List 4-5 things you learn about the setting (time and place).

Over and over again God goes out of his way to let his readers know that what he is about to tell them really happened—this is no mythological tale! God works in the midst of human events; the miraculous occurs in the midst of the mundane.

4. Read Luke 2:1-5. Again, list 4-5 things you learn about the setting (time and place). How is this an example of the miraculous occurring in the midst of the mundane?

5. **Think about the very real circumstances in your life today—the joys and the struggles. We have been talking about how God works in real people, in real time, and in real places—today just like in 33 AD. How is God working in the mundane and difficult places in your life?**

## Take-Away

The events of Scripture are anchored in history—real time, real places, real people.

## For Further Study

1. Read Acts 9:1-9. Why is the historical setting (reality) of this scene important? What is miraculous and what is mundane?
2. What are some of the different ways people might think about the historical reality of Jesus? In your own words, why does it matter what we believe about this?

## Scripture Memory:

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God  
as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”  
2 Peter 1:21

## DAY 3: Genre

If you have read Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, I doubt that you were frustrated with him for the fact that you couldn't find Middle-Earth on Google-maps. You probably even reacted in fear when She-lob (a giant spider) was about to eat Bilbo (a hobbit)—even though you knew that neither of these things actually exists. Why? Because you know what genre it is. It is not a history book; it is a made-up story of mythical and magical characters that delight and capture our imaginations. Knowing what you are reading is an important piece in knowing how to read it.

But is the Bible like *The Lord of the Rings*—a fantasy? No! In yesterday's homework, you looked at the fact that what is given to us in Scripture is the recording of real events, the stories of real people, as well as the recording of a real God speaking, acting, and moving in real time and place.

So what genre is Scripture? That is not a simple and easy question to answer because the Bible contains different forms of literature. The psalms are poetry, the New Testament contains personal letters, and the proverbs are,

***Knowing what you  
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to read it.***

well... proverbs. But does that mean that the Bible is a bunch of fragmented, maybe even unrelated, parts? No! What is the overarching genre of Scripture, the genre that holds it all together as one, coherent piece of literature? The Bible is narrative, a story—not a fictional story, but a story nonetheless. It is one story, written over centuries. The Bible is a narrative account of “God’s works in our world on our behalf.” Within that story we find historical records (e.g. 1 and 2 Chronicles), poetry (e.g. Psalms), historical narrative (e.g. Exodus), and several other forms of literature, but the overarching genre is narrative.

One of my favorite books, *A Severe Mercy* by Sheldon Vanauken, is an autobiographical, narrative account of the author’s marriage. Within the story, the author shares letters that he received from his dear friend, C.S. Lewis. I am not confused when I come to the letters, even though the genre has shifted. I understand that I am to read them within the story line. And the letters make greater sense within the even greater story being told. The same is true for us as we encounter different genres within the big story line of the Bible. They make the most sense when we read them as part of the whole. Paul’s letters are not random, stand-alone documents. Rather, they are letters found within a bigger story—and make the most sense within that story. David’s psalms are not arbitrary songs. They are songs that reflect the emotions and circumstances of the story being told.

1. Turn to the Table of Contents in your Bible and list 3-5 different books and what genre you think each might be.

God could have just documented the facts: that he made everything good, we broke it, and now he is fixing it again. But he doesn’t. God doesn’t just tell us about himself; he shows us who he is through what he

***By using narrative, God is showing us that his main goal is not to merely inform us, but he is actually transforming us and inviting us into this story.***

does. Let me say that again—God doesn’t just tell us about himself; he shows us who he is through what he does. He both tells us he is faithful and shows us his faithfulness through stories about men and women he forgave, promises he fulfilled, plans he brought to fruition. Stories are powerful. We are all moved more by a good story than by a list of facts meant only to inform us. By using narrative, God is showing us that his main goal is not to merely inform us, but he is actually transforming us and inviting us into this story. We are not to know him in only an intellectual way, but we are to know him in a relational way—and we are to love him with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength.

2. Read 2 Samuel 12:1-7. How does God use a story to both reveal truth as well as invite a response in David’s life?

Let’s look at a few of the places where we can thread pieces of the story together. If the Bible really is one, big, continuous story, then we should be able to find places where the story is woven together.



3. Genesis 50:24-26. What does Joseph ask?

- Read Exodus 13:19. What does Moses do?

- Read Joshua 24:32. What finally happens?

There is more to this story of Joseph and his bones—hang in there and we will get to it in a few weeks. But for now, it is important just to see that a piece of the story that began in Genesis is still a piece of the story over 400 years later in the book of Joshua. In the same way, we can see bits of this continuity as the story progresses in the New Testament, too.

4. Read Luke 1:1-4. Who wrote it? To whom was it written? For what purpose did he write it?

- Read Acts 1:1-3. Describe what you notice about the continuity of the story.

But it is not just in the smaller pieces of the story that we see continuity. This story holds together from beginning to end—from the garden to glory!

**5. Read Genesis 2:7-14 and Revelation 22:1-5. List 2-3 things that you notice are present in both accounts. How does this inform you about the continuity of the story?**

I will say it again—the overarching genre of Scripture is narrative, a story. Understanding this helps shape us (because we are studying this not just to be informed but to be transformed). For instance, have you ever felt insignificant? We all, at times, question the meaning and significance of our lives. My prayer is, as we study this great story of redemption, we will see how our stories are part of that bigger story and that we will more and more understand we have been created for a glorious purpose—our lives are anything but insignificant. You are a part of something grand and glorious! As we look at how the story continues from one generation to the next, from one person to the next, and from one place to the next, so it still continues to include you and me today.

**6. List a few ways people reach for significance in their lives.**

- Describe the difference between significance found in those things and the significance that comes because your life is anchored in this greater story.**

### Take-Away

The Bible is predominantly a story that both tells us and shows us about God and his relationship with his creation. God is revealing both who he is and who we are through the biblical story.

### For Further Study

1. Look back at Days 1-3. Summarize how you would put all three of these things together (author, setting, genre) and explain their importance.

### Scripture Memory

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God  
as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:21

## DAY 4: Plot Summaries

Did your English teacher ever make you write plot summaries? Mine did and I was not good at writing them. They were difficult. It was so hard for me to decide which details should be included. What events in the plot were crucial? What events weren't? But, without fail, whenever I did work to write a summary, I ended up understanding the story better. Writing a summary meant I had to know the main plot and be able to trace how the author accomplished his or her purpose through the development of the plot. In the end, after I had worked to write a summary, I found I was also better able to explain what the book was actually about.

If someone were to ask you, "What is the Bible about?" what would you tell them? "Jesus" is always a good answer, but what would that mean to someone who doesn't know anything about him? Remember the man I told you about in the introduction—the one who didn't think *The Passion* had much of a plot? What could you tell him that would help him see the events portrayed in the movie are actually part of a much bigger story? The movie portrays the high point of the story, but it is not a summary of the whole story. The movie chronicles a week in time, but that week was the culmination of thousands of years of promises and expectations. Likewise, the on-going effects of that one week have changed the course of history for all time—including our lives today. If we were asked to write a summary of the story, we would not begin with a baby in a manger. We would have to begin at creation and move through the major events of the Old Testament.

*If we were asked to write a summary of the story, we would not begin with a baby in a manger. We would have to begin at creation and move through the major events of the Old Testament.*

Usually the first chapter or two of a book contains some pretty key information and events. Let's take a peek at the first few chapters of our story and write down any information that might prove to be important.

1. Look up the following verses and write down any pieces that might be important to include in our summary:

- Genesis 1:1

- Genesis 1:26 (two key points!)

- Genesis 1:31

- Genesis 3:1-7

- Genesis 3:15

If we were writing a summary, knowing what comes next in our storyline would be important, so we are going to honor our English teachers out there! Take a minute and write down what you think might be a few of the major events in the story. Don't worry if you feel like you don't even know where to start—just take a shot at it. At the end of this study, we will try to do this again and you will be able to compare your two answers. But for now, pick a few events in the Bible that you might know about and think about whether or not they might be crucial events in the story line. We just looked at how the story begins, so what might be the next major event? Try to write down three events from the Old Testament and three events from the New Testament that you think might be important to include if you were to write a summary of the story found in the Bible (and there are no right or wrong answers here):

The Bible actually records a few summaries of itself!

2. Read Deuteronomy 6:20-25. Using the chart below, list 3-5 things that Moses includes in this summary.
3. Read Joshua 24:1-13. List 3-5 events that Joshua includes in his summary. Circle or highlight any events that are included in both.
4. Skim Acts 7:2-50. Identify 3-5 events that Luke includes in his summary. Circle or highlight any events that are included in all three summaries.

Deuteronomy 6:20-25	Joshua 24:1-13	Acts 7:2-50

One of my hopes for this study is that, by the time we have finished it, we will all be better able to summarize and articulate what this story is about and better understand what the key events in the storyline are, so that, we, like Moses, Joshua, and Luke, will be better able to tell others about our God and his plan of salvation. So press on; we will be spending time studying just that.

## Take-Away

There are key moments of the story that are crucial for us to know.

## For Further Study

1. Read the summaries in Nehemiah 9:6-37 and Psalm 105. What events are recorded in both and what events are only mentioned in Nehemiah?
2. What are some possible reasons for that?

## Scripture Memory

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God  
as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.  
2 Peter 1:21

## DAY 5: Author's Purpose

Every author has a purpose. Some write to inform, others to entertain, still others to persuade. What was God's purpose?

When Craig and I started dating, he lived in Colorado and I lived in Oklahoma. This was before cell phones and our phone bills were sky-high! But we were in love and what is money when you are in love? We would talk for hours, just getting to know each other. Craig loves to tell the story about being on the phone with me one night (the phone was in the hallway of his fraternity house) as his friends passed him to go out for the evening. They teased him about not going with them. He just smiled and stayed on the phone. But when they came back to the fraternity house many hours

*We do not  
discover God;  
God reveals  
himself to us.*

later and we were still on the phone, they about fell over laughing at him! He has never heard the end of that one.

I would write long letters just telling him about me, my day, my life. How else would he get to know me? But I had to decide what to tell to him. If I had kept something hidden, Craig would not have known it. He could only know me to the extent that I was willing to reveal myself to him. But we were so eager to know each other, we readily told the other one about ourselves—our hopes, dreams, fears, thoughts, aspirations—anything that would help us know the other one better. We wanted to know and be known.

The only reason we know anything about God is because he wants us to know him. We do not discover God; God reveals himself to us. He makes himself known to us! Has he told us everything there is to know about him? Absolutely not! But as Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:3, “His divine power has granted to us *all things* that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence” (emphasis mine). So God has told us (in both word and deed) everything that we need to know; he has told us both who he is and what he has done. But not all revelation is the same. Let’s look at several different ways that God has made himself known and the results of that knowledge.

1. Read Psalm 19:1. What is revealing what?

- \_\_\_\_\_ declares (or reveals) \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ proclaims (or reveals) \_\_\_\_\_
- To whom is it being revealed?
- Restate that in your own words.

2. Read Psalm 50:6. What is revealing what?

- \_\_\_\_\_ declare (or reveal) \_\_\_\_\_
- To whom is it being revealed?

3. Read Romans 1:18-20.

- What is being revealed?
- Why (v. 19)?

- In what is it revealed (v. 20)?

- Where does that leave man (v. 20)?

4. **Make a list of 3-5 things that, according to the verses above, are known about God through his creation.**

5. **Is that enough information? Is that “all things that pertain to life and godliness?” List a couple of things that are missing.**

Why is God's creation (the heavens and the earth) not enough information? We all know people who think it is—people who say that they don't need church or the Bible, they can simply “worship God in nature.” One of the reasons God's revelation of himself in nature is not enough for us is because “Sin has chewed the wires to the radio. God is still broadcasting, but we don't hear clearly.”<sup>2</sup> We need help to understand what we are seeing! Part of what God does as he reveals himself to us in the Bible is explain the things we see but don't understand. That is why just observing nature is not enough. We need the Author of all creation to comment on his work. There is a reason that the word ‘author’ is the root of ‘authority’—the one who originated the idea has the most authority to explain the idea.<sup>3</sup> We need God to explain his revelation to us. But we need even more still.

6. Read Exodus 34:5-7. List several things God reveals about himself in these verses.

- Do you think that in these verses God is revealing himself more as the Creator or as a Father? Comment on how this revelation is different than the revelation of God in creation.

- What are some possible responses to this knowledge of God (see v. 8)?

This is wonderful knowledge of God to have. But it is still not enough; we need even more.

7. Read John 17:3. What knowledge is needed for eternal life?

8. Read 1 John 5:11-12. Where is eternal life found?

Knowing things about God is wonderful, but salvation is found, not in knowing about him, but in knowing him. God has revealed himself fully in his son, Jesus (John 14:9; Colossians 1:15).

***The reason God has revealed himself is for our salvation and his worship.***

God has chosen to reveal himself to us so that we will know him. But knowledge of him is not the end goal. The reason God has revealed himself is for our salvation and his worship. We are required to respond to what he has told us about himself. God has recorded this great story of his “works in our world on our behalf” not so we will merely know about him, but so that we will know him, believe him, be saved, and worship him forever.

### Take-Away

Because God wants us to know him, he has revealed himself to us.

### For Further Study

1. Read Revelation 22:18-19. What does this tell us about the revelation of God through his written word?



2. Read Philippians 2:9-11. What will the final response of every person be?

Spend some time in prayer thanking God for revealing himself and asking him to help you better understand his revelation. Consider responding in a Philippians 2:10 kind of way.

### Scripture Memory

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God  
as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:21

### Points to Remember from Chapter 1

- God is the ultimate Author of Scripture.
- The historical reality of the events of Scripture is vital to our understanding of God and his word. God has moved in real time, real space, and real people—and still does!
- The Bible is a narrative account of God and his work in our world. He both tells us and shows us who he is through this story of “his works in our world on our behalf.”
- The story is still unfolding, which means that we get to be a part of it!
- God, the Author of our story, has chosen to reveal himself because he wants us to know him!
- God reveals himself through his creation but even more fully through his Word—both the written Word and the Word who took on flesh and dwelt among us.



# 2

## Once Upon a Time

When you were little did you love a fairy tale? Do you still? In my house, because my oldest two children are sons, our family tends to watch more “manly-movies” than “chick-flicks.” If you don’t know the difference, here is how my husband says you can tell—manly-movies are about a lot of people dying quickly and chick-flicks are about one person dying slowly. He may be right, but I’m not talking about chick flicks or manly movies. I am talking about a story that all of us—men and women, old and young—gravitate to. You know what I’m talking about, a story of danger and rescue, love and passion, heroes and villains, and of great evil being triumphed over by an even greater good.

My high school English teacher taught us that all good stories have at least four main parts: an introduction, a conflict, a climax, and a conclusion. The introduction is where the characters and setting are explained; the conflict is when the main problem of the story is revealed; the climax is the spectacular solution to the problem; and the conclusion is the wrapping up of the story in a way that brings resolution. Think of every fairy tale you ever loved. What story line do they follow? They all start with “once upon a time.” The music is sweet, the birds are singing, and the sun is shining. All of a sudden though, the music changes and we read, “but then an evil witch...” and the great conflict is revealed. Before too long, however, to our great relief, the trumpets blare and the knight in shining armor rides in to the rescue. There is a great battle, an even greater victory, and the story ends with the music again playing sweetly, the birds singing once again, and the sun shining brighter than it did before. At the end, we read, “they all lived happily ever after.” Our hearts leap at this good news. We gravitate toward this type of story over and over again because we know this story—it is our story. Instead of “once upon a time... but then an evil witch... the knight in shining armor... and happily ever after,” the four parts of our story are typically called creation, rebellion, redemption, and restoration—but both story lines follow the same path.

*We gravitate toward  
this type of story over  
and over again because  
we know this story—it  
is our story.*

I love the movie *Tangled*, which, like I mentioned in the Introduction, is Disney’s version of the Rapunzel story. It is a story of rescue and romance, love and laughter, danger and dancing. What could be better? But for our purposes in this study, I want to focus on the beginning of the movie. Within the first two minutes, we learn some crucial parts of the story (and if we were in line getting popcorn and missed the first few minutes of the movie, the rest of it just doesn’t make as much sense). The first line in the movie

is spoken by the soon-to-be-hero Flynn Rider as he says, “This is the story of how I die. Don’t worry, it is actually a very fun story.” He lets us know two things right away: that his death is an integral part of the story but that somehow it is all going to be okay in the end. Then he goes back to the very beginning and says, “It starts with the sun. And how, once upon a time, a single drop of sunlight fell from the heavens and from this small drop of sun grew a magic, golden flower. It had the ability to heal the sick and injured.” In three sentences we are told that there is an origin and source of that which is good. And it is into this goodness that the words “sick” and “injured” are dropped—but they are dropped in the context of healing and hope. The scene then skips to a shot of a glorious kingdom on a beautiful island and we are told that the “kingdom was ruled by a beloved king and queen.” In two minutes, what have we learned? We have learned the setting for the entire story.

Genesis 1-2 is the place in our story where we learn what the world was supposed to be like. It is the place that, if we were to miss it, the rest of the story just doesn’t make as much sense. It is our introduction and our glimpse into once-upon-a-time, when all was as it should be.

## Pray

Isaiah 40:8 “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” Pray that as we study the unfading word of God we would learn more of his greatness and live more in his grace.

# DAY 1: The Kingdom

At the beginning of any good fairy tale, how does the kingdom look? As mentioned above, the sun is always shining, birds are singing, and there is joy and laughter in the air. Why? Because the author wants the audience to know how it looks when all is right in the world. There is a way that it is ‘supposed to be’ and, having that picture in our minds, we are able to more clearly see the devastation when that beauty is disrupted . . . and we understand why we spend the rest of the story longing for things to be returned

***God starts our story with a beautiful glimpse of the way life is supposed to be in his kingdom: there is beauty, order, and peace.***

to the way they were. Think of *The Lion King*. How does it begin? It opens with the magnificence of the sun rising, the beauty of the animals roaming, and the order of creation functioning properly. But what happens when Scar (the evil brother) becomes the king? The land becomes dry and barren, there is not enough food or water, and animals languish and die. The kingdom is affected by the virtue of the king. But, wait, I am getting ahead of myself! We are still in “once upon a time.”

Our story is no fairy tale. But it is the greatest drama ever told! God starts our story with a beautiful glimpse of the way life is supposed to be in his kingdom: there is beauty, order, and peace. And our initial glimpse in Genesis 1 and 2 is what the Kingdom of God is supposed to look like. We are not supposed to see these chapters simply as a description of an event that has happened in the past, but as a window into the delight and love our Father has for his creation. God has lavished on his “very good” creation his goodness and it is in this goodness that we were intended to live. What we see in the Garden of Eden is a picture of how life looks when the Kingdom of God is in full effect, before the disruption sin caused. Genesis 1 and 2 is not meant to be merely a description of what God did in the creation of the world, it is meant to show us how he lavishes his goodness and love on us by creating such a good and beautiful world.

1. Read Genesis 1:2. Before God spoke our world into existence, what three words are used to describe it?
2. **Read Genesis 1:3. What is the first thing that God creates? Describe what it might have been like to witness that event?**
3. **Read Genesis 1:3-25 as if you were listening to a symphony. Describe what you see, hear, and feel in this beautifully majestic telling of the creation of our world.**
4. What is the repeated phrase in Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25? What are some things we can learn about the character of the Creator in that phrase?

As we all know, and as we will see as we follow the story into the next chapter, we no longer live in this perfect kingdom where all is good. And yet, at the core of who we are, we long for it.

5. Read Genesis 2 and write down 2-3 things that sound “very good” to you.

God is commenting on his work. He wants us to know that there was a time when all was good in the world. Genesis 1-2 describes the world during our “once upon a time.” And it is this context that helps us understand what we long for—the great restoration of all things.

**6. What are some ways you see a longing for this good kingdom in our world today?**

### Take-Away

There was a time when the world was as God intended it to be—and we long for it to be restored.

### For Further Study

1. Read Psalm 104.

- What do you learn about God?

- What do you learn about creation?

- What do you learn about how we are to respond to both God and his creation?

2. Read Psalm 8. Dr. C.J. (Jack) Collins calls Psalm 8 “Genesis 1 set to music.”<sup>4</sup> What was David’s reaction to God and his work of creation? Describe a time when you felt like this.

### Scripture Memory

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 1:31

## DAY 2: The King

The Kingdom, as it was intended, would have been a magnificent place. All was good—very good. But a kingdom is only as good as its king. It is the king who determines if peace rules and people flourish. He is the one who maintains the goodness of the kingdom.

Take a minute to write down some words that come to your mind when you think of a king:

I wish I could read what you wrote, but I would imagine most of us wrote things like “ruler” and “monarch.” I wrote down “power” and “responsibility.” And all of these are true. But there is one aspect of kingship that is crucial to our understanding: it is the aspect of sovereign decree—a king can speak and his words become law. We see this in historical kings.

1. Read Ezra 5:17-6:1. What did the king do (make) and what happened as a result?
2. Read Esther 1:19-20. What do you learn about a decree?

This is important to remember—kings are people who speak and their words are obeyed, immediately.

Before we turn to Genesis 1, I want to talk about the different ways authors can let their readers know about the characters in their stories. Some authors tell you about the characters in their stories. For example, in *Tangled*, Flynn Rider says that there was “a kingdom ruled by a beloved king and queen.” But other authors will describe to you things that their characters do (rather than come right out and tell you who their characters are) and the reader is supposed to be able to pick up on what is being shown and infer certain things about that character. Think of *Mary Poppins*. The author never explicitly tells us that Mary is some sort of magical being. But she shows us in numerous different ways. To start with, Mary uses an umbrella to fly onto the scene. Then she opens her carpet bag and proceeds to pull out a large lamp, a mirror, and a coat rack—all things that are entirely too large to fit into her bag. She talks with animals and rides a carousel horse off through the countryside. The reader is clearly supposed to pick up on what the author is trying to show us—that Mary is no ordinary person.

I am in no way equating God with Mary Poppins. I am merely pointing out the different ways that an author provides the information he wants the reader to have. In our story, Moses (the author of Genesis) does not tell us that God is the King—but he absolutely shows us that God is the great king over all things. He does this by describing what God does and what happens as a result.

3. What is kingly about how God is portrayed in Genesis 1:1?
4. Read Genesis 1:3, 1:6, 1:9, 1:11, 1:14, 1:20, and 1:24. Write down the repeated phrase.
5. What is the resulting action? What is the repeated phrase at the end of vv. 9, 11, 15, 24, and 30?
6. **Make a list of what obeys his voice.**
7. **If everything on the list above obeys the word of God, how much more so should you and I? Is there an area in your life where your response to “and God said” needs to be “and it was so”?**

The very first way that God reveals himself is as king. This is significant not only in how we respond to him, but also as a substantial part of the story. When Adam and Eve rebel, it is rebellion against the one true king of heaven and earth. And the story plays out in light of God, the one true King, reestablishing his people under his rule and reign. We will look at this theme as the story progresses and will greatly rejoice to see its glorious conclusion!

Before we go any further, we have to stop and talk about the very first audience of Genesis 1 and 2. In order to read anything well, we have to understand what the author wants his audience to know. People have strong opinions about what Genesis 1-2 means. There are debates about how long ago all of this took place, how long it actually took, how long a day was, and, of course, what happened to the dinosaurs. It is helpful to step back for a minute and remind ourselves who the first audience of Genesis was and what the author was conveying to them—not just to interpret well, but also to apply it well! Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible and the first people to read these books were the Israelite people after they had been brought out of Egypt and delivered from slavery (we’ll be talking a lot more about them in the weeks to come). So imagine what it would have been like to be one of those people.



8. Read Exodus 1:8-22.

If you had been an Israelite at that time:

- You would have been born as a \_\_\_\_\_.
- You would have been \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 11-12)
- The one who was responsible for this was the \_\_\_\_\_ of Egypt (vv. 8, 15).
- How did he set all of this into motion? He \_\_\_\_\_ (vv. 9, 22)
- He had power over \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (vv. 16, 22)

Now, imagine you are standing on the other side of the Red Sea. That king, Pharaoh, the one who seemed so powerful, that one who had held the life of your children in his hands, has been destroyed and you have been delivered. You are no longer a slave! Wouldn't you want to know just who it was that was more powerful than Pharaoh? Read all of Genesis 1 through the lens of this newly rescued, former slave. God is being portrayed, not just as a king, but as the King!

*God is being portrayed,  
not just as a king, but  
as the King!*

9. If you were one of the recently freed Israelite slaves, describe how you might have possibly felt as you read the words written in Genesis 1:26-27.

- **God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. What are some ways you experience the power and goodness of God in your life today?**

God is the high King of both heaven and earth. He is powerful, majestic, and to be obeyed. But, as we will see tomorrow, part of the good news of once-upon-a-time is that the most powerful King is also the most loving Father. As Tim Keller said, "The only person who dares wake the king up at 3:00 AM for a drink of water is a child."<sup>5</sup>

## Take-Away

God is the Almighty, the high King of heaven and earth, the sovereign, omnipotent Creator of all things—and worthy to be obeyed.

## For Further Study

1. **Read Psalm 33:6-9. How is this similar to Genesis 1 and how is it different? Do you learn anything else about God?**

## Scripture Memory

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.  
Genesis 1:31

# DAY 3: The Love of a Good Father

Yesterday was Father's Day and almost every post on my Facebook page was a tribute either to the father of one of my friends or, if my friend is married with children, the tribute was to her husband as the father of her children. It was a day filled with all the positive things you can say about a father. Some thanked their dads for providing for them, others thanked their dads for loving them and for "always being there" when they needed advice or a hug. It is a sweet day to think about all that a dad is supposed to be. But I know that not everyone has or had a good dad. We don't live in the 'once upon a time' anymore and things are not the way they are supposed to be—and one of the realities of living between 'once upon a time' and

*When God refers to himself as Father, he is referring, not to our experience of fathers, but to the kind of father we were created to have.*

'happily ever after' is that dads don't always function the way they are supposed to function. Not all dads are kind or trustworthy, not all dads are faithful or stick around, and not all dads provide what their children need. Some dads are harsh, absent, drunk, or abusive. When dads don't function the way they are supposed to, the impact on us is huge because we know, deep down inside, that things are supposed to be different; fathers are supposed to be really, really good—they are supposed to provide for, protect, love, engage, know, spend time with, and delight in their children.

When God refers to himself as Father, he is referring, not to our experience of fathers, but to the kind of father we were created to have. So no matter where your earthly father falls on the scale of fatherhood—from someone who is your hero to someone who failed or even hurt you—your heavenly Father is perfect in his love in every possible way. He is the only one who can truly satisfy the deepest longing of our hearts to be loved in that perfect way.

1. Read Psalm 103:13. List some ways God has shown compassion to you. Is this different than the compassion you received from your earthly father?

As we think about what it means that God is our Father, I want to look at four specific aspects of fatherhood: presence, provision, protection, and parameters. Obviously parenting is more than these four things, but it is not less. We want our fathers to be present with us, to spend time with us and know us. We need them to provide for us (in fact, we call ones who don't "dead-beat" dads). We long for their protection and we need them to set parameters for us—to teach us what is good and what is not. God does this for his children.

### Presence

2. Read Genesis 3:8-9. What did they hear? From what did they hide?

We are jumping ahead just a bit in the story and looking at what happened after Adam and Eve sinned, but the point is, prior to their sin, they were able to walk with God! He was present with his children; he spent time with them; he knew them, loved them, and communicated with them.

3. Read Zephaniah 3:17. How is the presence of the Lord described? List 2-3 fatherly things that God is portrayed as doing. Which of these aspects do you most long for?

### Provision

4. Read Genesis 1:29. Write down how God is being a good father to Adam and Eve. This will be important to remember in next week's lesson!

We live in the age of the dead-beat dad, but everyone, believers and unbelievers alike, seems to know that it is not right to have a child and not care for that child. Our government will even legally punish a father who does not help and care for his children. And yet many people believe God is like a deadbeat dad—that he simply created the world, stepped out of the picture, and now sits back and just lets things play out without his involvement. They think he is not involved in the care of his children because he is either disinterested or unwilling. But Scripture tells us something completely different.

5. Read Luke 12:6-7. How involved is our Father? How well does he know you?

**6. Read 1 Peter 5:6-7. What does it mean that he is willing to have you cast your cares on him? What cares can you cast on him right now?**

### Protection and Parameters

These two aspects are intimately united. Just as the parameters I set for my children are for their protection (don't run into the street), so are the parameters that God sets.

7. Read Genesis 2:16-17. What was the parameter (boundary) and what was the protection? How is God being a good Father to warn and protect them?

Most of us don't like parameters (and we will see that Adam and Eve were no different!). Our hearts are rebellious and we want to be independent, autonomous, "free." But protection is found within the parameters.

8. Read Psalm 91:4. What is the image portrayed here? What are the parameters of the protection offered?

Because we don't live in the once-upon-a-time of our story, the idea of God as our Father can be painful for some. But God identifies himself as our Father—a good and perfect Father.

9. Read Psalm 17:8. What term of endearment does God use for David?

Some of our dear friends had two sons before they had a little girl. This little girl was immediately the apple of her father's eye and he told her (still does) that she was his "little princess." When she was about four years old, my friend went to her husband and said, "I am worried that Anna thinks she is a real princess." So her husband went to talk with Anna to explain that some daddies call their little girls princess but that doesn't mean they really are. Anna interrupted him and said, "I know, Daddy. And they aren't. But I am so glad I really am!" And in the truest sense, she's right—she really is. So are you. You are a cherished and greatly loved daughter of a perfect heavenly Father—a Father who is also the King of all kings. When God created all things good and right, his fatherly care for his children was perfect and his relationship with them was uninterrupted. Our Father is longing for the day when we will be reunited with him in his kingdom, for the day that he can tell you and me that we are the apple of his eye and his very special little princess. The perfect love of our Father is a healing balm, indeed.

***You are a cherished and  
greatly loved daughter  
of a perfect heavenly  
Father—a Father who is  
also the King of all kings***

### Take-Away

God is a good and loving Father; he provides, protects, loves, and cares for his children perfectly.

### For Further Study

1. Read Matthew 6:8. What does that phrase "your Father knows what you need before you ask him" mean? How could that change the way you pray?
2. Read Luke 15:11-32. Make a list of the ways God is like the father in this parable.

### Scripture Memory

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.  
Genesis 1:31

## Day 4: The Mission of God

We are spending this week looking at the “introduction” of our story (Gen. 1-2) in order to get our bearings for the rest of the story. We have seen several things already:

- God is the main character—this is a story primarily about him.
- God is the King of all things—he is powerful and to be obeyed.
- God is a loving Father who cares greatly and provides abundantly for his children.
- There was a time when God’s relationship with his children was uninterrupted and the world was as it should be.

And so, in the introduction, we first learn about God. But as we learn about God, we also learn about us. As we see that he is the Creator, we see that we are the created—he is eternal, we are mortal; he is all-powerful, we are dependent. We learn that God gets to define what is good and set parameters where he will—and it is our job to trust and obey.

We also learn that God has a purpose, a mission, and he calls his children to participate in that mission. If you have ever struggled with feelings of aimlessness, purposelessness, or futility, this is great news! We have to go no further than the first two chapters of the Bible to see that we have been created for and tasked with a great mission to carry out, a King to serve, and a Father to represent. He truly does crown us with glory and honor (Ps. 8:5)! God has a plan for his creation—a mission to fulfill—and he calls his children into that mission to expand his kingdom until it fills the whole earth.

1. Read Genesis 1:26-28.

- In v. 26, what does God say he is going to do?

- What is he going to give to them?

- List the five commands (five verbs) in v. 28.

**So, if we were going to break this down, we would say that God**

- **Created them in his** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Gave them** \_\_\_\_\_
- **And told them to** \_\_\_\_\_

What is God’s mission? This becomes a very important question for two reasons: one, we want to know what God’s original intent for his creation was; and, two, we want to see if God, at any point in the story, changes his mind or purpose. Spoiler alert—God never changes his mind! The mission he set into motion in Genesis 1-2 never changes. What does change is our ability to fulfill that mission; but God is faithful and, as we will see in the weeks to follow, he will finish that which he started. His purposes will not be thwarted and his mission will be completed. And, just like he called Adam and Eve to participate with him,

he will call all his people into his intended purposes. So understanding the first glimpse of this mission isn't just so that we can "know more," it is because he has called you and me to be participants in this same cosmic mission today. What is that grand mission? To fill the earth with his presence. How does he equip his children for this task? By creating them in his image and giving them dominion (or authority) over the creation.

Today we are going to discuss dominion and tomorrow we will talk about image-bearing. Both are important aspects to understanding what we are to be about—and how we are to go about it. Dominion is simply the authority God gives to complete the mission—the King of all creation gives his children the authority they need to rule as vice-regents of his kingdom. God tasks Adam and Eve with the care and rule of the earth—and then gives them the authority, or dominion, to carry out that task. Since it is the whole earth that is to be filled, they are given dominion over the whole earth. And they are told to care well for that which they are called to rule.

***His purposes will not be thwarted and his mission will be completed. And, just like he called Adam and Eve to participate with him, he will call all his people into his intended purposes.***

God gave his children dominion over all creation. But the dominion was not given to them to take and do whatever they wanted, in any way they wanted. It was given so they could rule over God's creation as his representatives—in a way that reflected how their Father ruled over it. Collins says that to have dominion means "to bring the blessings of Eden to the rest of the world."<sup>6</sup> We will come back to this thought but, in some ways, it is like a man who starts a company and has a reputation for ethical, fair, and wise business deals. The company flourishes and is blessed with a good reputation. If the man were to allow his son to come on as the new CEO of the company, he would want the son to continue to manage the company with the same integrity, honesty, and wisdom—because the son is to continue the work of the father in a way that is consistent with the vision and purpose of his father. Sandra Richter says it like this, "God chose to manage this creation through his representative... Thus humanity is given all authority to protect, maintain, and develop God's great gift under God's ultimate authority."<sup>7</sup> Adam and Eve were given work to do and that work was meaningful, satisfying, and delightful; but it was never meant to be autonomous (a "do-your-own-thing" mentality) in either its method or its goal. How the work was done and how the mission was accomplished was supposed to both delight the child/vice-regent as well as please the Father/King.

In the same way that God told Adam and Eve not to just stay put in Eden, but to use their dominion to go, grow, and do something, so he tells us the same thing. We were created to have meaningful work, to accomplish, produce, contribute, affect change—not for our own glory, but so that, through these things, we will be filling the earth with the presence of God.

2. In what areas of your life can you see that you have been given dominion?
  
3. **How might you be able to use that dominion to fill that particular area with the presence of God?**

## Take-Away

God is on a mission to fill the whole earth with his presence and he has called and equipped his children to participate in that mission with him.

## For Further Study

1. Who or what is flourishing because of your dominion?
2. Think of one thing that you might do this week to participate in filling the whole earth with the presence of God in the places he has put you.

## Scripture Memory

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.  
Genesis 1:31

## DAY 5: Image Bearing

In Genesis 1:26-27, God says four times that he created man (male and female) in his image or likeness. Understanding our status as image-bearers is crucial to our understanding of the biblical story. It defines, informs, and fuels our entire purpose and goal. I like how Greg Beale and Mitchell Kim put it:

Adam was created in the image of the triune God to indicate his (God's) presence and rule over the earth... The Greek translation of "image" is "icon." On a computer screen, an icon is a small picture file that, when clicked, ushers in the megabytes of the computer program that it represents. Metaphorically, humanity is a small picture file in the terabytes of God's glory in creation. Although we often feel small in light of the overwhelming brokenness in the world, God has created us as icons of his powerful presence. Icons do not point to themselves, but usher in a far greater reality.<sup>8</sup>



In 1770 the British government had a large statue of King George III prominently placed in a park in the lower end of New York City (the soon-to-be capitol of the colonies). Just days after America declared independence from Great Britain, people rushed to the statue and tore it down. Why? Why did the Brits put it there in the first place and why did the newly liberated Americans tear it down? Because both parties knew that one way to show dominion was to set the image of the ruler in the newly conquered territory. The statue of King George III represented his authority and rule over that place—to both the Brits and the Americans. So when he was no longer their king, the Americans quickly took his statue down!



1. Read Genesis 1:26-28 again. What is the connection between the statue King George III put up and Genesis 1:26-28?

- Where does God want to place his image(s)?

- In what ways do people today try to “tear the statues (images) down?”

Images are supposed to 1) point to a greater reality, 2) express the dominion of the true King, and, in this case, 3) create more images. Adam and Eve were called to multiply and fill the earth with more images—more people who could point to God and usher in the greater reality of his presence. Remember this point of image bearing because we will be coming back to it in Chapter 9!

But what does it mean to bear God's image? Collins helpfully teaches that we were made with some kind of resemblance to God, which enables us to represent God both in how we rule (as those given dominion over God's creation) and in our relationships with God and others. Yesterday we briefly looked at what it means to represent God. What about resembling him?

Have you ever said something and thought, "Oh my, I sounded just like my mother!" When my oldest daughter was three, I saw her stand at the top of the staircase, emphatically put a hand on her hip, and yell at the top of her lungs in a very authoritative manner, "Boys! come here, right now." I knew exactly where she had heard and seen that (and it wasn't her father)! She was acting just like me.

I have children that look like me, too. When I am waiting in an airport, one of my favorite things to do is "people-watch" because I love trying to decide which children belong with which parent based on family resemblance. As the mother of both biological and adopted children, I know you can't always tell (for

*If we are to usher in the presence of God, then we need to be representing him accurately and one way we do that is through how closely we resemble him.*

instance, the only child of mine who has my dimple is my Chinese daughter), but it's fun to see how certain children resemble one parent or the other. My brother looks so much like my dad that, when he was about two years old, someone walked up to my mom and said, "Lady, I don't know who you are, but that (pointing to my brother) is George Randall's son!"

Image bearing means that we are to so closely resemble God through how we act, react, think, live, love and behave that we find ourselves saying, "Oh my, I sounded just like my father," and others might say, "Lady, I don't know anything about you, but you

are your father's daughter!" If we are to usher in the presence of God, then we need to be representing him accurately and one way we do that is through how closely we resemble him.

## **2. Read Romans 8:28-30. To what are we being conformed?**

**- What is God using to accomplish this?**

**- What is the end result?**

**- In what ways might that change the way you view your current struggles?**

Our ability to accurately bear the image of God has been deeply broken. But, as we will see, part of God's redemption is the restoration of that which was lost in the fall. Adam and Eve were created in God's image—and we are being re-created to bear his image. But again, I'm jumping ahead in the story!

## Take-Away

God created us in his image so that we could represent him by resembling him and be little icons of his presence in all the world.

## For Further Study

1. Review this week's work and make a list of everything that was part of God's perfect creation. Make it as specific as possible.
2. Read Colossians 1:15-19. How is Christ as the image different from us as an image? (hint: v. 19, John 14:9, and John 10:30)

## Scripture Memory

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 1:31

## Points to Remember From Chapter 2

- Knowing the beginning of the story and how it is “supposed to be” is the only way that we can make sense of the world around us today. We have to know the whole story in order to understand the part in which we find ourselves today.
- The Kingdom—Eden—was beautiful, peaceful, and good.
- God is the high King of both heaven and earth.
- God is the perfect Father and, as such, he provides, protects, loves, and is faithfully involved.
- The mission of God is the establishment of his Kingdom in all the earth and he is accomplishing his mission through the establishment of his people—those who bear his image.



# 3

## But Then an Evil Serpent...

Oh, how I long to stay in last week's lesson—the part of the story when all was right in the world! But you and I know, all too well, that is not where we live. We know we no longer live in the part of the story where the birds are always singing and the sun is always shining. What we long for is very different from what we experience. We live in a world where terrorists blow up buildings, famines kill, and school children and teachers are no longer safe in their classrooms. We experience strained and broken relationships, loneliness, depression, and disappointment. We struggle to love others well; we struggle to love ourselves rightly; and we struggle to love God at all. How do we make sense of our world—the sadness, loss, mourning, death, sickness, disease, and shame? What do we do when faced with birth defects, children starving, drug addicts, homelessness, poverty, famine, divorce, abuse, adultery, cutting, anorexia, Alzheimer's . . . the list could go on and on.

These are the things that tear our hearts apart. We sit before them and wonder why and how long? We weep and mourn and grieve. Or we shake our fists in anger and walk away from God. Most of us don't have a category in which to put suffering and sadness. We have a hard time making sense of them. We intuitively know things are not the way they are supposed to be—and there is a deep, deep longing in us to return to that time when all was right in the world. What has happened? Understanding both what we studied last week—the way it was supposed to be—as well as what we are going to study this week—the great disruption in the 'way it was supposed to be'—is the only way to make sense of our lives today and to be people that, yes, grieve, but not as those who grieve without hope.

Every year my friend's two daughters are in a Christmas play at their church. To call it a "play" might conjure up images of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*—a classic story of makeshift sets and homemade costumes. But this is no low-rent show! It is more like going to see a Broadway production. The costumes and makeup are spectacular, the singing and dancing are professional. There are live animals, including a large horse pulling a beautiful carriage across the stage. And the opening scene depicts the creation of the world. The actors, in makeup and costumes similar to those in the Broadway production of *The Lion King*, become animals that leap, bound, hop, run, crawl, somersault, and fly from all parts of the church up to the stage. The music soars

*We intuitively know things are not the way they are supposed to be—and there is a deep, deep longing in us to return to that time when all was right in the world.*

and it is a beautiful scene of the creation rejoicing in its Creator. But, all of a sudden, the lights dim and the church grows dark. The music changes from jubilant to sinister. From the back of the building, a large snake-like creature begins to wind its way through the crowd, slithering slowly toward the stage where Adam, Eve, and all of creation, cower in fear. There is no doubt that something is about to happen—something that is not right, not good, and something that is not the way it is supposed to be.

## Pray

Psalm 119:17-18 “Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word. Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” Let’s pray that our eyes will be opened, not as Adam’s and Eve’s were, but, as David prayed, opened to the glory and wonder of God and his word.

## DAY 1: The Intruder

There is a point in almost every story when you realize something has happened that will permanently alter the course of the plot. As we read our story, we can almost hear the change in the music. It’s as if the birds stop singing and the sky darkens as we read the jarring words, “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.” When I am watching my friend’s daughters reenact this scene, there is no doubt for those in the audience that the serpent is intruding on the scene as an unwelcome, uninvited, and unintended party. And that is how we are supposed to read the opening words of Genesis 3. There is a clear disconnect between the first two chapters of Genesis and the third. As Williams says:

Scripture proclaims categorically that sin is an intruder. It is not the product of God’s creativity. It does not belong ... Nor does Genesis seek to make sense of sin ... Sin remains ever a riddle, ever absurd, ever irrational. Augustine quite rightly said that seeking a rational explanation for the origin of sin is like trying to see darkness or hear silence.<sup>10</sup>

And that is what we see in Genesis 3. We are left wondering why. But there is no rational answer because sin is irrational. Adam and Eve had everything they were created to want. Their rebellion makes no sense. They rebelled against a good, loving, providing, faithful, relational, Father-King who had given them everything they could want or need.

1. Read Genesis 2:25. Describe, in your own words, the closing scene of Chapter 2.

2. Read Genesis 3:1. List several things you learn about the serpent.

This is kind of a strange scene, isn't it? We are supposed to feel the absurdity of the scene. We are supposed to puzzle and scratch our heads because sin should always confound us. Unfortunately, in the same way we can read this verse with a familiarity that numbs us to its absurdity, we can also grow very accustomed to sin itself, so accustomed that it starts to just feel normal. It is not. As Williams said, sin is an intruder. But to call it an intruder means that sin is not just some nebulous force or random "thing" floating around in the air that we should try to avoid. Sin is anchored in something, someone, this "intruder." But who is it?

3. Read Revelation 12:9. What words are used to describe him? Compare this list with what we read in Genesis 3.

4. **What are the first four words the serpent utters? Ponder those words for just a moment and describe how they make you feel.**

5. **What are some ways we hear the same uncertainty expressed today, both in our culture and also in our own lives?**

6. Read John 8:44. What three things does Jesus call the devil? How do we see the truth of this in Genesis 3:1-5?

John 8:44	Genesis 3:1-5

Many people think of God and Satan as equally matched foes—enemies across the table from each other in some kind of eternal chess match. But that is not how Scripture portrays them. Enemies, yes! But equals, absolutely not!

7. Read Revelation 20:10. We get a glimpse of the end of the story! Who wins?

But we're not there yet. We are living between Genesis 3 and Revelation 20. So how do we live? How do we stand against the one who is not just the enemy of God but also the enemy of our souls?

8. **Read Ephesians 6:10-18. Write down all of the action verbs that we are commanded to do.**

**- How do these help you fight against the temptations to doubt or disobey?**

### Take-Away

Our enemy always tempts us to doubt God's word and God's goodness.

### For Further Study

1. Read Genesis 3:1 and compare what the serpent said with what God said in Genesis 2:16-17. What does the serpent do to God's words?
2. Describe a time when you have doubted God's word.
3. Read 2 Corinthians 11:3. What is Paul (the author of 2 Corinthians) concerned will happen?



- Where does the battle seem to take place?

- How is this true in your life?

## Scripture Memory

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Genesis 3:15

## DAY 2: The Sin

Well, here it is—that point in the story that changes everything. It is akin to Snow White’s teeth sinking into the apple, or Sleeping Beauty’s finger reaching out and touching the needle, or Scar killing Mufasa—there is no going back. Have you ever watched a movie and, knowing what is going to happen, you want to yell at the characters on the screen, “No! don’t do it!” That is how we should feel reading the first several verses of Genesis 3. We should want to tell Eve to stop talking with that snake, stop listening to his ideas, and, for goodness sake, put that fruit down. But, instead, I think most of us wonder what the big deal is about eating some fruit? Why did so much devastation come from something that we might do every day? And if God had made the fruit, why was it so bad to eat it? Was the fruit the issue? Before we start answering all of these questions, look at the following verses and write down any observations you make as you compare them.

1. Read Genesis 2:9, 11, 12, 16, 18. Make a list of everything that God gave to Adam.
2. Make a list of what was withheld from Adam and Eve (2:17).

Oh, the temptation is there for all of us! We underemphasize what God has given and overemphasize what God has prohibited. Gratitude and contentment are difficult while complaining and discontentment seem to come so easily. Culturally, we are surrounded by a lack of contentment, even encouraged to be discontent. Think of all the ways that commercials are targeted at this proclivity in us to be discontent with what we do have and stir up in us a longing for that which we don't have. I have been convicted recently to actively combat this tendency in myself. Psalm 16:6 has become my mantra: "The lines have fallen for

***We underemphasize  
what God has given and  
overemphasize what  
God has prohibited.***

me in pleasant places; indeed I have a beautiful inheritance." I say this when I am tempted to want that which the Lord has chosen not to give or to wish that he hadn't given what he has. I am actively trying to choose gratitude and thanksgiving to replace my feelings of ingratitude and complaining. But the true sin, the true temptation that the enemy enticed Eve with was not discontentment—although, like he does with us, he used it to lead her to the place of true rebellion.

3. Read Genesis 2:17. What does God say the consequence of eating the fruit will be?

4. Read Genesis 3:4-5. What does Satan say the consequence of eating the fruit will be?

This is the lie that continues to be whispered and shouted to us—the lie that says what God has said is simply not true. One thing we can say about Satan, he is not original or creative. He just keeps whispering the same lies over and over again to new people in new situations—but the lie itself is not new.

One question most of us ask is why God gave Adam and Eve the prohibition in the first place? Why was there not total freedom to do whatever they wanted? We have to remember that Adam and Eve were not created to live autonomously, independently, or self-centeredly; they were created to live in right relationship with their Creator. Adam and Eve were given both privilege and responsibility. They were created to resemble and reflect their Father, the King. And both kings and fathers are to be obeyed. God had every right to set a boundary on both them and his created order—this is his world. Irchter says, "In essence, Adam and Eve are free to do anything except decide for themselves what is good and what is evil. Yahweh reserves the right (and the responsibility) to name those truths for himself."<sup>11</sup> Obedience is always part of the arrangement between fathers and children and between kings and their subjects. He knows more than they do; he is wise and good, and his boundary is wise and good. God is being God—a good father and a good king.

5. Compare Genesis 2:25, with 3:5 and 3:7. What was their condition (real or promised) in each verse?

Genesis 2:25	Genesis 3:5	Genesis 3:7

6. Were their eyes opened?

- What had the serpent told them would happen when their eyes were opened?

- What was produced instead?

Have you ever experienced something like this? Have you believed something about God or his ways that simply was not true? Has the enemy ever whispered a promise in your ear on the front end of sin and then, on the other side, the place from which you cannot undo what has been done, you realize that promise was a lie? Of course it was a lie! That is the language of our enemy. But, oh, how we long to believe him sometimes. What he promises seems to be just what we desire. If he is currently trying to tell you that 1) God did not really say \_\_\_\_\_, 2) or that your life will be better if you \_\_\_\_\_, then run! Run the other way. It is a lie and, if you do not run, you will get to the other side and feel the same shame and fear that Adam and Eve felt.

This is the saddest part of the story. And, really, it should be the end of the story. As one of my professors has said, the story should be: God made it, man broke it, the end. But the glorious hope of the gospel is that this is not the end. Keep reading and see the grace of our mighty God!

## Take-Away

There is no rational answer for sin; it is absurd and makes no sense in light of God's goodness.

## For Further Study

1. Read Exodus 20:3-17. What are some of the ways we hear that lie in regard to even the most basic of God's commands?

2. Read John 14:6. List some of the ways the enemy tells us this truth is simply not true.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Read Romans 5:12. What were the far-reaching, long-lasting effects of Genesis 3:6? Comment on how your sin can have far-reaching, long-lasting effects on others.

## Scripture Memory

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and  
her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”  
Genesis 3:15

## DAY 3: The Shame

When my oldest son, Austin, was about three years old, he found some cookies he knew he was not supposed to eat. I found him hiding in the front hall closet, happily munching away. When I opened the door, he quickly took the box of cookies, hid it behind his back, and looked up at me with big eyes and a concerned expression (fear) on his face—and crumbs on his lips.

He had hidden in order to commit the sin and then tried to hide the evidence of the sin itself. Isn't that the nature of sin? We usually know it's wrong while we are committing it. So there is an element of hiding just to commit the sin; and then we try to hide the evidence of the sin after we have committed it. Think of the last sin you committed. How did you “hide” just to commit it? To get the cookies out of the pantry, Austin had to make sure no one was in the room—he had to sneak. In the same way, we whisper a lie, or say it behind closed doors, so we “hide” what we are saying from others. If a person is going to shoplift something, she has to hide the item in a purse or bag. If a person is going to commit adultery, that person has to figure out a way to hide their activity from others. Most sins are not committed in broad daylight, publically. Hiding is a part of sin. If you feel the urge to hide something, you need to stop and ask yourself why.

But hiding is also the result of most sin. When I was in high school, I decided that it would be a great idea to smoke (it was not a great idea!). Of course that meant I had to hide the cigarettes I bought and hide myself (at least from my parents) in order to smoke. But the thing about hiding is that we are usually found. One evening, I was at a party and thought I was “hidden.” But a few minutes after my curfew, I felt a tap on my shoulder, turned casually around, cigarette in hand, only to be standing face to face with my father. Needless to say, I really wanted to hide—permanently! In this part of our story, we see the origin of hiding.

1. Read Genesis 3:8. In some ways it is like when Austin hid in the front hall closet. Can they really hide from God? Why or why not?

- Read 2 Chronicles 16:9 and Proverbs 15:3. What do you learn about God?

2. **Read Jeremiah 23:23-24. Praise God that we cannot hide from him! I am so grateful that, even though I tried to hide, he found me! We have probably all heard the hymn Amazing Grace. In light of what we are studying, what do the lyrics, “I once was lost but now am found” mean to you?**

There are several times in Scripture when one, simple, little word makes all the difference in the world—the difference between life and death. The little word is the conjunction “but” and it is used when the author wants to introduce an idea that is in complete contrast to what has just been said. We see that use in Genesis 3:9. Adam and Eve were hiding “*but* the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”” (emphasis mine). Have you ever asked yourself what would have happened if God had not done that? If the story just ended with “the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.” Adam and Eve would have been lost forever. But the good news is that he did call out to them and go to “find” them! He pursues his children even though they are running from him. God enters into the place of their disobedience. Where are you today? Are you hiding or have you been found? Those are really our only

*God pursues his children even though they are running from him. He enters into the place of their disobedience.*

two options; there is no middle ground. And God will come to you in the exact place of your disobedience, call to you, find you, and ask you to come out of hiding. Run to him; he is safe and he is loving.

3. Read Genesis 3:10. What caused Adam to be afraid?

Look back at Genesis 2:25. Adam is naked in both verses, so it was not his nakedness in itself that caused him to want to hide.

4. What are the last two words of Genesis 2?

Now that sin has entered the picture, so has shame. There are different kinds of shame—shame we experience for things we’ve done, things done to us, and even things about us. And shame is a terrible weapon in the hands of our enemy. Shame can keep us from being in relationship with others, even relationship with God—no wonder the enemy wields it so powerfully in our lives. Shame makes us want to hide; shame tells us that we should hide. But, praise be to our good and loving Father-God, he does not leave us in the misery of our shame.

Like the day I found Austin in the closet, there were many times that I would have to kneel down in front of my children, put my hand gently under their chins, and lift their heads back up to look at me. They were ashamed of what they had done and they didn’t even want to make eye contact. I have felt that same way many times. Praise be to God that he stoops down, takes our faces in his hands, lifts our faces back up to his, and removes our shame.

**5. Read Psalm 3:3. Describe what David is describing. How has God done this for you?**

Just like sin leads to shame, shame usually leads to blame. When I was a little girl, I had a bath mat in front of my bathtub with a caricature of a little red devil holding a pitchfork with the words, “the devil made me do it.” Now this is wrong on several levels, but the message conveyed was that I wasn’t really responsible for my wrong doings and sin wasn’t my fault because the “devil made me do it.” What sweet relief to blame someone else! We live in such a strange time right now. On one hand we have people like the woman who blamed McDonald’s for the injuries she suffered when she spilled her coffee (the burn is not my fault for spilling, but McDonalds for allowing the water to be so hot). On the other hand, we have “no fault” divorce—where neither party assumes any blame at all. It is like a friend of mine whose daughter goes to a preschool where they try really hard not to let the children feel bad about themselves. If the child does something wrong, like kick a fellow classmate, the offender gets sent to the “oopsie rug.” Oopsie? Really? It is telling the child, “we know you didn’t mean to do it. We know you would never intentionally do something wrong. It must have just been an oopsie.” I think that if they aren’t willing to call it the “sin rug,” then they should at least call it the “naughty rug.” What they have is no better than my little red devil bathmat.

Look at Adam and Eve's response when God confronts them with their sin.

6. Read Genesis 3:12. Which two people does Adam blame?
7. Read Genesis 3:13. Who does Eve blame?
8. Read Genesis 3:11. Who does God hold accountable?
9. **Read Genesis 2:17 and Romans 6:23. What is the hope?**

One of the most glorious parts of our story is that Jesus came, took the blame, and has removed our shame!

### Take-Away

Sin leads to shame and hiding, but God calls us out and covers us.

### For Further Study

1. Read Psalm 139:1-12. Do you agree with David that "such knowledge is too wonderful for me" (v. 6) or does it unnerve you to think that you cannot hide from God? Why?
2. Read Hebrews 12:2. Part of the shame of the cross is that, when people were crucified, they were stripped and naked. Jesus became naked and ashamed and endured that shame on our behalf . . . and overcame it for us! Jesus does for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. Describe the difference it makes that Christ bore your shame.
3. Read Colossians 2:15. How are the tables turned?

### Scripture Memory

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and  
her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Genesis 3:15

## DAY 4: The Sentence

If you were the defendant in a criminal case, I imagine the worst part of the trial would be waiting for the sentence to be given. Especially if, despite making the best case possible, you knew you were guilty. That is what is happening in today's text. The crime has been committed (Day 2). The case has been made—there was a plea of “guilty-as-charged,” despite my defense that “it wasn't really my fault” (Day 3). Think what it would have been like to wait for the judge to speak the words that would define the rest of your life. And the scope of this sentence isn't just the rest of Adam's life, or Eve's life, or my life, or your life, it is for all of creation until kingdom come.

Why is that so? Why do we all suffer the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin? I'm sure you have heard people say things like, “Thanks a lot, Eve!” Or express confidence that they would have done things differently and they would not have taken that forbidden bite. Most people wonder why the rest of us suffer because of the sin of Adam and Eve. Theologically, this is one of the most important concepts we can understand—the idea that one person stands as the representative of a larger group, and what goes for the representative, goes for the group.

We all know, at some level, what this is like. My daughters play basketball and, before a game starts, the team captain goes out to meet the other team captain and shake hands. These captains are representing their respective teams. The gesture of good will and sportsmanship given with the shaking of hands means, not just that the two captains are pledging to play fairly, but their teams will, too. Their actions are on behalf of the whole team because they are the representatives.

When the President of the United States signs a peace treaty, he is signing it on behalf of all US citizens because he is the representative head of our country—his actions will result in peace, or war, for all those who are represented by him. On the negative side of representation, think of the CEO of a company who makes a bad financial decision and the company fails as a result. All those under her leadership will lose their jobs. The actions of the CEO have an impact on all those whom she represents. We see this over and over again in the Old Testament with the kings of Israel: as the kings go, so goes the nation. Good kings bring peace and prosperity and evil kings bring disaster and hardship. So we may think that it is unfair, but we live with this reality all the time. In addition, and more importantly, our salvation is wrapped up in the fact that we have a Representative. But, again, that is jumping ahead in our story!

1. Read Genesis 3:14-19. Who is the only one speaking? What does this indicate about authority (think if this were a court of law)?
2. **There is a clear distinction between the Creator and the created in these verses. Into which category does Satan fall? How do you know?**



I have put verse 15 as your memory verse for this chapter because it is a verse that we will come back to time and time again as we trace it through the entire story. In essence, what God is saying is, *even though you, Satan, have just defeated my children, I am going to send One who will not just defeat you, but who will completely destroy you. The war is on and I will win.* And this is our first glimpse of the gospel. Before God pronounces punishment and curse on his children, he pronounces grace and victory. He promises to defeat the one who has just defeated them. The good news is this: punishment is not God's ultimate answer to sin—redemption is.

***The good news is this:  
punishment is not God's  
ultimate answer to sin—  
redemption is!***

- 3. Respond to that thought in your own life; punishment is not God's ultimate answer to sin—redemption is.**

**- Describe the difference it makes in the way you view God's posture towards you and your sin?**

After God deals with the serpent, he turns toward the woman and then the man.

- 4. Compare Genesis 3:16 with 1:28. What changes?**

Collins points out that the “joyful task of ‘multiplying’ (1:28) becomes the arena of ‘multiplied’ pain (3:16) and the sphere in which humans were supposed to experience God’s blessing (multiplying) is now ‘an arena of [multiplied] pain, danger, and curse.’”<sup>12</sup> And don’t we know, too well, the truth of his words. The pain associated with multiplying is extensive. We tend to think only the physical pain associated with birthing a child is in view here, but it encompasses everything from infertility to miscarriages, from stillbirths to SIDS, and has in view all of the pain, heartache, and anxiety that go along with “multiplying” in this broken world. Again, things are not the way they are supposed to be and knowing this helps us to rightly respond to the pain around us.

If you are married, know anyone who is married, or longing to be married, Genesis 3:16 should explain much. The wonderful institution of marriage—invented, ordained, and blessed by God—can be an area where we intimately experience the results of the fall. Whether it is strife in your parents’ marriage or your own, the yet unmet desire to be married, the devastation of divorce, or the myriad of ways we encounter sexual brokenness, most of us have experienced brokenness around marriage. In Genesis 2 we saw joy, delight, deep satisfaction, and safe vulnerability between the man and woman. We saw perfect harmony between two people. Are there differences between them? Absolutely. Adam was created first and is the

representative head of his wife. But they were created as co-heirs of the kingdom and co-workers in the kingdom advancement. And, until now, everything indicates that there was no strife in this. Eve didn't rebel and usurp and Adam didn't dominate and dictate. They worked shoulder-to-shoulder with joy and love. But now, we are told, they will oppose each other, and the woman will strive to rule over her husband. Let me take just a minute to clarify. No matter how many times I say things are "not the way they are supposed to be," I, by no means, mean 1) there is nothing we can do about it or 2) we are to take a resigned attitude and think we are just supposed to wait it out. No! We are called to push back the curse, reverse it, and, as

***Eve didn't rebel and usurp and Adam didn't dominate and dictate. They worked shoulder-to-shoulder with joy and love.***

we pray "your kingdom come (now), on earth as it is in heaven," we participate with that prayer! We fight against fighting. If you are married, you strive to learn what it means to work alongside your husband, not against him. But married or not, we learn what it means to fight for the marriages around us, not against them. For some this means learning to speak positively about your friend's husband. For others (to put it bluntly) it means to stop flirting with someone else's husband. It means praying for the marriages in our churches and neighborhoods. It means living in sexual integrity—whether we are married or single—in all areas. It means counseling

with an eye toward humility and restoration. It means that we participate with our Father who is in the business of restoring all things, including the brokenness in our marriages—ours and those around us.

5. List some ways you can work to "push back" the curse.

## Take-Away

Curse is not God's ultimate answer to sin; redemption is.

## For Further Study

Can you imagine the ah-ha moment reading Genesis 3 would have been for the first readers? They knew the pain of bringing children into a broken world and what a sweet balm of comfort it would have been for them to learn that this was not how it was supposed to be—there was a reason for, as well as an end to, their pain.

1. Read Exodus 1:8-22. List the pains that the Hebrews were experiencing.

2. Read Genesis 3:17-18. How was the earth cursed because of Adam?

- Read John 19:2. What does Jesus wear on his head?

- In what ways does the crown of thorns symbolize how Jesus bore the curse?

- He was naked, put out for open shame, and wearing a crown of thorns. How does that tie into what we have learned about the fall and the curse (think thorns and shame)?

## Scripture Memory

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Genesis 3:15

## DAY 5: The Mercy

I have had to come down really hard on my children before. Their disobedience has required tough discipline and my concern for their ultimate good has compelled me to love them enough to administer that discipline. I can vividly remember a time when one child was requiring some pretty “tough love” and the discipline Craig and I were giving was fairly severe. We removed a lot of privileges and instituted a lot of restrictions. The situation was hard. It was not anger that motivated us to do what we did, but great love for our child was our motivation. And through the whole ordeal (and it was an *ordeal*), Craig and I did not pull back from this child relationally; instead, we were able to hold him, remind him of our love and care for him, and remind him that we were actually “for him” in all of this. The consequences were given—and stood—but the relationship was not severed. And in a much bigger, better way that is what we see here.

1. Read Genesis 3:21. In what ways do you see the Lord caring for his children in the midst of disciplining them?
2. Read Genesis 3:20. If you are reading a study bible, most of the notes for this verse will tell you that Eve's name means "life-giver." Why is that a particularly hopeful thing to know in light of the curse?

God is reminding Eve, through Adam, that the call on her life is still there! She is still called to fulfill her mandate, to be fruitful and multiply. She has not lost her status as co-heir of the kingdom, and the calling to have dominion over the creation in a way that brings life and flourishing is still a part of what God has created her to do. It will be a lot more difficult now; she will struggle with wanting to have dominion, not with her husband, but over her husband. She will struggle with pain in multiplying, but God is telling her that she is still going to be given the privilege of being not just a life-giver, but actually the mother of all who will live! God is the God of all mercy—then and now!

Do you ever feel like your past sin has disqualified you from kingdom service? Praise be to God, it doesn't! Repented sin is forgiven sin; forgiven sin is covered sin. The apostle Paul, the man who identifies himself as the chief of sinners, is also the one who wrote almost half of the New Testament. So he knows what he is talking about when he tells us "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). I think Eve could have written the same thing.

***Repented sin is forgiven sin;  
forgiven sin is covered sin.***

As a woman who lives "post-sin" far more often than I wish, verse 21 conveys one of the sweetest moments in all of Scripture for me. Remember how Adam and Eve felt before their sin? They were naked and not ashamed. After their sin, they hid because they realized they were naked and they were ashamed. Shame is ugly.

Now there is a good and right shame, the kind we feel before we confess, before we repent. That shame will drive us to God. But shame not associated with our sin or shame after we have repented and confessed is a tool in the hand of our enemy to drive us away from God. So far, Adam and Eve have received a punishment that is both just and merciful and they have received a word of hope—that this curse and punishment will not be the end; God is going to act on their behalf to crush the one who has just defeated them. But, even though they have made an attempt at covering themselves, they are still standing there in those ridiculous little fig leaves, feeling the weight of their shame. Can you relate? I can. It is in verse 21 we see God move toward Adam and Eve in tenderness to cover what is now the source of their shame, their nakedness. This is a moment between a perfect Father and his wayward children. This is tenderness and love in the midst of discipline. It is a moment that displays God's care and provision for both real and felt needs. And God does it all. We are always dependent on God moving toward us, covering us, providing for us. And that is exactly what he does.

Don't you want it to end right there? Yes, there are consequences, but now that those have been given, can't we just go back to the way it was? Do they have to be kicked out of the garden?

3. Read Genesis 3:22-23. What does God want to prevent and why? What do you think his edict means?

My favorite explanation is from C.F. Keil: "The expulsion from paradise, therefore, was a punishment inflicted *for man's good*, intended, while exposing him to temporal death, to preserve him from eternal death"<sup>14</sup> (emphasis mine). It is so important that we understand this! God, in his mercy, will not leave his children in this state of sin and suffering. It was merciful for God to send them out of the garden and prevent them from eating from the tree of life. If they had not been expelled, but had access to the tree, they would forever and ever and ever and ever have had to deal with their sin and shame. They would have lived forever as sinful, fallen people. I long for the day that I will be delivered from my sin—not just the penalty of my sin but its power over me and its very presence in me. And it will be my physical death that will usher me into that state. So banning them from the tree of life was mercy indeed.

***God, in his mercy, will not leave his children in this state of sin and suffering.***

4. Read Revelation 22:1-3. What will be in the new heavens and the new earth?

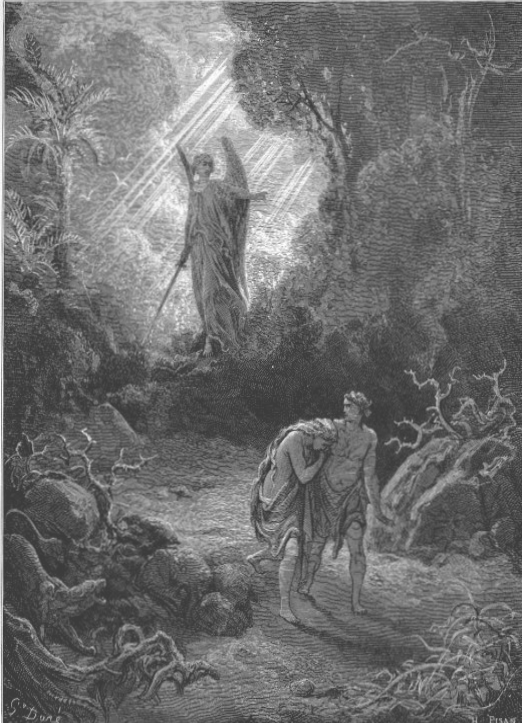
We have the glorious hope of one day being delivered from this body of death, reunited with God, and then, only then, we will again have access to the Tree of Life. How merciful is our God!

## Take-Away

It is the mercy of God to not leave us in the state of sin forever.

## For Further Study

There are several famous works of art that depict the expulsion from the garden. Unfortunately most show Adam and Eve cowering in fear and shame—which misses this as an act of mercy and grace. Below is Gustave Doré's "Adam and Eve Driven Out of the Garden." One person wrote, as an explanation for Doré's piece, "As punishment for abusing his trust, God drives Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden ... Adam and Eve are on their own from now on."



That is not the story we are given in Genesis!

1. Based on what we have just discussed, why is this painting not an accurate depiction of what we read in Scripture?

2. Read Hebrews 12:5-6. How do we see the truth of this in Genesis 3?

- How does this comfort you in the midst of rebuke?

## Scripture Memory

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Genesis 3:15

## Points to Remember from Chapter 3

- Sin is irrational, illogical, absurd, and alien—it is not part of the way life is supposed to be.
- God reserves the right to define what is good and what is evil.
- Sin always results in shame and hiding. God pursues us in our shame and hiding.
- Adam is our representative head and, as such, we are affected by his sin.
- We were meant to rule but, instead, we are ruled.
- Punishment is not God’s ultimate answer to sin; redemption is.

# 4

## The Heart of Our King

What a way to end last week's lesson—definitely not the high point of the story! The ones in the story we identify with most have been defeated and cast out of the garden. In addition, they are incapable of remedying their own situation. Think about that for a minute. What could they do? They can't fight their way back in, they can't earn their way back in, and the death they were told would come will conquer them if they don't get back in. If anything is going to remedy their situation and restore them to the goodness of the garden, they will need someone to rescue them. They need to be rescued from their current state and restored to that for which they were created, namely perfect fellowship with God, each other, themselves, and the creation. Why? Because they were created for Eden.

You might be wondering if we are now going to move to chapter 4 of Genesis and, if so, how in the world we will ever finish this study. I promise you that we are not going to go chapter-by-chapter through the Bible (even though that would be fascinating)! But you might be wondering why we spent two weeks studying just three chapters. We have spent so much time in these first three chapters because it is crucial that we understand what was intended in order to understand what is wrong; we have to start with what happened in order to know what problem has to be solved. We saw God create the world and all that is in it (including mankind) and call it very good. Yet our experience tells us that all is no longer very good. We know that we no longer experience that perfect goodness, and now we know why—sin entered into this good creation and disrupted it to the core. The brokenness, pain, suffering, and sin that we currently live with has both a beginning point in the story and, we will soon see, an end!

We have already seen the promise that God is going to fix this deep disruption. His solution will involve the seed (or offspring) of the woman and will result in the destruction of the enemy. The story is set for intrigue and adventure. We know the setting, we know the conflict, and we have been given a glimpse of the great resolution. As we pick up the pace and trace the key moments in the story, we are first going to turn our attention to the heart of our Father, the way of our Father, and the promises of our Father in order to understand why he does what he does, how he does it all, and what we learn about him in the midst of the greatest rescue of all time.

*It is crucial that we understand what was intended in order to understand what is wrong; we have to start with what happened in order to know what problem has to be solved.*



## Pray

“Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations” (Deut. 7:9). Pray and thank God for his steadfast, unfailing love and his covenant faithfulness to us.

## DAY 1: The Heart of the King—Love

Does it help you to know what compels people to act? Earlier this week, my husband stopped by my office with a beautiful bouquet of flowers. And, as lovely as his gift was, don’t you think knowing why he brought them to me would make a difference in how I responded to the gift? Was he feeling guilty? Did he feel obliged to do so? Did he think his gift would produce some great effect in our marriage? Were the flowers even for me? Yes, they were for me and he brought them because he loves me (and because the bouquet he had brought me the previous week had wilted). Knowing his heart helped me to better understand his action.

In the same way, knowing what compels God is helpful in understanding his purposes. Why did he embark on this great rescue mission? Why didn’t he just leave us to our own plight? Was he obliged to rescue us? Was it pity that compelled him? Did he stand to gain anything by rescuing us? I have to stop and quote Paul, “By no means!” God was in no way obliged nor did he stand to gain a thing—quite the opposite, it cost him greatly! And, even though his mercy towards us is great, it was not pity that compelled him. Before we look at what the rescue mission entailed and how it was to be accomplished, let’s look at the heart of our Father—a heart that compelled him to rescue.

In Deuteronomy 7:6-8, God, speaking through Moses to the people he has just redeemed out of Egypt, tells them, “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

The Exodus (or exit) out of Egypt—the time when God delivered his people out of bondage and slavery—is the great rescue mission in the Old Testament. God uses it over and over again throughout the story to typify, or give a foretaste, of the even greater rescue mission that he is going to perform through Jesus Christ. So, when he tells the Israelites what did and did not compel him to rescue them, we can appropriate the same thoughts to his even greater rescue of us.

1. What compelled God, according to Deuteronomy 7:6-8, to rescue his people?

- What does God say about the kind of people they are to him (v. 6)? What does that mean?



**- What were the people chosen to be (God's \_\_\_\_\_ )? Explain what you think that means?**

**- What did the Lord “set” on them? Why?**

I know what it is to set your love and sights on a child that is not yet yours. Our youngest was born in China and the adoption process was difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. But my heart was set on this little girl. The process didn't consume me, my love for her did. I would have gone through anything to bring her home. So I worked and worked; I wrote a lot of checks; I cried and prayed. What did she do? Nothing. What could she do? She had no resources. She had no ability to move towards us. She couldn't fill out any adoption papers. She could do nothing to help the process along. She didn't even know that we were working for her or that we loved her. But we did! My heart longed for her to be curled up beside me in bed. I longed to hold her, cover her with kisses, tell her how much I loved her, and just be with her. And that longing in my heart, my great love for her, compelled me to do whatever was necessary to bring her home.

How similar, and yet how much greater, is the story of our adoption. God, compelled by his great love for us, did everything necessary to make us his own.

2. Read Ephesians 1:3-8. What pieces of your adoption story do you see in these verses?

3. It was his love for us that compelled God to rescue us. Write down your response to that.

**- Does it make a difference in how you view your salvation? How?**

4. Describe what it feels like to be treasured and list some ways you could respond to this kind of love.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Read Romans 8:15 along with the few verses surrounding it. How should this inform the way we live?

### Take-Away

God sets out on this mission of rescue and redemption because he loves us.

### For Further Study

1. Read Galatians 4:4-7. How do these verses tie together the heart of the Father, the rescue he provides, and the way we are to respond?

### Scripture Memory

“And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.”  
Leviticus 26:12

## DAY 2: The Way of the King—Covenant

Does it matter to you if Craig and I are married or if we are simply living together outside of marriage? It should (for so many reasons)! But why does it? Why isn't it enough for you to know that we love each other? What is the difference between marriage and living together outside of marriage? The difference is a covenant. And the covenant that I entered into with Craig Doctor on January 6, 1990 provides the framework for understanding the nature of our commitment. Yes, we love each other, but it is the covenant of marriage that binds us together. In order for us to have entered into that covenant, we had to make promises to each other about how we would act in the future—and those promises should bind us to each other and to the One to whom we made the promises. We promised that no matter what the future would hold (sickness or health, riches or poverty, joy or sorrow) we would love and cherish each other until one of us died. And we did something to symbolize our commitment; we gave each other rings. Love compelled us to enter into covenant, but it is the covenant that defines the nature of our relationship: we are covenantally bound to each other.

*Our God is a covenant-making  
and covenant-keeping God.*

God binds himself to us with covenants. Love compels him; covenant binds him. Mike Williams says it like this, “God’s way in all this [the story of redemption] ... is the way of covenant.”<sup>15</sup> Covenant is the way that God goes about accomplishing his purposes—he makes certain promises to his people and then he binds himself to those promises. Our God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God.

While we are somewhat familiar with the idea of what a covenant is (we think of words like promise, contract, pledge, and commitment), we also live in an age of no-fault divorce, cohabitation instead of marriage, and shameless adultery. This can jade and slant our thoughts on what a covenant really is and the strength of the bond that is intended.

Covenants were part of the ancient world, the world of the Old Testament. The most common type of covenant was called a Suzerain-vassal covenant, in which the Suzerain, or stronger party (think nation or king), pledged to protect the weaker party, or vassal. In return for that protection, the vassal promised obedience and loyalty. It would be as if a large and mighty kingdom promised to protect a small and weak kingdom and, in exchange, the small and weak kingdom would be loyal and offer support. God used a concept familiar to the ancient Israelites to help them understand what he was doing. He was going to be their Suzerain and they were to be his vassal. He was the initiator of the covenant because he was the stronger party and his people were to respond with loyalty because they were the weaker. Again, our God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God.

Today we are going to begin to trace the thread of the covenants through Scripture—what is God accomplishing through the covenants. The rest of the week we are going to look at some of the specific promises found in some of the different covenants—what are the ways he is going to accomplish his purposes.

1. Read Exodus 6:6-8. List the promises God makes (I will...).

2. Read Leviticus 26:12. What will God do?
  
3. Read Jeremiah 7:23. What is required of the people? What will God do?
  - Are both parties faithful to uphold their end of the covenant?
  
4. Read Jeremiah 11:4. What phrase has been repeated throughout all of these verses?
  
5. **Read Jeremiah 30:22 and Ezekiel 36:28. When you think about the Garden and all we lost because of sin, what does that repeated phrase mean to you?**

This is possibly one of the greatest things we can understand about our God and our story. This great rescue mission is for a purpose—God wants to be in relationship with his people! He loves us. And so he binds himself to his own promises, knowing that he will be the only one who will be faithful and keep the covenant. Our faithful God enters into a binding relationship with unfaithful people. He knew on the front end that he would have to be the one upholding both sides of the covenant and, because he is faithful, he keeps his promises and accomplishes his will; we are his people and he is our God.

This is the heart of our Father. He wants to be our God and he wants us to be his people. Reflect on the incomprehensibility of that for a moment and write down a prayer of response.

## Take-Away

God enters into a covenantal relationship with us because he wants to be our God and wants us to be his people.

## For Further Study

1. Read Zechariah 2:10-11. Who will join and be God's people? Why is that good news for us?

## Scripture Memory

“And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.”  
Leviticus 26:12

## DAY 3: Tracing the Covenants—Noah

One of my favorite definitions of covenant is that it is the King of Glory's binding promise to be our God and to make us his people. God is on a mission to redeem his people. But, even though there is only one mission of God, was there only one covenant in the accomplishment of that mission? No. There were many covenants. God entered into covenant with Adam, Noah, Abram, Moses, David, and, of course, us—we have the New Covenant. How are we to think about the fact that God entered into multiple covenants? Does each “new” one do away with the previous ones? Does God change his mind or alter his course? No! God's promise remains the same—to redeem a people for himself. But each covenant gives a little more information on how he will do that, what his people should be looking for, and how they are to respond. Each covenant builds on the ones before and gives a little more information about the great rescue mission of God. We will spend the rest of this week tracing some key elements of the covenants.

*God's promise remains the same—to redeem a people for himself. But each covenant gives a little more information on how he will do that, what his people should be looking for, and how they are to respond.*

Read Genesis 3:15 again: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Both the ESV and the NIV use the word “offspring.” The Hebrew word is *zera'* and it can also be translated “seed” or “descendant.” The verse goes on to tell us “*he* (this offspring) shall bruise your head and you shall bruise *his* heel” (emphasis mine).

The first promise given is that there will be a descendant of Adam—a man, a human being—who will crush the head of the enemy. We take that for granted and think, “Of course it was a human!” But this

is actually of utmost importance. Jesus, the one who will be the fulfillment of all the promises and all the covenants, is both man and God. As Robert Peterson said, “It took God to save us, but it took a man to save us!” The promise that the victor will be an offspring of the woman means that we have a Savior who is able to identify with us in every way because he is like us—not just God, but God who became a man. And as we trace the promises of God through the covenants, we are going to make note of each piece of information given along the way because each one reveals a crucial part of this big plan of redemption.

After Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden, we see sin abound in the next eight chapters. The beauty of the garden has obviously been lost. Cain murders Abel, Lamech kills numerous men, and corruption overflows. The question we should ask as we read of this immediate downward spiral is, “Does sin win?” God had promised in Genesis 3:15 that he would win, but all we read about after the garden is sin abounding. Then God sends the flood. Does his promise survive the destruction? Is our covenant-keeping God still faithful to his word? When we come to Genesis 6-9, the account of Noah and the flood, we need to read these chapters and hear God shouting from the mountaintops that he will, forever, be faithful to his word and he will accomplish all he has promised to do. Nothing will triumph over him, especially not sin and corruption. As Mike Williams says:

Sin and judgment is at best only half the story ... The point is rather to communicate God’s resolve to redeem in spite of fallen man, and that sin cannot thwart the promise made in the Garden. It is about grace, that God will protect the seed of the woman and will affect his plan to redeem in spite of sin’s power and allure. Like all of Scripture, the story is about the faithfulness of God.<sup>16</sup>

The flood destroyed almost all, but God, again, saved in the midst of his judgment. One man and his family survive. And with that one man, Noah, God reestablishes the covenant he made with Adam in the garden.

1. Read Genesis 9:1-7. Compare it with Genesis 1:26-30. What is the same? What is different?

Genesis 1:26-30	Genesis 9:1-7

2. What do you learn about the faithfulness of God?

Unfortunately, not much changes after the flood. Judgment did not change man’s heart. We will need more than judgment; but I don’t want to get ahead of myself. Man is still corrupt, sinful, and disobedient. But even in the midst of sin, chaos, and rebellion we see God’s faithfulness to his word and his plan.

3. Read Genesis 9:12-17. Why do you think God gave Noah a sign? How does that reassure you?
4. Read Isaiah 54:8-10. What comfort do you receive from this and why?
5. Have you ever thought of the Bible as the story of an unhappy father who constantly has to punish and rebuke his disobedient and naughty children? Or do you see it as it is—the story of a most loving Father who consistently moves toward the sin and brokenness of his children in order to forgive and redeem them? What difference does that make?

### Take-Away

No matter what, God will be faithful to his promises.

### For Further Study

1. Glance at Genesis 11:10-26. Moses carefully recorded the genealogies of the descendants of Noah. List the three sons of Terah (11:26).
2. Why is it important to know that Abram is a descendent (or offspring) of Noah who, by necessity, was a descendant of Adam and Eve (read Genesis 9:8)?
3. Read Genesis 9:8. With whom does God make his covenant? How is this different than the “offspring” mentioned in Genesis 3:15 (think in terms of through whom vs. for whom)?

## Scripture Memory

“And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.”  
Leviticus 26:12

## DAY 4: Tracing the Covenants—Abram

At the end of yesterday’s lesson we saw that we can trace the covenant from Adam to Noah and from Noah to Abram. The promised seed will be the offspring of Eve, Adam and Noah. And today we will see that the promise is now carried through Abram. God’s covenant with Abram does not “do away with” his covenants with Adam and Eve, or with Noah. Rather, he builds on them and gives us another glimpse of what redemption will look like. Out of all the peoples of the earth, God narrows the fulfillment of his plan first to one man (Noah), then to one family (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), then to one nation (Israel). But what I hope we see today is that the scope of God’s plan has always been the whole world.

1. Read Genesis 12: 1-3. Make a list of what God told Abram to do.

2. Write down everything God says “I will” do.

*God is calling Abram, setting him apart, and blessing him so that, through him, God will bless the whole world by keeping his covenant promises.*

I enjoy almost every translation of the Bible and use several different ones, but for this verse, I am going to quote the ESV and RSV. They best capture the Hebrew grammar in Genesis 12:2 by translating it “and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, *so that* you will be a blessing” (emphasis mine). And the “so that” is crucial! God is not giving up on the rest of the world. This is not just about God and Abram. God is calling Abram, setting him apart, and blessing him for a reason ... so that, through

him, God will bless the whole world by keeping his covenant promises! God is still on his great rescue mission to redeem and restore his creation and he is going to use Abram and his offspring to do that.

3. Read Genesis 12:3. Who is to be blessed through Abram?

From the beginning God has been on a mission to fill the whole world with his presence. This was true in Eden (“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” Genesis 1:28). He wanted his people to bear his image and extend his kingdom. And we see that his heart has not changed because what he begins with Abram is the same whole-earth mission.



4. Read Genesis 12:7. What new piece of information are we given about God's promises to his people through Abram?

Before Craig and I moved to St. Louis to go to Covenant seminary we lived on approximately 15 acres of what is arguably the most beautiful 15 acres in all of Kansas. I loved this land. I loved how my children could run, play, swim, and climb. I loved how bright the stars were at night. I loved how I could ride my horse as fast as I wanted. There were times when I would sit outside and reflect on the fact that this piece of land had been in existence since the creation of the world—and I felt as if God had created it just for me. He hadn't. I was only to enjoy it for a season and then pass it on to others just as it had been passed on to me. But I know what it is to be given a specific piece of land for a season.

Part of God's covenantal promises to his people involved giving them a specific piece of land for a season of time. We call this the Promised Land because that's what it was—land promised to them. In Genesis 12:1 we get the first glimpse that land is going to be part of God's plan. He tells Abram to go from his home to "the land that I will show you." God chose the land and it is important to our understanding of God's mission to understand why. First, let's look at the promises.

5. Read Genesis 12:7. To whom was the land to be given?

- Read Genesis 15:2. Did Abram have any offspring at that time?

6. Skim Genesis 15 paying special attention to vv. 7-8 and 18.

- What was Abram's question (v. 8)?

- What did God do to answer Abram's question (v. 18)?

Do you remember the "so that" in Genesis 12:2? Abram was called and blessed so that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed. The same is true for the land. It is given so that God's children would be strategically located so that they could be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Canaan was perfectly situated for God's redemptive purposes. Williams says,

Why was Abraham promised the land of Canaan rather than some other piece of real estate? If God had chosen Abraham and Israel for some pampered and coddled existence in which the nation would relate only to him and not bear an active mission toward the rest of humankind, then Canaan was an exceedingly poor choice on God's part. But it was neither a mistake nor happenstance that Canaan, the crossroads of the ancient world, was chosen to be the dwelling place of Israel . . . God did not call his people to a mountain-top monastery but to a strip mall on Main Street.<sup>17</sup>

7. The same is true for us. God does not call us to live a “pampered and coddled existence” but to live in light of the fact that we have been strategically placed. Describe how this is true in your life.

God’s people are to be a blessing to the world. Abram was called, blessed, and promised a strategic location so that, in him, “all the families of the earth” would be blessed. The same holds true for you and for me.

### Take-Away

God’s sights have always been on the whole world.

### For Further Study

1. Read Matthew 1:1 and Luke 3:23, 34-36. Write down your observations. Why do you think the gospel writers took the time to write down these genealogies?
2. How is Jesus the “even greater Abram?”
  - What did he leave in order to obey God?
  - How is the phrase “and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” supremely true of Jesus?

### Scripture Memory

“And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.”  
Leviticus 26:12

## DAY 5: Tracing the Covenants—Abraham

In chapter 2, we looked at God as the King over all creation and his kingdom as the place where perfect justice, mercy, and righteousness rule. We long for such a place. I live in St. Louis and, as I write, there are riots and protests occurring. Many people feel that a great injustice was done a few days ago when the Grand Jury announced that Darren Wilson (a white policeman) would not go to trial for shooting Michael Brown (an unarmed 18 year old African American young man). The unrest, though, is not rooted in

***Only when the perfectly righteous and just King of kings is on his eternal throne will that perfect justice be ushered in again.***

just this one incident. The deep pain and anger lie in the feeling that injustice has been a part of our nation's history for far too long. And what is happening in St. Louis is, for most, a visible demonstration of the fact that we long for justice, righteousness, and peace. And that longing is good and right; it is there because we were created for it. Unfortunately though, we turn our hope for perfect justice to other men: judges, politicians, police, and protestors. There is not one person or one platform that can

offer perfect justice—save One. Only when the perfectly righteous and just King of kings is on his eternal throne will that perfect justice be ushered in again. Only the perfect King can bring perfect justice. And, even as we work towards it now, we long for that day with eager expectation.

We should not be surprised then, as we trace God's covenants, to see the foreshadowing of a king comes early in the story—because redemption will be complete only when God reestablishes his perfect King on his eternal throne. There will be other kings that come first, but all in anticipation of the only King who can and will accomplish all of God's purposes.

1. Read Genesis 17:1-8. Write down any words you have seen in previous covenants. Write down any new phrases or words.

Words and Phrases Used Previously	New Phrases Used

When you were little, did you ever sing “Father Abraham?” It goes like this, “Father Abraham had many sons. Many sons had Father Abraham. I am one of them, and so are you. So let’s just praise the Lord.” Then we were supposed to move our arms and legs, turn around, and repeat the song over and over. The whole thing was confusing to me. I just didn’t get it. How was I one of Abraham’s sons and why would that cause me to praise the Lord (to say nothing of moving my arms and legs in ways that had nothing to do with the song)? Well, the arm and leg movements still confuse me, but the rest now makes sense. In Genesis 17, God changes Abram’s name to Abraham. Abram means “exalted father,” while Abraham means “father of a multitude.” This idea that he would be the father of many nations and many people ties into the promise in Genesis 12:3 that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

2. Read Romans 9:7-8. Who are the children of God?
3. Read Romans 4:11-12, 16-18. What is the promise based on? Who are counted as Abraham's children?
4. Read Romans 4:1-8. List a few reasons why this should cause us to sing, "let's just praise the Lord."

*God is ever faithful to his plan and his promises, but, for the people to realize the blessing of it, they are required to walk in obedience.*

It is because we are the children of Abraham that we are heirs to the promises made to Abraham. What is our part in all of this? Remember what Abram was doing in Genesis 15 while God was cutting the covenant? He was asleep. Theologically we are very comfortable with that. We fully affirm God's complete sovereignty—he does it all! And he does: he initiates, he moves toward us, he has a plan, and he accomplishes that plan. But do

we play any part? Do we have any responsibility? Or do we get to remain asleep while God does all the work?

5. Read Genesis 17:1-2. What is God requiring of Abraham?

This is a very important point to understand as we head into the rest of the Old Testament. Does God carry out his plan regardless of how people respond? Yes and no. God is ever faithful to his plan and his promises, but, for the people to realize the blessing of it, they are required to walk in obedience. We know "the covenant always rests upon God's initiative and determination. God nevertheless places obligations upon man in covenant relationship ... he calls his people to obey the word of God, walk in his ways, trust him, and lean upon his mercy."<sup>18</sup>

6. Read Deuteronomy 30:16-20. How does this help us understand the unfailing promises of God and, at the same time, the responsibility he places on his people to obey?

7. What light does this shed on how God feels about holiness and obedience?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. God said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.” How does he ask the same two things of us today? What are some ways we can respond?

As we begin to talk about holiness, blamelessness, and obedience, it is so important to flip back the pages to Days 1 and 2 of this chapter. Are we to be blameless in order to earn our Father’s love? No! He has set his love on us because that love compels him. Is the surety of his covenant faithfulness based on our faithfulness or holiness? No! He is faithful in spite of our sin and he is a covenant-keeper even though we are covenant-breakers. The call to holiness is a call of response. It is not so that we will earn God’s love; it is because we have God’s love. As we will see in the next chapter, we are God’s children and, because he loves us, he wants us to behave accordingly.

### Take-Away

As Abraham’s descendants, we are also called to respond faithfully to the faithfulness of God.

### For Further Study

1. Read Psalm 119:1-11. What are some ways to walk blamelessly?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Read John 14:15. What should our love compel us to do?

3. As you think about the fact that Abraham was called and blessed *so that* others would be called and blessed, think of some of the ways “being blameless” played in that calling?

## Scripture Memory

“And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.”  
Leviticus 26:12

## Points to Remember from Chapter 4

- It is God’s love that compels him, not our “obedience.”
- Covenant is the binding promise of our King to be our God and to make us his people.
- God is a covenant-keeping God.
- Sin does not thwart God’s faithfulness.
- We are blessed so that we will be a blessing.
- We are to walk before God and be blameless.

# 5

## A Kingdom of Priests

I grew up in a very moral home. We were good people. The biblical basis of morality was the standard my parents used, but it was a morality that had very little to do with Jesus or with the story of redemption. It was a morality that screamed, “Good girls don’t smoke, cuss, chew or go with boys who do.” And, for the most part, I wanted to be a “good girl.” But, at the same time, I tried to get my toes as close as I could to the line of law breaking without actually crossing over it. I found all sorts of ways to skirt around the rules. For instance, we were not supposed to take the Lord’s name in vain, so I would say “ga” when I was upset. If my mom questioned me, I would simply say, with indignation in my voice, “I said ga,” and that seemed to satisfy. My only desire to obey these rules was my desire to not be grounded. I viewed them as rules that were there to kill my fun. They seemed outdated, boring, and irrelevant.

In the introduction I mentioned that Scripture is not a collection of do’s and don’ts and, yet, it contains lists of do’s and don’ts. Think of the Ten Commandments. The majority start off with the phrase “you shall not.” You shall not steal, lie, murder, covet, or take the Lord’s name in vain... but you shall honor your father and mother and remember the Sabbath. Isn’t that just a list of do’s and don’ts? What place do these rules have in our story? In order to answer that question, we have to look and see when they were given and, most importantly, why they were given.

Let’s review where we are in the story and what has happened up to this point. God created. His creation was filled with peace, beauty, unhindered relationship, and unspeakable joy. Man rebelled, sinned, and faced the consequences. In spite of their sin, God pursued his children and promised to fix what they had broken and, one day, to permanently defeat their enemy. God promised this victory of his would come through a man and that man would be a descendant of Adam, Noah, and Abraham. God told Abraham two important things: I am going to bless you so that, through you, all the families of the earth will be blessed and, as part of that blessing, you are to be blameless and walk before me.

What happened next? You know the story: Abraham had Isaac, Isaac had Jacob, Jacob had twelve sons, and they all ended up in Egypt (read Genesis 21-50 for all of the details!). For four hundred years this family lived in Egypt and they were fruitful and multiplied! They became not just a large family, but a large people group. The Egyptians felt threatened by this large people group, so they made the descendants of Abraham slaves. This large group of people had been told about the God of their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so they cried out to him to see if he would rescue them. And rescue them he did! He sent

plagues, signs, and wonders to defeat the Pharaoh of Egypt and he brought his people out of Egypt. He delivered them from slavery and oppression and then told them he was their God and they were his people. And this is where we will pick up the story this week.

## Pray

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Pray and thank God for choosing you, calling you out of darkness, and making you his own *so that* you can proclaim his excellencies!

## DAY 1: The Pattern of Redemption

I just finished reading John Grisham’s *Sycamore Row*. When I finished the last page I was simply amazed at how he had woven so many pieces of the plot together. At the end, I realized that he had tied all the different events and people together in a way that was beautiful and made sense. It was at the end of the story that I could look back and identify which pieces had been the most important.

The exodus was an event that happened early in the story line of God’s great drama. But, by the time we get to the end of the story, we realize the exodus from Egypt was an event central to God’s unfolding plan.

***The exodus is an event that foreshadows our glorious redemption.***

It is not just an isolated event that has little to do with us. The exodus is an event that foreshadows our glorious redemption.

The second book of the Bible is named Exodus based on the Greek word meaning “departure” or “a going out,” similar to our English word exit. And that is the major theme of the book—Israel’s exit from Egypt. Why is an entire book of the Bible dedicated to this one event?

Because the exodus is the single greatest act of redemption apart from the cross. The exodus gives a model of what God’s ultimate redemption would look like and is “repeatedly celebrated as the ground for Israel’s hope and basis for God’s future deliverances.”<sup>19</sup> Listen to how Richter puts it:

This [the exodus] is the single most important event in all Israelite history. Without the exodus, the children of Abraham were a forgotten race. Without the exodus, the promises of Abraham were nothing. Without the exodus, there would be no Mosaic covenant and no Israel . . . For all of history God has chosen to be identified by this singular event—the God who rescues slaves from their bondage and claims them as his own . . . If we are to understand the God of our salvation, the faith of Israel and therefore our own faith, we must understand the exodus.<sup>20</sup>

1. Read Exodus 2:24. What did God remember?

2. Read Exodus 6:2-8.

- What is familiar in v. 7?

- List the seven “I will” statements God makes in vv. 6-8 in the chart below. Then look up



**the verses in the second column and comment on how God has also done that for you.**

I will	Colossians 1:13	He has
I will	Romans 6:17-18	He has
I will	Ephesians 1:7	He has
I will	1 Peter 2:10	He has
I will	Revelation 21:3	He has
I will	John 14:3	He has
I will	John 14:2	He has

Immediately after God told Moses what he was going to do, God sent Moses back to Pharaoh. Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go, so God started sending the plagues. Plagues 1-9 came, but Pharaoh refused to release the Israelites. As a result, God sent the tenth plague. And the tenth plague is of utmost significance to us because, before the captives were set free, one of two things had to happen.

3. Read Exodus 12:29. Who was to die in the final plague?
4. Read Exodus 12:3, 5-7, 12-13. In this scenario, who died?

Before the slaves were set free, either the firstborn child or a perfect lamb died.

5. Read Colossians 1:15 and Matthew 3:17. Who is the ultimate firstborn son?
6. Read John 1:29 and Revelation 5:12. Who is the ultimate Passover lamb?

The story of the exodus is a crucial point in our story. Slaves are set free because blood was shed. A group of people were delivered from oppression and slavery because either the firstborn son or a perfect lamb died. God shows us the pattern of his redemption and how high the cost of this rescue will be.

7. **Looking at the chart above, pick 2-3 from the “He has” column and write how God has done that in your life. Be as specific as possible.**

Take-Away

We, too, are slaves who have been rescued and redeemed.

## For Further Study

How important is the exodus to the other biblical authors?

1. Read Psalm 81:10. How does God choose to define himself?
2. Read Psalm 136:1-16. List the main events that are to cause the people to praise and thank God.
3. Read Acts 13:17. What three things is Paul referring to in this verse?

## Scripture Memory

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Exodus 19:5-6

## DAY 2: Treasured Possession

Does the exodus end when the Israelites cross the Red Sea? Do they get to the other side, look around at each other, and ask “now what?” Was the whole point of their deliverance to simply get them out of Egypt? No. It wasn’t just that God was taking them from something; he was taking them to something. Earlier in the study we talked about the Disney movie, *Tangled*. When Rapunzel was rescued from the tower, did the audience stand up thinking the movie was now over? No! Everyone knew the deliverance from the tower was important, a necessary step, but it was never the final goal. The final goal was to be reunited as a true daughter of the true king.

The Israelites were not delivered out of Egypt merely to be released from slavery. As Williams says,

The initial act of physical deliverance is just that, initial. More is to come. For all believers, salvation is more than deliverance from the oppression of sin, guilt, and death. God wants not only to save but also to enter into relationship with his covenant community and to bless that community. Relationship and blessing lie alongside deliverance at the heart of redemption.<sup>21</sup>

As we trace the main threads of the story through Scripture, we have to remember what God is up to.

He is fixing things for a reason. He is fixing things because, unless he does, he cannot be in relationship with his children. The goal of salvation is the restoration of relationship. God wants what he had in the garden with Adam and Eve: he wants to be our God, to be in relationship with us, he wants us to be his people, and he wants to dwell with us. So he redeems and delivers.

*The goal of salvation is the restoration of relationship*

**1. Read Exodus 19:4-6. List the three things God tells his people they will be.**

Remember these three things!

2. Where does God say that he brought them?
3. Read both Exodus 19:5-6 and 1 Peter 2:9 (below). Put brackets around all of the phrases telling what God did, circle all of the words indicating relationship, and underline all the words showing response/responsibility on the part of the people.

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. (Ex. 19:5-6.)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10.)

4. Write down everything you underlined. Remember these, too!

Does the order of the events matter? Absolutely! What would have happened if things had been reversed—if God said to them while they were still in Egypt, “If you obey my voice and keep my covenants, then I will bring you to myself and make you my treasured possession?” What changes? Everything! In fact, every other religion in the world is based on that order: if you do things right, then you will earn whatever it is that religion is promising. But that is not the order of events. God delivers them because he loves them. He brings them to himself because he loves them. They did nothing to earn it. The same is true for us.

5. All of us struggle at times with feeling like we have to earn God's love. List 2-3 ways you might try to

“earn” God’s love.

- Re-read Deuteronomy 7:6-9. What are some of the ways that this verse could help us when we doubt the love of God?

- What does v. 9 tell us to do?

Let the deep truth that God loves you with a steadfast love, a love that is given before it is ever returned, sink in. He delivers you because he treasures you. You don’t earn it, which means you can’t lose it. Hallelujah, what a Deliverer!

### Take-Away

God delivers people in order to bring them into relationship with himself.

### For Further Study

1. Reflect for a moment on what it feels like to be called treasured and chosen. Our hearts long for both. Which words in these verses mean the most to you and why?
2. Read Ephesians 2:8-9, 13. How do these verses reinforce what we have been talking about?
3. Read 1 John 4:16. Have you come to know and believe, really believe, that God loves you and you are

his treasured possession?

## Scripture Memory

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Exodus 19:5-6

## DAY 3: Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation

What does it mean for God to tell Israel they are going to be a kingdom made up entirely of priests? Does it mean they are to walk around in white collars and black robes? No. It helps to stop for a minute and think about what priests were to do. Priests were to be people who acted as a “go-between” between God and man. They were to talk to God about the needs and failures of the people and they were to talk to the people about God—how to worship and serve him. By calling them priests, Israel was being told they were to be priests to the whole world—to be the go-betweens by praying for the surrounding nations and by telling these nations about their great and mighty God. By calling them a kingdom of priests, God is inviting them into his story. They now have a part to play in this great rescue mission, not just as receivers of God’s mercy and grace, but also as participants who get to pass the story of their great God on to others.

God has united them to his mission to redeem a people for himself. As always, God’s sights are set on the whole world. It might have been easy for this newly formed nation to think, when God said he wanted to be their God, this meant he was rejecting the rest of the world. But that has never been the case. God’s sights, even before the fall, have always been on the whole world.

1. Before the fall, where was God sending Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:28)?
2. Where was Noah to go (9:7)?
3. Who was Abraham to bless (12:3)?
4. Where are we sent (Matt. 28:19)?
5. Based on the verses above, how would you summarize God’s intention for his people?

God is giving this new nation, Israel, not just a purpose, but also an identity: they are his people, treasured, loved, and redeemed. They have a mission: they have been called to be both the receivers of God's great mercy and also the extenders of God's mercy. They are going to be the means by which God will make himself known throughout the world. And they are told what is required of them to be faithful partners in this beautiful relationship: they are to be holy (more about this in a minute). Israel was not saved for Israel's sake alone (neither is our salvation for our sake alone).

***Israel was not just a receiver of God's mercy and grace, but also a participant who was to pass the story of their great God on to others.***

Peeking ahead in our story just a bit, how well did Israel do with this? How well did they mediate God's presence and blessing to the surrounding nations? Not very well! There are two big pitfalls Israel fell into (and we can fall into!) as they moved forward in the story: syncretism and separatism. Syncretism is a word that describes the merging of things (think of synthesis or synthetic—the combining of different things). And separatism is just what it sounds like—it is a removal and a separation from those around you.

6. Read Judges 2:12. In what ways is this an example of syncretism?
7. Read Ezekiel 20:32. Who did the people want to be like?
8. **Think of a time when you either have wanted to just “fit in” or have felt drawn away from God by those around you. In what ways could that have been similar to how the Israelites felt?**

The flip side of this coin is separatism. At times, Israel so far removed herself from engaging the other nations she was completely ineffective in her call to minister to them.

9. Skim Luke 10:30-37, paying extra attention to v. 31. What were the priests to do?

10. Read Matthew 9:11-13.

- What accusations did the Pharisees make against Jesus? What was Jesus' response?

**11. In what ways are you tempted to fall into one of these pitfalls (syncretism or separatism)?**

Israel failed at fulfilling her mission to be a kingdom of priests to the world. But the good news is that we have One who was sent who did not fail; he was the perfect priest in every way. Kevin Vanhoozer says, "Part of what Jesus is accomplishing on the cross, then, is fulfilling the messianic vocation of Israel to be a faithful and obedient covenant people, a kingdom of prophets and priests, a light to the nations."<sup>22</sup> Jesus is the true and holy priest who can mediate God's blessings to the whole world.

### Take-Away

Israel had a mission and a purpose—they were to be mediators of God's blessing to the whole world.

### For Further Study

1. Read Psalm 67:1-2. What does the psalmist seem to understand?

2. Read Isaiah 66:18 and Revelation 7:9-10. In what ways does this declare the heart of God?

- How are you participating in this?

## Scripture Memory

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Exodus 19:5-6

## DAY 4: Real Relationship

I like to play tennis. It is a fun game and a great outlet for my competitive nature. But tennis is no fun to play alone. To stand on a tennis court and hit the ball over a net and never have it returned is not tennis. Tennis requires at least two people so that the ball can go back and forth. Then it is fun! In the same way, relationships need people on each “side.” Real relationship means that each party is present, willing to engage, and involved.

***Real relationship means that each party is present, willing to engage, and involved.***

God is constantly inviting his people into real relationship with him—relationship that requires something from both sides. He is not the “great watchmaker” who set the world into motion and then steps back to let it all play out. He is present, engaged, and involved. Neither are we puppets, mere pawns in a game;

our responses and actions matter. We are called into real relationship. And that relationship comes with expectations and requirements.

That should not seem strange to us. What relationship doesn’t come with expectations and requirements? One of the closest relationships I have is my relationship with my children. My love for them is not tied, in any way, to their actions. I will love them no matter what they do and no matter what they don’t do. But that love does not mean that our relationship doesn’t have requirements and expectations. Even though my love for them cannot be broken, the closeness of my relationship with them can suffer heartache. Disobedience on their part can certainly cause a distance in our relationship—not in my love, but in the way we relate to each other. We all know what it is like when a relationship is close, joyful, and thriving and when that same relationship is distant, frustrating, and strained. It is not that different with God.

The main difference is that God never fails on his side of the relationship. He never falls short. He is always present, engaged, involved, faithful, wise, and loving. He is the covenant-keeping God. We, on the other hand, fail, fall short, and disobey. We are the relationship wreckers, the covenant-breakers. But I am getting ahead of myself again. This is the place in the story where we learn not just about this relationship, but also what is required.

God has already proven himself to be present, loving, and faithful. He has just brought this large group of people out of Egypt, is telling them he loves them, and has brought them to himself. He then tells them what he expects of them. Again, remember, the requirements are not to earn his love, but are to be in response to his love.



**1. Read Exodus 19:5. List the two things God says he requires.**

We are not always comfortable with the “if-then” language in Scripture. It can sound as if God’s actions are dependent on our actions. On the one hand, God can and will do all that is in his holy will to do. He will fulfill his promises and purposes. On the other hand, he requires covenant-faithfulness on our part, too. We get to participate in his plan. God requires us to respond with faith and obedience. Think about the Israelites for a minute. God did all it took to deliver them from Egypt, but, at some moment in time, they had to stand up, walk out their front door, and march out of Egypt. They had to obey. Think about Abraham. God told him, when he was 99 years old, that he would have a son. Abraham believed him, but he still had to do something in response to that belief (or else Sarah would not have become pregnant). It is hard to hold God’s complete sovereignty and our responsibility together—but God has no trouble doing so.

**2. Skim over Deuteronomy 28 (especially verses 1-2 and 15). Describe what is happening in this scene.**

**3. Read 1 Samuel 13:13-14. What did Saul not do? What happened as a result?**

**4. Read Acts 13:22. Why was David called a man after God’s own heart?**

**5. Read Philippians 2:8. Describe the obedience of Jesus.**

**6. In what ways does this inform or challenge your understanding about the importance of obedience in the life of a believer?**

We are called to obedience. We are called to keep the commands of the Lord. We are called to real, living, active, and vibrant relationship with the Lord of all creation. Not to earn, secure, or sustain his love, but as the appropriate response to his love. And, remember, his mercies are new every morning!

### Take-Away:

We are called to be faithful and obedient responders to God's grace.

### For Further Study:

1. Read John 14:15, 24. How do we express our love to God? Describe what that looks like in your own life.
2. Read John 15:9-10. What connections is Jesus making? What came first, the obedience or the love?
3. Read 1 John 5:1-3. In what ways are God's commands burdensome to you?

### Scripture Memory

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Exodus 19:5-6

## DAY 5: The Law: Image-Bearing, Flourishing, and Witness

We started this chapter with the question, *aren't the Ten Commandments just a list of do's and don'ts? What do they have to do with God's rescue mission?* We have spent the past four days on Exodus 19:4-6 because, in order to understand the law of God, we have to understand it was given to those he called his treasured possession and a kingdom of priests. It was given to people with whom he was in real relationship. And the order of events is crucial to our understanding of the law.

Do you remember the song from 1968, “Here Comes the Judge?” It has been stuck in my mind all week as I've thought about this lesson! That was my basic feeling about the law when I was growing up—the judge was watching me all the time, like a giant Santa Claus in the sky who is making a list and checking

it twice. And I was going to be found out to be either naughty or nice. And I was pretty sure which list I would be on.

Then, when I became a Christian in my early 20's, I was more like the rich young ruler in Mark 10, "And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.' And he said to him, 'Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.'" And I thought to myself, I've never murdered anyone, never committed adultery, never stolen anything... that I could think of.

***God never changed his mind  
about wanting the goodness  
of Eden for his children.***

But was the law given to incite fear of the judge or be a checklist for the naughty and nice? No! At this point in the story, we should have two things at the front of our minds. First, we should see that God loves his people and desires what is good for them—he loves to see his children flourish. God never changed his mind about wanting the goodness of Eden for his children. The second thing we should have firmly in our minds is that God is on a mission to redeem a people for himself and has invited his children to participate in that mission. These two things are our keys for understanding the law.

1. Read Deuteronomy 4:5-8. What did Moses tell the Israelites would happen when they entered the Promised Land and kept the law? Describe how this was supposed to happen (who was watching and what were they to see).

In our house we have certain rules that our children are expected to obey. To name just a few, we don't let them call each other names or hit each other; when they were small, they had to hold a hand when we crossed the street; they are required to look people in the eyes when speaking or being spoken to. When asked a question, they are required to provide an answer. When called, they have to come. They are not allowed to interrupt. And the list could go on, but the reason for these rules is three-fold.

- 1) We want our family to be a safe place where each person flourishes.
- 2) We want our children's actions to accurately reflect our family.
- 3) And we want to cultivate in them obedience and trust.

God's law is not that different.

Our family's "laws" were not intended to be domineering, oppressive, or killjoys. I didn't tell my children they couldn't play in the street because I wanted to ruin their fun. I told them that in order to promote their wellbeing; I wanted them safe from harm. Yes, the law—both mine and God's—restricts at times, but only to promote the flourishing of those to whom the law applies.

2. **Read Exodus 20:1-17. What are some of the ways God is promoting life, safety, health, and flourishing in these laws?**

The “laws” in our home are not just for us—there is a hope that we would be a blessing to others. It is no fun to have a family over for dinner and have their kids throw food, hit each other, or call each other names. If that were to happen, nobody present would be blessed or impressed.

3. Read Deuteronomy 4:5-8 again. Who was to be “impressed?” What was to cause them to be “impressed?”

4. Explain why God wanted the surrounding nations to be “impressed?”

5. **What are some ways that the law of God can/should/does function in a similar way in our lives today?**

Have you ever been around a family that loves and enjoys each other and treats the other family members with care and respect? Don't you want what they have, to be a part of that? The law had a similar function—to show a watching world what it looks like to be the people of the living God and to make them want to be a part.

One last thing to say about the law: I had a professor who talked about the “floor and the ceiling” of the law. The floor, he said, was like the floor of a great cathedral. It is the place you enter and the platform on which you stand. But the ceiling is the place that lifts your eyes and can cause you to lose your breath in wonder and awe. In this sense, the Ten Commandments function as the floor. It is the bare minimum that we can do to reflect the character of God. If someone were to ask about God, would we say, “Well, let me tell you: My God is not a murderer, or a liar, or a thief, or an adulterer. That is how great my God is.” No, that is the bare minimum—it is the floor. But the ceiling is the character of God himself: instead of murder, he brings life; instead of lying, he is the source of truth; instead of stealing, he gives generously; and instead of adultery, he is ever-faithful.

6. Read Exodus 33:18-19. What did Moses ask to see, what does God say he is going to cause to pass before Moses, and what does God say he will proclaim?

7. Read 34:5-8. List the attributes that God names.

Exodus 34:5-8 is a description of God's character: merciful, forgiving, loving, faithful. That is the ceiling—and the character God wants to inscribe on our hearts.

In the same way that I have a bare minimum standard for my children—thou shall not hit each other—it is far from the best I have for them. I want them to love each other, serve each other, sacrifice for each other. But, at bare minimum, they are not to hit or call each other names. In a similar way, God provides the law to teach his children the bare minimum of how they should treat each other so there is life and flourishing for all. The law is the floor of accurately bearing God's image; obedience and trust will be cultivated as they follow. And it will prepare their hearts to strive for the ceiling—to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

## Take-Away

God's laws are for our good.

## For Further Study

1. Read Exodus 20:2. What are some of the possible reasons God says this before he gives the rest of Exodus 20?
2. Read Romans 7:12. What three things does Paul call the law?
3. Read 1 Kings 10:1-9. In what ways is Solomon fulfilling Deuteronomy 4 and in what ways is he not (what is the Queen of Sheba impressed with that she should be and what is she impressed with that is a distraction from God)? What are some ways you are “impressed” with the right things in someone else's life?

## Scripture Memory

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Exodus 19:5-6

## Points to Remember from Chapter 5

- The exodus is the pivotal event of the Old Testament as it sets a pattern of God's redemption.
- God's people were taken out of slavery in order to be treasured children.
- The goal of salvation is relationship and flourishing.
- God calls his children to participate in his mission of redemption by being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.
- Obedience matters. It is our side of covenant faithfulness.
- The law of God is for the flourishing of God's people.

# 6

## A Dwelling Place for the King

Our first child was born almost six weeks early. After a long and difficult labor, Austin arrived. But he was in bad shape. Before I could see or hold him, he was whisked away to the neonatal intensive care unit. My thoughtful father-in-law, video camera in hand, went into the nursery and captured a short video of Austin. My father-in-law then brought the camera and video to me in the recovery room. And that was how I saw my son for the first time. Not the way I had envisioned glimpsing my first child for the first time. It was several hours before I was able to go see him and, even then, I wasn't able to hold him. He was in an incubator that separated us. I wanted to hold him but couldn't. His condition required that I keep some distance; in fact, his very life depended on it. So I sat as close to him as I could.

In some ways, this is the situation between our heavenly Father and his children. He longs to be with us. But we have a condition (unholiness) that makes it impossible for him (the Holy One) to be too close. Our very lives are actually in danger because of this condition; the Holy cannot dwell in the midst of the unholy. What we see, though, is, similar to the way I sat as close to the incubator as I could, God moves as close as he can to his children—he actually dwells among them. We will see this first in the tabernacle and, eventually, in the Temple. The freedom God had to walk with his children in the garden has been lost, but God makes a new way to draw near. He establishes for himself both a place to dwell and ways for his people to approach him. What we cannot lose sight of is the amazing love of our Father/God—and the lengths he goes to just to be near his children.

*The Holy cannot dwell in the midst of the unholy.*

The study this week might feel similar to beginning a 500 piece puzzle when all you are doing is putting the edge pieces in place—you know the pieces have to be there, but are not yet sure what they will have to do with the final picture. We are going to skip through almost fifteen hundred years, picking up just a few of the main pieces. We will look more closely at the heart of our Father, the tabernacle, the establishment of the kingdom, the Temple, and the exile. But these pieces are key to our understanding of the story. The center of the puzzle will be filled in after the edges are put into place. I promise.

## Pray

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness” (Ps. 45:6). Praise God that he reigns, that his throne and his kingdom are eternal, and that he is a good and righteous King!

## DAY 1: I Will Dwell Among Them

I love it when all of my children are home under one roof. Those times are few and far between now that two of my children are married adults, but they are still oh-so-precious. I like to simply be in the kitchen while they are making coffee and talking, or just have everyone around the table together. I love the evenings when we can all sit on the back porch and simply be together. I love to play board games or snuggle on the couch in the basement to watch a movie. I love to be with my children.

Amazingly, God feels the same way! He loves to be with his children. We have looked at the heart of our Father—that he wants to be our God and wants us to be his people. But there is another, very important (arguably the most important), piece to this picture we are putting together—a piece that was evident in the garden, and now becomes clear again.

**1. Read Genesis 3:8. Where was God and what was he doing? What do you learn about God and his presence with his people?**

2. Read Leviticus 26:11. Where does God want to dwell again?

*The presence of God with his people—dwelling together—is a theme that we will need to trace from creation to glory in order to truly understand where this story is headed.*

God created Eden as a place where he could dwell with his people. Remember, they lived in such sweet closeness that Adam and Eve even knew the sound God’s footsteps made (Genesis 3:8)! Can you even imagine such a sound? When he expelled them and placed the cherubim at the entrance to prohibit their return, the greatest loss of Eden was the loss of the beauty of being able to dwell with God (and he with us) in such close intimacy. But the Holy cannot dwell with the unholy—that is the great dilemma in Scripture. God is holy; we are unholy. God is faithful; we are unfaithful. But he longs to be with his people, so he is working all things

together until the time that we will, again, dwell together. The presence of God with his people—dwelling together—is a theme that we will need to trace from creation to glory in order to truly understand where this story is headed.



After Eden, we read of several accounts where God “occasionally descends to meet with selected individuals, although these encounters are always relatively brief and sometimes unexpected.” But when we come to the second half of Exodus, we read of a giant step forward in God’s plan.

3. Read Exodus 29:45. Where is God going to dwell?

- Read v. 46. Why does God say he brought them out of Egypt?

As you read through Exodus 26, you will notice that the tabernacle was God’s idea, God’s plan, and God’s design. He establishes it so that he can dwell in the midst of his people. We absolutely have to see that this is the heart of our Father. It changes everything when we know the God of the universe loves us and wants to be with us. The love of our Father is what drives the story of redemption forward—God wanting to be our God and dwell with us. If we don’t understand anything else, we have to understand this. We all have a deep, deep longing to be loved. Some of us have experienced being loved well and some of us have not. It is worth stopping right here and soaking in the fact that God is saying to his people, “I want to be in your midst, I want to be with you, because I love you so deeply.”

How do we respond to such a love? Years ago I was at a women’s conference and had some time alone in my hotel room. I was praying and asking God for many things. While praying, I felt a conviction in my heart that I was primarily seeking the hand of the Lord (his hand of provision and protection). And the conviction was this: the things that his hand provides are good and right, but, more than his hand, I was to seek his face. I was to learn to long for the very presence of the Lord, not just what he could do for me.

4. Read Exodus 33:1-3. List what God is going to do for the Israelites.

- But what is he not going to do (v. 3)?

5. Read Exodus 33:14-16. What does Moses long for and why?

**6. Read Psalm 27:7-8. What did the Lord tell David to seek? How did David respond?**

- Read Psalm 27:4. What was the one thing for which David's heart was longing?

7. Ultimately, we will all seek that which our heart most longs for. What do you long for? How do you seek it?

God wants us to seek his face because he loves to simply be with his children. Hence, the great dilemma—God longs to be with us and we long/desperately need to be with him, but our sinful, rebellious, and wayward hearts make it impossible to be in the unveiled presence of our holy God.

8. Read John 14:2-3. How is our greatest hope also the fulfillment of our Father's desire to be with us?

- Do you believe the sure promise of John 14:3? Why or why not?

### Take-Away

God wants to dwell with his people but the great dilemma in Scripture is that the unholy cannot dwell with the Holy.

### For Further Study

1. What would it have meant to the Israelites to have God's very presence in their midst?
2. Take some time to reflect on the fact that your heavenly Father wants to be with you. Does this change how you spend time with him in prayer? How and why?

3. Spend some time reflecting on what it will be like to actually dwell with God, face-to-face. Capture those thoughts in a brief prayer.

## Scripture Memory

“And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

2 Samuel 7:16

## DAY 2: Tabernacle

If we were going to outline the book of Exodus, we would probably begin by breaking the book into two sections: Egypt and Sinai. The first half of the book begins with the plight of the people in Egypt and ends with the people leaving Egypt (chapters 1-18). The second half (beginning in chapter 19) takes place at the base of Mount Sinai. It is here that the people are given the law (we looked at that in chapter 5) and then given instructions on how to build the tabernacle.

1. Read Exodus 25:8. What did God tell the people to build and why?

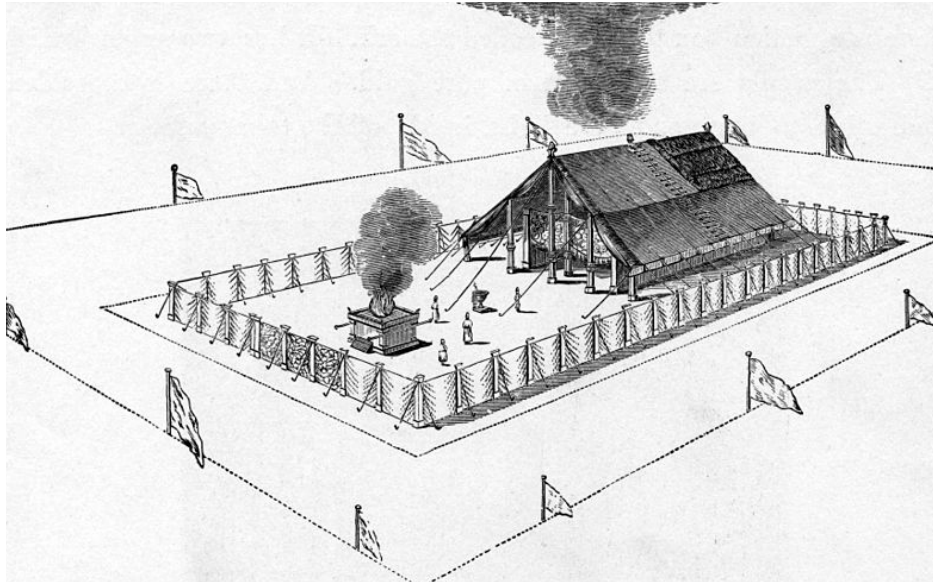
In any story, some moments are more important to the storyline than others. In our story, the giving of the tabernacle is one of these key moments. God has created and called a people to himself. He has been binding himself to them through his covenantal word. He has been longing to dwell with them, and now, for the first time since Eden, God is going to be residing with his people again. But this is not Eden. And we, the readers, know this as soon as God declares his desire to dwell among his people (Ex. 25:8) because he immediately gives them instructions, regulations, and laws concerning how to both build and approach the place where he will dwell. As Richter points out,

*The freedom of Eden has been lost, but the desire of the Father to be with his children has not.*

The irony of the tabernacle is the agony of redemptive history. By its very form this structure communicates God's desire for cohabitation. But the increasing restriction of persons—and the elaborate systems of sacrifice and mediation even for those approved persons—communicated the legacy of sin, separation.<sup>24</sup>

Even as God dwelt among his people, they were still separated by the simple fact that God is holy and his people are not.

God takes 13 chapters of Exodus to give rules and guidelines for the construction of his new dwelling place and then an entire book of the Bible, Leviticus, to give the guidelines for how to approach him in this dwelling place. Most of these are given for one of two reasons: to either remind or protect the people—remind them that he is holy and protect them from that holiness. It is serious business for the unholy to dwell in the presence of the holy. The freedom of Eden has been lost, but the desire of the Father to be with his children has not.



The tabernacle, however, was more than a mere tent in the desert. It was, unbelievably, a palace for our King. The high king of heaven took this lowly tent as his dwelling place. As Jay Sklar wrote, “The King (the Lord) dwelt in his earthly palace (the tabernacle), among his people (Israel).”<sup>25</sup> This should astound us.

2. Read Isaiah 40:21-23. Where does God dwell?

3. Psalm 113:4-6. Where is God seated?

And yet, God told his people to take wood and animal skins, cloth and metal, and make a tent for him. Imagine, for just a minute, what it would be like if Prince William and Princess Kate called to tell you they were going to move in with you. That, in and of itself, is difficult to believe. But then, imagine for another minute, they tell you they will be staying in a tent in your backyard. That is incomprehensible; and, yet, what God did was even more so! The tabernacle was the place where the Divine King chose to live.

**4. Read Exodus 40:34-35. How do we know that God took up residence in the tabernacle?**

**- What phrase is used twice to describe God's presence?**

**- What do you think that means?**

God, the creator God, the God of all heaven and the whole earth, the God who defeated Pharaoh and delivered his people was now dwelling in the midst of his people. And his glory filled the tabernacle. Of course it did! The glory of God is so great and so abundant, that even the glory he chose to share with the Israelites would overflow and overwhelm them. God is still omnipresent (everywhere). He is still enthroned above the heavens and seated on high. The tabernacle does not contain him—he is uncontainable. Of course the tabernacle is filled; nothing can contain the glory of the Lord.

5. Why was Moses not able to enter (Exodus 40:35)?

If you are familiar with the idea of the “already, but not yet,” you know it is a phrase that captures so much of our story. It means so much of this great story has already happened—and the end is a sure thing—but we do not yet live in the time of “happily ever after.” Soon, but not yet. When God fills the tabernacle with his presence, an aspect of the “already but not yet” tension is occurring. He is dwelling with his people—already. But he is not yet fully approachable.

**6. Describe your attitude as you approach God. In what ways is it informed by the tension between the fact that God is both a holy God and a loving Father who longs to dwell with you?**

## Take-Away

The Holy One of Israel is going to dwell in the midst of his people—but it remains serious business for the unholy to approach the Holy.

## For Further Study

1. Read Exodus 26:31-33. What is commanded? Why?

**- How is this a reminder of God's holiness?**

- How is this a protection for God's people and a display of God's mercy?

2. Read Exodus 39:32, 42-43. What do you notice about the Israelites? Describe how they might have felt.

## Scripture Memory

“And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

2 Samuel 7:16

## DAY 3: Throne

Hold on! We are going to cover a lot of history in a short amount of time. In order to trace the threads of our story that hold it together, there will be times we have to slow down and look intently at what happened in just a few short hours or days. At other times, we will skim over years and centuries of events and details. Skimming doesn't mean the events aren't important. They are, or God wouldn't have chosen to put them in his inspired word! But, while some pieces of the story illuminate and add detail, others are the main thread of the storyline. So, today, we are going to race through 400 years of history as we hold onto that thread!

As you know, the Israelites, after being delivered from slavery, were given an identity (treasured possession and kingdom of priests). They were given rules to obey (the law) showing them how they were to live as God's covenant children. Living this way was good for them and was also meant to accomplish the purpose of God to extend his kingdom. And, lastly, most importantly, God ordained a way to fulfill the desire of his fatherly heart and dwell among his children (the tabernacle and the sacrificial system). They are now ready to enter the land that had been promised to Abraham.

But, as we will see, they fail miserably. They do not live as a kingdom of priests. They do not uphold their side of covenant faithfulness. And they grieve the God who lives in their midst.

You know the story—the Lord brought them to the edge of the Promised Land and they refused to go in (Num. 13-14). As a result of their refusal to take what God had promised, God made them wander in the desert for 40 years. After the 40 years of wandering, they finally enter the Promised Land, but they fail to completely conquer and occupy it (Judg. 2:1-3). As they begin to live in the land, they do not function as a kingdom of priests to the one, true God, but, rather, worship the gods of the surrounding nations.

1. Read Judges 2:11-18. List the sequence of events.

This was their constant cycle of behavior: sin, slavery, supplication (crying out), and salvation. They continually bowed down to other gods and forsook their covenantal promises. As a result, God would allow their enemies to overtake them. This would cause the Israelites to cry out for God's mercy and deliverance. God, ever faithful and mighty to save, would send a deliverer and save them. Now, lest we forget, we don't get to sit back, shake our heads, and waggle our fingers at "those naughty Israelites." Because this story, remember, is our story, too.

2. **Have you ever felt caught in this same cycle?**

**- Do you only cry out in times of trouble?**

**- What are the enemies that threaten to overtake you?**

**- From what do you currently need God to deliver you?**

3. One of the saddest verses in all of Scripture is Judges 21:25. Read it and comment on what makes this verse so sad.

"Israel had no king." Really? Hadn't God gone out of his way to show the people he was their King? He had shown them he was the King of creation (go back and review Chapter 2). He had shown them he was a covenantal King (go back and review Chapter 4, Day 2). The problem is not that the people don't have a king; the problem is that they don't acknowledge their king.

*The problem was not that the people didn't have a king; the problem was that they didn't acknowledge their king.*

4. Read 1 Samuel 8:4-7. How does God refer to himself?

5. Do you recognize God as the rightful King of your life? List 2-3 ways you do (or could do) that?

In his mercy, God gave them a king. But that king was never meant to replace God—he was meant to represent God. God is still the King of all kings (including Israel's) and, as we will see, he will take the new monarchy, weave it into his glorious plan of redemption, and “through the king ... reveal some of the most glorious aspects of Israel's future.”<sup>26</sup>

The king of Israel, the one who was to rule as a representative of the King, was to rule in a way that caused the people of God to flourish and the kingdom of God to be extended. It is important to know what this appointed king was supposed to do. He was to rule in such a way that he promoted the law of God (righteous rule), caused the flourishing and wellbeing of the people, and served as a witness to God's kingdom to the surrounding nations.

The people chose the first king, Saul. He did not represent God and God removed him from the throne. God chose the second king, David. It is with David that God established the next covenant. It is to David's reign that future kings are compared. It is David's heart before the Lord that others are measured against. David is the king who established Jerusalem as the capitol city of Israel. He brought the ark and the tabernacle into Jerusalem and, in doing so, brought “the throne room of the true king of Israel”<sup>27</sup> into Jerusalem.

Under David's rule, the promises to Abraham had become realities. Christopher Wright says, “With David the covenant with Abraham had come to a measure of fulfillment: Abraham's offspring had become a great nation; they had taken possession of the land promised to Abraham; they were living in a special relationship of blessing and protection under Yahweh.”<sup>28</sup> And, as promised, kings and nations had come from Abraham. Israel was ready, finally, to function as the kingdom of priests they had been called to be. It is at this point in the story that David, a man after God's own heart, decided it was time to build a permanent palace for the rightful King. But God had other plans.

6. Read 2 Samuel 7:1-11. What did David want to do and why?

- How does God “turn the tables” on David?

- What three things does God tell David he, God, will establish (11b-13)?



7. Read 2 Samuel 7:18-29. How did David respond?

God, once again, enters into a covenantal promise with his people through a single person, a representative. So much of what he tells David, we have heard before. There is still the promise of a seed/offspring (v. 12), still the promise of the land (v. 10), God will still make his name great (v. 9), and kings will still come from this line (v. 12). But there is also something new in this covenant.

8. Read 2 Samuel 7:12-13. What will be established? How long will it endure?

It is one thing for God to promise (and we have seen that if he promises, he fulfills!) a throne and a kingdom. But it is the type of throne and kingdom that should cause us to stop and scratch our heads in wonder... an eternal throne and an eternal kingdom? What must David have thought? What must the people of Israel have thought?

David's son, Solomon, became king after David. The Israelites might have, at first, thought that Solomon was the one promised. He was David's son. He succeeded David, he built the Temple, and he had a wise and righteous rule—at least in the beginning. But was his throne established forever? No. Almost immediately upon Solomon's death, the kingdom of Israel was divided into two kingdoms—the northern and southern kingdoms. And it remained divided until after the exile.

So who was the one who would sit on this eternal throne? If David wasn't the one, and Solomon wasn't the one, who would be the one to sit on this eternal throne? God's people looked year after year for the answer to that question. Throughout the rest of Israel's history, we see the people looking for the one, longing for this covenant to be fulfilled, longing for a Davidic king, someone who would finally sit on the promised eternal throne. They were looking for another king, one like David, chosen and anointed by God, one whose rule was good and righteous—a king under whom the people flourished and the kingdom was extended. How would this happen? "How could Yahweh fulfill such a tall order? The answer, of course, will be by means of a child of David who reaches beyond David and Israel and is himself eternal." They had a name for this person—the Messiah. And all of Israel was looking for him.

*Throughout the rest of Israel's history, we see the people looking for the one, longing for this covenant to be fulfilled,*

## Take-Away

God promises that a son of David will sit on an eternal throne.

## For Further Study

1. Read Psalm 10:16. Who is the eternal king?
2. Read Psalm 89:3-4, 20-37. Who do you think the psalmist is talking about? Why? List any New Testament references to support your answer.

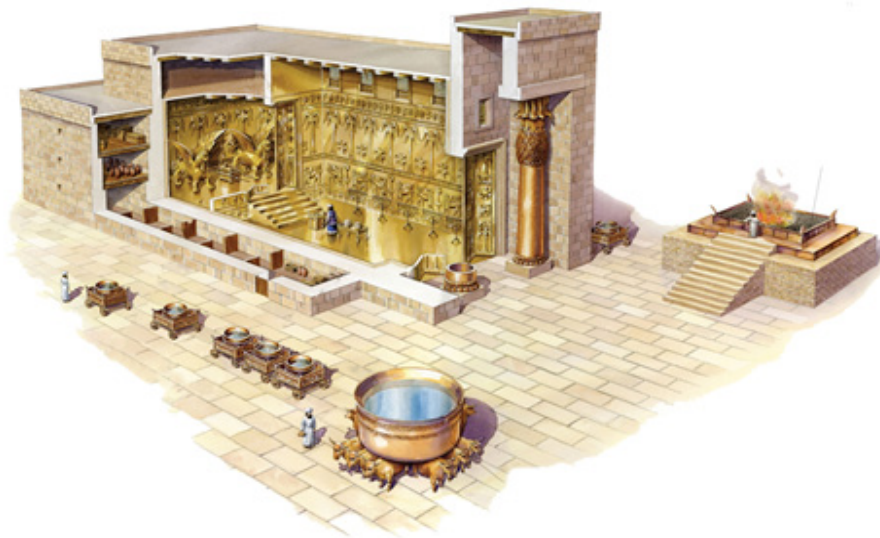
## Scripture Memory

“And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

2 Samuel 7:16

## DAY 4: Temple

David was on the throne. The Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle were in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6; 1 Chron. 6:31-32). David had a palace and peace on all sides, but he wanted more. He didn't want God living in a tent that could be moved. He wanted God to be permanently fixed in Jerusalem. David knew that God's people were no longer wanderers but were now settled. The “lower-case ‘k’” king had a permanent home and David wanted the “capital ‘K’” King to have one, too. He asked God if he could build a house for him, but God told David no. David had shed too much blood, so David's son, Solomon, would be the one to build this glorious palace for the King (2 Sam. 7:1-17). David obeyed.



1 Kings begins with David passing the throne on to Solomon. One of the first acts of the new king was to start construction of the Temple. The Temple was to replace the Tabernacle; what had been a moveable tent was to now be a permanent palace. But the purposes of the two were the same—to be the place where God would dwell among and meet with his people.

1. Read 1 Kings 6:11-13.

- What does God say he will do?

- What is the requirement of the people?

2. Read 1 Kings 8:1-11. What happens in v. 11?

3. Read 1 Kings 8:27. As great and beautiful as this Temple is, what does Solomon acknowledge about it?

We should read 1 Kings 8:1-11 and sigh with contentment. Isn't this it? Isn't this where the story has been headed all along? Think about it—a seed of Adam, Noah, Abraham, and David is king. He is a wise, just, and righteous (mostly) king. He is a son of David, seated on David's throne. The people of Israel are living in the Promised Land. The Temple has been built and the presence of the Lord has filled the Temple. The people are set to be a kingdom of priests and a blessing to the rest of the world as they live according to the ways and words of the Lord, their true King.

4. **Read 1 Kings 8:66. This is a snapshot in time. How would you describe the picture presented?**

Unfortunately, this picture doesn't last long. But, then again, it wasn't meant to. As good as this is, we were created for more. We were created for more than a mostly-good king; we were created for a perfect King. We were created for more than a small strip of land along the Mediterranean; we were created to rule the whole earth. We were created for more than meeting with our God through a veil and a priest; we were created to walk with him and see him face-to-face.

*We were created for more than  
a mostly-good king; we were  
created for a perfect King.*

The books of 1 and 2 Kings are really one large book chronicling the history of Israel from the end of David's reign until the Israelites are taken into exile. Every king Israel ever had is recorded (and evaluated) in this book, hence the name. The book begins with the death of David and ends with the exile of the last Davidic king. The book begins with the construction of the Temple and ends with the destruction of the Temple. If the people in 1 Kings 8:66 thought that they "had it made," that joyful hopefulness didn't last long.

5. **Read 1 Kings 11:4-7. The reign of Solomon began with such promise, but it ends in great sadness. What led Solomon astray?**

**- What leads your heart away from following God?**

If we were to read all forty-seven chapters of 1 and 2 Kings, we would discover that Israel (northern and southern kingdoms) had a combined total of thirty-nine kings. None of the kings in the northern kingdom were considered good kings and only four of the kings in the southern kingdom were. They either did (the four) or did not (the other thirty-five) walk in the ways of the Lord. That is the standard by which God assessed their reigns. It is no wonder God, after four hundred years of the people not walking, not obeying, and not keeping all the Lord had said, sent them into exile. They lost the land, their king, and, most of all, the Temple. They had grieved the heart of their God.

6. Think about this in your own life. Do you persist in not walking, obeying, and keeping all the Lord has commanded? What are ways that you grieve the heart of God?

## Take-Away

The presence of the Lord was in the Temple. The Temple was in the city. A son of David was on the throne. This is just a foretaste of what is to come.

## For Further Study

1. Read 1 Kings 6:1. To what event is the building of the Temple tied? Why do you think this is?

2. Skim 1 Kings 8:12-61. This is Solomon's prayer to the Lord after the Temple is built. What does Solomon say in v. 60 about the purpose of the presence of the Lord with his people?

- Where have you heard this before?

- In what ways does the Lord's presence in your life let "all the peoples of the earth know that the Lord is God?"

## Scripture Memory

"And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."

2 Samuel 7:16

## DAY 5: Exile and Return

Were you ever grounded as a child? Sent to your room? I was. A lot. I spent many an hour on my bed—supposedly thinking about what I had done wrong, what I would do differently in the future, and how I was to make amends. Sometimes this happened, but usually I just read a book or spent time daydreaming about riding horses or playing with friends. My time-outs didn't always serve the purpose for which they were given. I do, however, remember what I felt like when the time-out was over. I was, of course, glad for my time of punishment to be ended. But it was hard to go back and talk with my mom. I knew I had done wrong. I knew I had disobeyed, offended, and hurt her. A more tenderhearted child might have wanted to run back into her arms, apologize, and restore the relationship. But I rarely felt like that. Even as a child I had a hard time admitting I was wrong. Yes, my heart longed for restoration, but the combination of my pride and shame kept me from that restoration.

The Israelites are sent into a type of time-out. It is called the exile. As we have seen, they have been disobedient and disloyal. God has been patient with them. He has warned them, over, and over, and over, and over again. When the kings were not walking with the Lord, God sent men, prophets, to talk to the kings, to remind and rebuke them. He sent man after man: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel, and Ezekiel. But nothing worked.

When my kids were little, Chuck-E-Cheese was at the top of my list for favorite places to hang out. About ten of us went every other Thursday after Bible study. We would check in, order pizza, and sit and talk for hours as our kids ran around screaming and having fun. When it was time to leave, you would think that our children would be happy, content, grateful, and obedient. It is just the opposite! On a good day, I would not tolerate their disobedience, but, on a bad day, when I was exhausted, I did what every other mom finds herself at times doing. I would tell them to put on their shoes; they would ignore me and keep running around. I would tell them to sit down; they would ignore me and keep running around. I would tell them what to do, tell them again, threaten them, and count to three. (Now, I would love to branch into parenting advice here and tell all of you young moms not to do this, but that ruins the point I am trying to make) The point is, no amount of goodness shown to my children caused them to obey and no amount of instruction or threatening made them obey. Two things caused them to obey: discipline and a change of heart.

That is what the people of God needed, too. They needed to be disciplined and they needed a change of heart.

1. Read 1 Kings 14:8. Who was Jeroboam said not to be like? For what is David commended?

We all know that David was not perfect. He was born a sinner (Ps. 51:5) and committed grievous sin—adultery and murder to name just two (2 Sam. 11). So what is the difference between David and the other kings of Israel? Why is David commended and they are condemned?

2. Read 2 Kings 13:1-2.
  - Who and what did Jehoahaz follow?
  - Who else did he cause to sin?

**- What are the last six words of v. 2? What do you think that means?**

3. Read 2 Kings 18:11-12. What happened to the Israelites? What reasons are given?

For those of you who might be tempted to think of the word and commands of God and say to yourselves, “those were written a long time ago and a lot has changed. Surely those rules are no longer relevant today,” I would encourage you to consider the gravity of these verses. The punishment Israel received was due to the fact that they “transgressed his covenant” and neither “listened nor obeyed” all that Moses had commanded—words and commands that God had given to Moses at least five hundred years before.

4. Read Psalm 105:7-8. What does God remember forever? What stands for a thousand generations?

5. Read Isaiah 40:8. What will stand forever?

6. Are there sins that you “do not depart from?” How do these verses compel you to “listen and obey?”

The words of Isaiah 40:8 were spoken to the exiles in Babylon. Think about that for a minute. The Israelites knew they were being punished because they didn’t keep the word of the Lord. Had they thought that it was irrelevant and outdated? If they had, they learned they were wrong—the Word of God will stand forever. The same is true for us. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever and his word stands for all time.

In that sense, the words in Isaiah are a word of rebuke. But there is a word of hope in them too because “the word of God” refers not just to his commands, but also to his promises. And God is reminding his people that, though they are in exile for not keeping his words/commands, he, their covenant-keeping God will always keep his word/promises. He still wants them to flourish; he still wants them to fill the earth with his presence; he still wants to dwell with his people; and he still wants to be their God and for them to be his people;

Back to my thoughts on Chuck-E-Cheese—until my children had a change of heart, my rebukes and reminders seemed to bear no fruit of obedience. But discipline did. So discipline I did. In a similar way, after almost five hundred years of rebukes and reminders, given through numerous prophets, the people of God are still disobedient and disloyal. God punishes them and sends them into exile. But, think back to an earlier time in the story when God’s people were being disciplined and cast out of their land. Remember when Adam and Eve were exiled from the garden? Was punishment God’s final answer to sin? No! What was? Redemption was (review Chapter 3, Day 4). Punishment is being used for the purpose of redemption. Ultimately, it will be the punishment taken by another on my behalf that will be my salvation.

And so the people of God are sent into exile—but only for a time. They are brought back and restored. The discipline had occurred, but had it changed the hearts of the people? What do they need even more than discipline?

**7. Read Ezekiel 36:26-28. What is God going to give them? What will it cause them to do?**

God is going to remedy the problem of both their unholiness and their unfaithfulness! The questions to ask now are “when and how;” when will this glorious promise come to fruition and how could this possibly be? Just wait. The answer is glorious!

### Take-Away

Exile did not change the hearts of the people; but God has promised to cleanse them from their unholiness, give them a new heart, and cause them to walk in his ways.

## For Further Study

1. Read Ezra 6:13-18. Compare the dedication of the Temple built after the exiles returned to the dedication of Solomon's Temple in 1 Kings 8:1-11. What important event is missing in Ezra?
2. Read Ezekiel 37:24-28.
  - Who will be their king (v. 24)?
  - What will they (finally) be able to do (v. 24)?
  - How long will David be their prince (v. 25)?
  - What type of covenant will God make with them (v. 26)?
  - How long will God dwell with his people (verse 26)?
  - What is the glorious promise given in verse 27?

## Scripture Memory

“And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”  
2 Samuel 7:16

## Points to Remember from Chapter 6

- God longs to dwell with his children.
- Our sin keeps us from being able to dwell with a holy God and keeps us from the flourishing he desires us to have.
- The king of Israel was supposed to represent and serve the King of creation.
- We were created for a perfect King and a right relationship with God.
- Punishment is not God's final answer to sin. Redemption is.



# 7

## The Hero Arrives

Waiting. Silence. Expectation. Silence. Hope. Silence. For four hundred years after their return from exile, the people of God have been waiting with no word from God. They have been returned from their exile to the Promised Land. They have rebuilt Jerusalem and rebuilt the Temple—but neither was as glorious as it had been. And the people are waiting. Where are the prophets? There are none. Where is their king? There is none. Where is their God? He, too, is waiting... until now.

In a quiet little town in northwest Israel, the silence is broken with this announcement, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).”<sup>30</sup> Whatever or whomever they thought they were waiting for, this is more—it is more than they ever thought to hope for. *God* with us. God *with* us. God with *us*!

In our story, we have come to that glorious moment where, if this were a movie, the music would grow quiet and there would be an intense anticipation in the silence. Then, the music would begin to soar as the hero came on the screen.

*God with us. This was more than  
God’s people ever hoped for.*

The time of waiting is over; the hero has arrived! If you are feeling a crescendo of music in your soul right now, you should be. If you are hearing trumpets blare as the great Knight in shining armor rushes over the horizon, you should be. Our hero has arrived! He is Immanuel, God with us.

### Pray

“And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’” (Luke 2:9-14). Praise God for his faithfulness in sending his Son—the Savior of the world. Glory to God in the highest, indeed!

## DAY 1: The Second Adam

We live with it every day. It is always around us—and in us. In fact, we’ve never known a time when it wasn’t this way. We have become so used to it we forget it’s there. We think this is normal. Until something happens that strikes the core of our soul and we are reminded—this isn’t the way life is supposed to be. We are surrounded by brokenness but have been created for wholeness.

***We are surrounded by brokenness but have been created for wholeness.***

When something is broken, we want it fixed. When an appliance is broken, we wait impatiently for the repairman to come. When an arm is broken, we rush to the emergency room for someone to fix it. We don’t like living with broken things—marriages, friendships, crumbling inner cities. Brokenness makes us long for things to be unbroken and that time of longing, waiting, can be hard.

The people of Israel had been waiting. And waiting. And waiting. But it wasn’t just the people of Israel—ever since Eve’s teeth sank into that piece of fruit, all of creation had been waiting for the brokenness that followed to be fixed. Ever since God spoke the words in Genesis 3:15, all of creation had been waiting, and looking, and watching to see when, and where, and how, that promise would be fulfilled. When would a seed of the woman crush the head of their enemy? When would a man be sent who would (who could) be the champion they needed?<sup>31</sup> When would God make all things right again?

The time has arrived and God does it by sending One who will not just redo all that has been done, he will undo it. Jesus is the One sent by the Father who will do it all right: where the others failed, Jesus will succeed; where the others disobeyed, Jesus will obey; where the others fell short, Jesus will overcome. Jesus was sent to fix the brokenness.

1. Read Luke 3:23-38. Look at how Luke begins and ends this section. How does Luke capture both the divinity and humanity of Jesus?

2. What event does Luke record next (Luke 4:1-13)?

Luke is showing his reader that Jesus is the second Adam, the One sent to redo and, therefore, undo what happened in the garden. Where Adam failed, Jesus would succeed. As Peterson points out, “The first Adam was tested by Satan in the beautiful Garden of Eden with one test and failed. The second Adam was tested by Satan in the wilderness with three tests and passed.”<sup>32</sup> It wasn’t just the victory in the wilderness; it was the victory of his whole life. Where Adam had been disobedient, Jesus was obedient.

3. Read Philippians 2:8. How obedient was Jesus?

Our salvation is wrapped up in the obedience of Christ. Not only are his perfect obedience and righteousness imputed (credited) to us, but it was obedience that led him to the cross where he died the death that I should have died. Adam's disobedience brought me death; Christ's obedience brings me life. Peterson goes on to comment on Romans 5 saying, "The first Adam brought sin and death, the second Adam grace and life (v. 15). The first Adam brought condemnation, the second Adam justification (v. 16). The first Adam brought the reign of death, the second Adam the reign of life (v. 17)."<sup>33</sup>

4. Read Romans 5:12-19 (below). Underline everything that happened as a result of the first Adam and circle everything that happened as a result of the second Adam.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

5. Read 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. Write down who dies and who lives.

How is a person found to be "in Christ?" This is the single most important question a person will ever ask herself. Literally, it is a question of life and death—life for those who are in Christ and death for those who remain in Adam. So the question for each of us is, how do I find myself "in Christ?"

6. Read John 3:1-15. This is a strange conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Let's break it down a bit.

- Read v. 3. What does Jesus say needs to happen and why?

- Read v. 5. What does Jesus say needs to happen and why?

- Read v. 9. What question would you have asked?

**- Read v. 15. According to this verse, what must someone do to receive eternal life?  
Comment on what you think that means.**

We are all born as sons and daughters of the first Adam. We have to be born again as a son or daughter of God and that new birth takes place only through Jesus, the second Adam. Peterson, again, comments, “Adam ruined his race. Jesus rescues his.”<sup>34</sup> Oh, the seed of the woman, the One promised to the first Adam, has indeed come. And he, the second Adam, most definitely crushed the head of the enemy. What has to happen for that victory to be ours? We have to believe that Jesus is the promised One, the victorious One, and the only One who can give us eternal life.

### Take-Away

Jesus, the second Adam, came to undo and repair the brokenness the first Adam caused.

### For Further Study

1. Read Colossians 1:15-18. List all the words that remind you of Genesis 1-2.

- Study the chart below. If you are still in Adam, all that was true of Adam is true of you. If you are in Christ, then Jesus gives his status to you—not because we earn or accomplish that status, but because Jesus gives us the victory that was his. Make a brief comment in the last column about what that means for you now.

	Adam	Jesus	Me
Obedience	Disobedient	Obedient	
	<i>Gen. 3:6</i>	<i>Rom. 5:19</i>	<i>Gal. 2:20</i>
Temptation	Satan won	Jesus won	
	<i>Gen. 3:1-7</i>	<i>Luke 4:1-13</i>	<i>Heb. 2:18</i>
Curse	Brought the curse	Bears & breaks the curse	
	<i>Genesis 3:14-19</i>	<i>Gal. 3:13</i>	<i>Gal. 3:13</i>
Death/Life	Brings death	Brings life	
	<i>Gen. 5; 1 Cor. 15:21</i>	<i>Rom. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 15:21</i>	<i>1 Cor. 15:22</i>
Paradise	Out of paradise	Into paradise	
	<i>Gen. 3:23-24</i>	<i>John 14:3; Rev. 22:2</i>	<i>Luke 23:43</i>

## Scripture Memory

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).  
Matthew 1:23

## DAY 2: The Reconciler

As we spend time this week looking at our true hero, the greatest knight-in-shining-armor that ever was, we have to stop and ask ourselves how he saved us. To reference *Tangled* one more time, we know Rapunzel was rescued when her hero brought her out of the tower. We know Snow White was rescued when Prince Charming kissed her. But how does our hero rescue us?

If I were to tell you we are saved by works, you would probably shut this book and never open it again. And, yet, in the truest sense, we are saved by works... but hold on before you close this book! The works that save us are not our works, but Jesus'. He did things and these things—his works—save us. He lived a sinless and perfectly obedient life, and then gave all that was earned because of his perfect, sinless life to us. He received our punishment for sin—he was beaten, mocked, flogged, spit on, and crucified. Jesus died our death for us. And he was raised so we would be too. These are some of the things Jesus did. And these are the works that save us—not ours, but his.

In order to understand how these works save us, Peterson explains, “Scripture interprets Christ’s saving work by painting pictures. It uses images, motifs, themes to explain what Jesus did for us.”<sup>35</sup> Yesterday, we looked at one of those pictures, Jesus as the Second Adam. This is a picture that highlights how Jesus restores to us all that was lost because of the first Adam’s sin. The rest of this week, we will look at four more pictures: Jesus as our Reconciler, Redeemer, Perfect Sacrifice, and Victor. Each picture will help us better understand different aspects of the salvation Jesus accomplished.

Reconciliation requires two things: 1) a disruption in a relationship and then 2) a restoration of that same relationship. Reconciliation requires that what is being reconciled was once good and is now broken. Sound

***Reconciliation requires that what is being reconciled was once good and is now broken.***

familiar? Our relationship with our Father was once good and right (Chapter 2, Day 3), but this relationship has been broken. Reconciliation is what brings the Father and his children back together and the Reconciler is the One who accomplishes the reconciliation.

Look back at last week’s lesson (Day 1) and remind yourself of what God wants. God longs to dwell with his children again. But our sin has disrupted that relationship. We are alienated from our Father. In fact, Scripture tells us our situation is even worse than that.

1. Read Romans 5:10 and comment on what God calls us. Why do you think he might use such strong language about us?

Do we need to be reconciled? Yes! The amazing thing is that God wants to be reconciled with us.

2. Have you ever experienced reconciliation in a relationship? Use 2-3 words to describe what it felt like (or, if you are longing for reconciliation, what you imagine that reconciliation will feel like).

3. Read Romans 5:1. What is the first thing we are given as a result of being reconciled?

Peace. We long for peace. And the peace that ensues when a broken relationship is restored is one of the sweetest forms of peace we can experience. This is what the Reconciler offers us—peace with our Creator. It is a deep peace, a lasting peace, and a secure peace because it rests on the finished work of Christ. We all know types of peace that are fragile—treaties are broken, friendships and marriages dissolve—but this

peace is not like that. Peace with God is one of the first, sweet fruits of our salvation. Have you ever heard someone tell of a dramatic conversion experience? Many people will mention they felt an “immediate peace wash over them.” It is a piece (no pun intended) of our salvation that we get to experience now; it is a peace that we can sit in, rest in, live in.

However, this peace is not just for us. It is also a peace that we are called to bring others into.

**4. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. How does v. 19 define reconciliation?**

**- What has God entrusted to us?**

**- Explain what you think that means?**

**5. Is there anyone in your life that you need to be reconciled to in this way? How can your reconciliation with God help you reconcile with others?**

## Take-Away

The picture of Jesus as our reconciler is a picture showing us it is only through Christ that we can have peace with God.

## For Further Study

1. Skim Luke 15:11-24, focusing on v. 20. Name a few feelings that surface in you as you contemplate that you, too, have been loved and reconciled in this way.
2. Read Romans 5:9-10. By what are we justified? By what are we reconciled? What is the result in both cases?

3. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. There is a division between the Gentiles and the Jews (the uncircumcision and the circumcision, v. 11). Paul is exhorting them to be reconciled to each other. List 4-6 of the reasons he gives.

- Do you have a “dividing wall” between you and any other group of people? If so, how do these verses challenge you?

### Scripture Memory:

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name  
Immanuel” (which means, God with us).  
Matthew 1:23

## DAY 3: The Redeemer

Fanny Crosby wrote about it when she wrote,

*Redeemed, redeemed,  
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;  
Redeemed, redeemed,  
His child and forever I am.*

Keith Green wrote about it:

*There is a Redeemer, Jesus, God's own Son  
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, Holy One  
Jesus my Redeemer, Name above all names  
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah oh, for sinners slain*

We lift our hands and our voices to sing about it. But what does being redeemed mean for us?

When I was little, I loved the *Benji* movies. Benji is the story of a stray dog and two children, Paul and Cindy, who love him. In the first movie, the children are kidnapped and Benji saves the day by intercepting a ransom note and taking the note to the children's dad. It was the first time I had heard of a ransom note. Then, in 1974, Patty Hearst was kidnapped. Patty was nineteen years old when a group called the Symbionese Liberation Army kidnapped her. She was held captive by this group for over a year and a half, during which time the group made demands on Patty's family—if they wanted to ever see her alive again, they needed to do certain things. It was the second time I heard of a ransom note. And it terrified me.



Being taken captive terrified me. And if someone needed a ransom, it meant that person was a captive. What I didn't know then was that I was already, in fact, a captive and in desperate need of being ransomed.

**1. Read Luke 4:18. Who is talking? Why does he say he was sent?**

2. Read John 8:34. What does Jesus say enslaves us?

3. Read Galatians 3:23. What held us captive?

We are held captive by the law because it sets a standard before us that we can never keep. We are enslaved by our sin because our sin is what thwarts our efforts to keep the law. We are captive and need to be ransomed.

A ransom is the required purchase price of redemption. In a ransom note, the writer demands something (the ransom) in exchange for the person being held captive. When that demand is met and the exchange occurs, we can say the person has been redeemed. The ransom is the cost of redemption. Jesus is both the Ransom and the Redeemer.

*The ransom is the cost of redemption. Jesus is both the Ransom and the Redeemer.*

4. Read Mark 10:45. What was given for our ransom?

- Read 1 Peter 1:18-19. Even more specifically, what was shed for our ransom?

**5. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Paul is telling us that one response to our ransom should be to glorify God with our bodies. What are some ways you can do this?**

Do you live as a redeemed person? Do you forget you are no longer a slave to sin? When faced with temptation, we find it all too easy to say, *I just can't help it*. I can't help that I gossip, flirt, hate, etc... but our Redeemer says, *yes you can! I have bought you, ransomed you, redeemed you and you are no longer a slave to sin. You belong to me and I have given you all you need for life and godliness*. To live as a redeemed person is to live knowing that both the penalty and the power of sin have been broken. Sin no longer is our master because we have been redeemed.

Redemption requires a Redeemer. Indeed, One was sent to us to be just that. We have been Redeemed, Redeemed, Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. So raise your hands and lift your voices in praise because we are no longer captives—we have been set free.

## Take-Away

We are captive to sin and the law, but the ransom has been paid and all who are in Christ Jesus have been redeemed!

## For Further Study

1. Read Romans 6:17-18. Describe 2-3 ways you could be a slave to righteousness.
2. Read Ephesians 1:7. Write down any observations and insights you receive about redemption in this verse.

## Scripture Memory

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).  
Matthew 1:23

# DAY 4: The Perfect Sacrifice

We marvel at stories of sacrifice: a soldier who throws himself on a grenade to save his platoon, or a woman who runs in front of a car to save a child about to be hit. Sacrifice, especially self-sacrifice, is astounding. Even Jesus told his disciples, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” The next verse starts, “You are my friends.” And there is no greater love than that which Jesus has for us. He proves it by laying down his life.

In John’s gospel, one of the first things we read is a public proclamation from John the Baptist—“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.” This is another of those passages we might read with a numbing familiarity, so numbing that we barely blink an eye. But in reality, this scene in John’s gospel captures a strange man saying a strange thing and it should cause us to stop and question. Why would John the Baptist point at Jesus and call him the Lamb of God? John was tying Jesus to two Old

***Provision was through the death and blood of an innocent lamb. The pattern of redemption was set—the blood of a perfect lamb saves.***

Testament concepts, ones that the Jews standing around would have been familiar with—the Passover lamb and the sacrificial lamb.

In Chapter 5, Day 1, we looked briefly at Exodus 12, the tenth and final plague before the Israelites were delivered out of slavery. The night before they were to leave captivity,

God told them, through Moses, that he was about to send the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn son. In the midst of this devastating plague, however, God gave them a provision for a way to survive the destruction. That provision was through the death and blood of an innocent lamb. And the pattern of redemption was set—the blood of a perfect lamb saves.

1. Read Luke 22:7-8. What day was it?

- Read Luke 22:14-20. How does Jesus identify himself with the Passover lamb?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 5:7. Thinking about how the first Passover lambs saved the Israelites (Ex. 12:13), comment on how Christ is your Passover Lamb.

After the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and met their Redeemer at the base of Mt. Sinai (Ex. 1-18), God established his presence with them through his law and his Tabernacle (vv. 19-40). If you remember, the book of Exodus ends with the glory of the Lord filling the Tabernacle. Sklar says,

If you were an Israelite, all of this [redemption, deliverance, the law, the Tabernacle] would lead to some burning questions: How in the world can the holy and pure King of the universe dwell among his sinful and impure people? How can he live here, in our very midst, without his holiness melting us in our sin and impurity ... Leviticus answers these questions.<sup>36</sup>

I doubt that Leviticus is on anybody's short list (or even a long one) of favorite books in the Bible. It seems like a long and strange list of long and strange rituals—and ones that have very little to do with us today. Truth be told, how many of you have skipped over Leviticus in your yearly reading plan? Well, not anymore! Leviticus is a book that reminds us that we, an unholy people, serve a holy God. It reminds us that our sin is serious and the atonement of sin requires sacrifice. Because sin is something that is in us and around us constantly, we have a proclivity to minimize the seriousness of sin. But when we minimize sin, we unavoidably minimize the atonement of that sin. Sin is a big and horrible deal. Sin renders us unholy and unclean. It permeates and defiles every fiber of our being. And it causes us to be separated from God. Theologian Cornelius Plantinga says the following:

Christians have always measured sin, in part, by the suffering needed to atone for it. The ripping and writhing of a body on a cross, the bizarre metaphysical maneuver of using death to defeat death, the urgency of the summons to human beings to ally themselves with the events of Christ and with the person of these events, and then to make that person and those events the center of their lives—these things tell us that the main human trouble is desperately difficult to fix, even for God, and that sin is the longest-running of human emergencies.<sup>37</sup>

If we are to be redeemed, forgiven, and restored, our sin has to be atoned for. And it took sacrifice to atone for sin. The sacrifices in the Old Testament were given over, and over, and over, and over. There were

daily sacrifices, weekly sacrifices, monthly sacrifices, and yearly sacrifices, year after year after year. From the time of Leviticus on, throughout the rest of the Old Testament, the question is begged, would it ever end? Would sin ever be permanently and finally atoned for? Would there ever be a sacrifice pure enough to be a final offering?

**3. Read Hebrews 10:1-10.**

- What are the last three words of v. 10?

- What does that mean for your sin?

There has never, in the history of the world, been a lamb pure enough—until the Lion of Judah took on flesh and willingly became the Lamb of God. Was his sacrifice accepted? Is it permanent and final?

4. Read Hebrews 1:3. Describe the location and position of Jesus. Comment on what it means that Jesus is currently seated on his throne.

It wasn't an easy or cheap solution. It was costly beyond comprehension. But, because the Lamb of God willingly placed himself on the altar, his sacrifice was acceptable and pleasing to the Father. And the glorious result is that you and I are cleansed from all our unrighteousness. Permanently. Completely. Finally.

Join the chorus of heaven in Revelation 5 and sing, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' and the elders fell down and worshiped" (vv. 12-24). We should, too.

## Take-Away

Only one lamb was pure enough to remove all sin for all time—the Spotless Lamb of God.

## For Further Study

1. Read Exodus 12:3-13.

- Whose Passover is it (v. 11)?

- What will happen as a result of being passed over (v. 13)?

2. Skim Exodus 12:14-27.
  - What were the people instructed to do (v. 14)?
  
  - For how long (v. 17)?
  
  - List 3 things the celebration was intended to cause the people to do (vv. 26-27).
  
3. Read 1 Peter 1:17-19.
  - According to v. 19, what aspects of Jesus tie him to the Passover Lamb?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - What is the required response on our part (v. 17)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Read Ephesians 5:2. Rewrite in your own words.

## Scripture Memory

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name  
Immanuel” (which means, God with us).  
Matthew 1:23

## DAY 5: The Conqueror

I've saved this picture until the end, because it is the picture, I would argue, our hearts might long for most—a champion, a victor, a conqueror. Oh, we like to convince ourselves we can “fight our own battles” and we can “stand up for ourselves,” but Scripture paints quite a different picture of both our enemy and us. We are more helpless and in greater danger than we ever imagine and our enemy is stronger and more evil than we care to believe. We overestimate ourselves and underestimate our enemy. The truth is, we

***We are more helpless and in greater danger than we ever imagine and our enemy is stronger and more evil than we care to believe. We overestimate ourselves and underestimate our enemy.***

are in a battle we cannot win—and it is a battle for our very lives. We are cornered, trapped, and our defeat is sure. But, praise be to God, our conquering hero steps in and fights for us. He wages war on our behalf and he is the victorious One.

Ever since the promise was made in Genesis 3:15, that God will send a seed of the woman to defeat the serpent, we have been waiting to see how this

great victory would occur. Throughout the Old Testament, we are given glimpses of what it might look like, glimpses of what to expect. My favorite of these glimpses is found in 1 Samuel 17.

We all know the story of David and Goliath. We learned it as children and have heard it taught as adults. There is a popular Bible teacher who has a series titled, *Slaying the Giants in Your Life: You Can Win the Battle and Live Victoriously*. I think he is missing the point. David did not engage Goliath in a battle of life and death in order to show us how we, too, can fight giants—real or metaphorical. For one thing, in my life at least, nine-foot bullies are not an every day occurrence. Oh, I have metaphorical giants to be sure—giant fears and struggles that loom large and scary over me. And the metaphorical giants in my life are as undefeatable to me as Goliath was to the Israelites. I attempt to fight them at times, but they whoop me regularly. I don't need to know how to slay them. I need to know that someone can, will, and has slayed them for me. And when that champion does battle on my behalf, my giants, my enemies, are completely and utterly defeated.

1. Read 1 Samuel 17:1-7. Describe Goliath.

- What word is used of him in v. 4?

2. Read 1 Samuel 17:8-10. For what was Goliath asking?

- We talked about representatives earlier in the study (Chapter 3, Day 4). What did the winning side gain as a result of the victory of their representative?

- What did the losing side lose as a result of the defeat of their representative?

3. Read 1 Samuel 17:11. How did “all Israel” react?
4. Skim 1 Samuel 17:12-54. Summarize the story in 3-4 sentences.

- In vv. 52-53, what do the men of Israel and Judah do and what do they get?

The men of Israel and Judah, the ones who were cowering in fear in v. 11, are now following their champion and receiving all the benefits of victory.<sup>38</sup> It was not a battle they fought. It was not a victory they earned. And yet, they received the rewards of that victory because their representative had won the battle.

5. **In what ways is Jesus the even greater David? Make your list as specific as possible.**
6. **Because Jesus is the greater David and has won the battle on our behalf, think of a metaphorical giant in your life that only Jesus can defeat. In what ways can you not “be more like David or Jesus,” but rather follow Jesus in the victory he has already won for you?**

If you feel alone in the battles you face, or if you feel defeated by the giant struggle before you, take courage. Your Champion is here. He has and will wage war on your behalf—and he always wins.

## Take-Away

Our champion has come and won the battle on our behalf.

## For Further Study

1. Read Exodus 14:13-14.
  - Who is going to do the fighting?
  
  - What will the people see?
  
  - What happens to their enemy?

## Scripture Memory

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).  
Matthew 1:23

## Points to Remember from Chapter 7

- We are saved by works—but only the perfect works of Christ.
- Jesus, as the Second Adam, was sent to redo and, therefore, undo what happened
- in the garden.
- Our Reconciler gives us peace with God.
- Our Redeemer ransoms us from slavery.
- Our Perfect Sacrifice purifies us completely.
- Our great Conqueror defeats our enemy and gives us the rewards of his victory.



# 8

## The 50 Most Important Days in the History of the World

In the Introduction, I mentioned that most of us have probably spent our Christian life explaining our faith and salvation to others by telling them, “Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins and take me to live with him forever in heaven.” While this is true, the statement is far too brief a synopsis, too truncated a version of the story of our redemption. We have spent the past seven weeks looking at the scope of our redemption and the depths, heights, lengths, and breadths the Lord has gone to in order to accomplish that redemption: he is washing us, restoring us, and making us into his own children because he longs to be with us again. In Chapter 1, Day 2, we also spent time looking at the importance of the historical reality of the story. It is of utmost importance that these events happened in real time, in real places, with real people. I will say it again: we are saved because a real man was really born, really died, and really rose again.

*For most of us, our stories involve similar details of how specific events, occurring in a particular location, at a particular time, were events the Lord used to bring us to himself. Our days, and the moments of our days, matter.*

A few weeks ago, one of the young women in our Bible study gave a brief testimony of how and when the Lord saved her. She told us about her childhood and high school years in fairly broad terms, but then she told us about the events of a particular Wednesday night during her college years. She told us about what happened that particular night and about a conversation she had the next morning in a particular location—a sorority sister’s room. She told us how the Lord used the events of that 24-hour period to bring her salvation. For most of us, our stories/testimonies also involve similar details of how specific events, occurring in a particular location, at a particular time, were events the Lord used to bring us to himself. Our days, and the moments of our days, matter. God is working in our world on our behalf!

Just as there are some days, and some moments of some days, which stand out as crucial moments in time for our individual stories, the same is true of the big story of redemption. This week, we are going to

spend most of our time looking at what, I would argue, are the fifty most important days in the history of the world—from the cross to Pentecost.

## Pray

“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:16-20). Let’s join Paul in praying for the Spirit of wisdom, the opening of our spiritual eyes, and the hope that is ours because Jesus is seated on his heavenly throne.

## DAY 1: Crucifixion

The cross. We sing about it. We talk about it. We even decorate with it. The cross is the symbol of our faith. But, at times, we are in danger of becoming so accustomed to having a cross dangle from our ears, hang around our necks, and decorate our walls that we forget it represents torture, brutality, and death. As Peterson notes,

Christians chose Christ’s cross as their emblem. On the one hand, this is amazing because the cross spoke of crucifixion, which was regarded with horror in the ancient world ... On the other hand, in light of Paul’s sentiment, ‘But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 6:14), they chose well. Why? Because the cross describes where the work of salvation was accomplished.<sup>39</sup>

Even though I have said several times that our salvation is more than the summary statement, “Jesus died on the cross to save me from my sins,” it is never less than that. The cross is the center point of our salvation. It is the defining moment, the place where the great battle for our souls was fought—and won. The cross is where Jesus was headed, what he was born for, and the location of the greatest battle ever fought.

1. Read Mark 10:45. Why does Jesus say he came? How would he do that?

Jesus was a man on a mission. He knew what he had been sent to do. He knew he had been born to die.

2. Read Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33-34. What did Jesus keep telling his disciples?

Jesus knew he had come to die. But knowing it and doing it are two different things. Lest we ever forget, in no way did his knowledge or determination make his sacrifice easy.

3. Read Matthew 26:36-46.

- What did Jesus ask his Father?

- How many times did he ask?

- Read Luke 22:44. What word is used to describe how he felt?

**4. Read John 14:6. What is the way to the Father? Who comes to the Father through another way?**

It is no coincidence that Jesus struggled with obedience in a garden. Remember, he was sent to redo, therefore undo, what happened in the first garden. Jesus, in a garden, knowing he had been sent to fulfill the promise made in the first garden, knowing he had been sent to reclaim all that was lost in the first garden, asked his Father, is there any other way? And the Father answered, no. Why? Because Jesus is the way, the only way—he is the way, the truth, and the life and no one comes to the Father except through him. And so he did what Adam should have done—he obeyed.

*Jesus asked his Father, “Is there any other way?”  
And the Father answered, “No.”*

5. Read Mark 15:30. What could Jesus have done?

6. Read Hebrews 12:2. Why did he not “come down from the cross?”

Jesus knew the cross was his to endure. He knew that it was the Father’s will and the Father’s way.

7. Read Isaiah 53:4-6. Pay careful attention to the pronouns. There is one, singular person who will be experiencing certain things for the many. Make a list of the words used to describe what this one, singular person will experience.

- Read v. 10. What two things are said about the will of the Lord?

- Read v. 11. What happens for the “many” as a result?

Peterson says,

The innocent Servant suffers willingly. ‘He poured out his soul to death’ (v. 12). He does so as a Sin-Bearer in the place of others; he takes the punishment that they deserve. The Servant’s substitutionary death has amazing results. His death accomplished justification; it makes ‘many to be accounted righteous’ (v. 11). His death is an ‘offering for guilt’ (v. 10), which according to Leviticus makes ‘atonement’ and procures forgiveness (Lev. 5:16, 18).<sup>40</sup>

This all happens at the cross. The cross of Christ, the place of so much suffering, is also the place of so much victory. It is the paradox of the gospel—life comes through death. The cross, that which was intended to shame and kill becomes that in which removes shame and gives life. It is why the cross is the symbol of our faith. In 1912, George Bennard wrote the following lyrics about that cross:

*On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,  
the emblem of suffering and shame;  
and I love that old cross where the dearest and best  
for a world of lost sinners was slain.*

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
and exchange it some day for a crown.*

**8. Read Galatians 6:14. Thinking of the lyrics above, how might you “boast in the cross?”**

9. Thinking about Isaiah 53, write a prayer of response to the One who endured the cross for you.

## Take-Away

The ultimate battle of all time was fought—and won—on the cross.

## For Further Study

1. Read Romans 3:24-26. What about God's people who lived before the cross? How were they saved? These verses help us understand.

- How are we justified (v. 24)?

- How do we receive this (v. 25)?

- What did God do to former sins (former meaning before the cross)?

Peterson, again, helpfully explains,

Paul means that up until the time of Jesus's crucifixion, God forgave sins without actually having made atonement for them. The animal sacrifices were a picture of the gospel, and God really forgave Old Testament believers ... He forgave Old Testament believers on the basis of the work of Christ to come ... every time a sacrifice was performed, God wrote an IOU to himself, so to speak, looking forward to his actually making atonement through the blood of Christ.<sup>41</sup>

2. Read Hebrews 10:1-7. Comment on how Jesus is not only the final sacrifice, but also the only truly acceptable one.

## Scripture Memory

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven  
given among men by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

## DAY 2: Resurrection

I love Easter morning! For our family, Easter morning is the holiday with the most established family traditions. When the children were younger, I would wake each one up by whispering in his or her ear, “He is risen.” And each child would sleepily respond, “He is risen indeed!” Even now, with adult, married children living in other states, I text them “He is risen” every Easter morning. They love me enough to humor me, and they text me back, “He is risen, indeed!”

When all the children still lived at home and we lived on our fifteen acres in Kansas, I would wake everyone up before the sunrise. They would, one-by-one, stumble into the kitchen, grab a coffee or hot chocolate and a big blanket, and we would make our way out to our little dock that sat on our little pond. The dock allowed us to sit, side-by-side in a row, feet dangling off the edge, and face east. As we sat there, we took turns choosing praise songs to sing. I’ve never sung an on-key note in my life, but it was beautiful and glorious, nonetheless. Together, as the sun was rising, we worshipped the Son who had risen.

The death and resurrection of Jesus could be called the hinge of our entire salvation. But it is important to note that it is both his death and his resurrection. If Jesus were just a good man who happened to have died a horrible death, how would that have helped us? Throughout history, there have been a lot of good men who have died horrible deaths. But Jesus was not just a good man; he was the perfect man. He was fully man and fully God. So his death was a death he died on our behalf. He literally took the punishment we deserved and died in our place. And, as we will see, his death was swallowed up in victory as he rose triumphantly over the grave.

Think about this—up until the morning of the resurrection, no one really knew anything unusual, special, new, or different had happened. Looking back, knowing what we know now, we marvel at the miracle of the manger, the sinless life, and the death on the cross. But, if you and I had been alive during that time, I’m not sure we would have recognized those things as unique—other babies were born and other men had been crucified. But at the moment of the resurrection, everything changed.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-17. According to these verses, how important is the resurrection?

- What four things does Paul list as being “of first importance” (vv. 3-5)?

- If Jesus was not raised, what is in vain (v. 14)?

- What is our condition if Jesus was not raised (v. 17)?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-22. What is our hope because of the resurrection?

Jesus is the second Adam and, as such, undoes the effects of the first Adam. Do you remember what we studied in chapters 2 and 3? We looked at the goodness of God's creation when all was right in the world and then the great disruption that came as a result of our first parents' sin. God had told them in Genesis 2:17 what would happen if they rebelled against him: "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Death was ushered in the moment Eve swallowed the fruit. But Jesus, the One promised in Genesis 3:15, was sent to swallow up the devastation and consequences of that rebellion.

*Death was ushered in the moment Eve swallowed the fruit. But Jesus, the One promised in Genesis 3:15, was sent to swallow up the devastation and consequences of that rebellion.*

3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.

- What is completely "swallowed up?"

- How does/should that knowledge change the way you live today (v. 58)? Why?

We will be raised because he is raised! The hope of the resurrection is tied tightly to the humanity of Christ. We have talked about how Jesus was both fully God and fully man—and the full humanity of Christ is so important in the hope of our resurrection. The man Jesus was a human being who experienced hunger, thirst, fear, exhaustion, and then death. His deity did not prevent him from experiencing his humanity. And it was his human body that was killed and his human body that was raised. The hope I have is, because Jesus' human body was raised from the dead, my human body will be raised from the dead. But the hope we find in the resurrection isn't just for the life to come. It gives us hope here and now. We will look more at this on Days 3 and 4, but the fact that our Redeemer lives should affect how we live!

4. Read the glorious words of Revelation 1:17-18.

- Who is speaking?

- What is his command to John (v. 17)? On what is the command based (v. 18)?

- In what ways does the same truth ask you to "fear not" today?

Christianity is the only religion in the world that claims and celebrates an empty tomb. Muhammad is in his grave. Buddha is in his grave. There is only one empty tomb—that of our risen Lord Jesus. He is risen. He is risen, indeed! Hallelujah!

## Take-Away

The resurrection of Jesus is what guarantees our resurrection.

## For Further Study

1. Read Acts 2:22-36.
  - What was defeated at the resurrection (v. 24)?
  - What can we “know for certain” because of the resurrection (v. 36)?

## Scripture Memory

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven  
given among men by which we must be saved.”  
Acts 4:12

## DAY 3: Ascension

The title for this week’s study is “The 50 Most Important Days in the History of the World.” We are looking at the events that occurred on Good Friday, Easter Sunday, skipping over the forty days when the resurrected Jesus walked on earth in his resurrected body, picking up again with the day he ascended into heaven, and ending with Pentecost.

I have mentioned numerous times that we can’t pick up the story mid-way through. If we do, we miss so much. But, in the same way that people are inclined to start the story of salvation at the cross, they are inclined to end with the resurrection. But there is more! We looked at the fact that it is not enough for

***At the cross, our sins are forgiven. At the empty tomb, we receive victory over death. And at the ascension, we see that this story just keeps heading up—literally.***

Rapunzel to merely be out of the tower; we want to see her returned to the kingdom and restored to her parents. We long for full restoration.

The ascension of Christ is key in our understanding of where this story is headed—full restoration. As we look at each of the key events of these 50 days, we see that the good news for us just keeps getting



better and better! At the cross, our sins are forgiven. At the empty tomb, we receive victory over death. And at the ascension, we see that this story just keeps heading up—literally.

1. Read Acts 1:6-11. Describe the scene and what happened.

- Where was Jesus taken?

- What is the great promise in v. 11?

Do you see how the ascension is grounded in the story line? It is not an isolated event, but part of the continuation of what Jesus was sent to do.

2. Read John 3:13. What had to happen before Jesus could ascend?

I can't help but think of the great rescue of Jessica McClure. I was in college in Oklahoma in October of 1987 when 18-month-old Jessica fell into a well in Midland, TX. All of America watched with bated breath for three days to see if this little girl, wounded yet alive, at the bottom of a narrow and collapsing casing would be, could be, rescued. The entire mission, from start to finish, defied all odds. Jessica was too far down. The casing was too narrow. And yet, rescued she was! It took the rescue workers the vast majority of those three days to just reach Jessica. And there was great rejoicing when they reached her, but the victory was far from complete; reaching her was not enough. The descent to Jessica was not the ultimate goal of the rescue. They had to bring her safely up. The descent was vital, but the rescue journey wasn't complete until Jessica had ascended to the top of the well.

Jesus was sent on the greatest rescue mission of all time and it started with a great descent. God the Son set aside his crown and robe, put on flesh, descended to the womb of a woman, condescended to let the dust he had created dirty his fleshly feet. He went even further when he wrapped a towel around his waist and washed that dirt off of his disciple's feet. But the road kept going further down still. The descent didn't end until he was nailed to a cross, suffered unimaginable pain, breathed his last and cried out, "It is finished." He descended to the depths because that is where you and I lay—not wounded, but dead. And it took the descent to death to rescue us from death.

But the road doesn't end at the cross! It now turns and begins to head back up. The stone is rolled away and he is alive—death could not hold him. He is not just the crucified savior, he is the risen savior. And he is not just the risen savior, he is the ascended Lord. At the ascension, we see Jesus continuing back up, all the way to full restoration.

**3. Read Ephesians 4:8-10. What two things happened when Jesus ascended?**

**- List a few of the things that Jesus took captive.**

The ascension of Christ is the “linchpin of Christ’s saving work bridging his earthly and heavenly ministries.”<sup>42</sup> It is the victorious re-entry of the conquering king. He has won the battle and is returning to the throne room as the rightful king—and he is bringing his bride with him. It is also the acceptable entry of the great, perfect, and final high priest as he enters into the Holy of Holies.

*He has won the battle and is returning to the throne room as the rightful king—and he is bringing his bride with him.*

**4. Read Hebrews 6:19-20. What has the ascension won for you?**

**5. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. Where can you now draw near?**

- Take some time to do just that. Bow before the throne of grace and thank the ascended Lord Jesus for securing your access there.

## Take-Away

Christ ascends and enters the throne room as the victorious rescuer.

## For Further Study

1. Read Ephesians 2:4-6. List the three things God does. How do those line up with what Christ has done?

- Read v. 7. Where do we have to be to receive these things? Why?

## Scripture Memory

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven  
given among men by which we must be saved.  
Acts 4:12

## DAY 4: Session

When a king is on his throne, it is said that his court is “in session.” We say, when Congress is assembled, they are “in session.” To be in session means that a ruler (or ruling body) is in place in order to work for the good of those he governs.

At this point in Israel’s history, it’s been over 400 years since the last king of Israel was on his throne and close to 1,000 years since David was on his. Yet what have the people been longing for? A Davidic king. Why? Because they know the promises of God that were given in 2 Samuel 7. And they know that what their covenant-making God promised, he will fulfill.

1. Read Isaiah 9:6-7. Who is being given?

- What shall be his?

- On whose throne shall he sit? For how long?

2. Read Luke 1:30-33. What will Jesus be given?

- How long will his kingdom last?

- How is the angel tying the birth announcement into the promises found in Isaiah 9?

Heaven itself declares that Jesus is the long awaited King of all kings. He is the one who will be seated on the eternal throne, the one who will carry the government upon his shoulders, and the one who will establish his kingdom and his throne forever. But he didn't appear to be much of a king in the beginning.

***If the story ended at the cross, it would be hard to see how Jesus was the One.***

Jesus was born in a stable, not a palace, to a carpenter and a peasant girl. He wandered the dusty roads of Galilee with “nowhere to lay his head.” Instead of a mighty army, he had a ragtag group of twelve common men following him. Instead of overthrowing the Roman oppressors, he merely irritated them. And at the end of his life, he was crucified as a common criminal. How could this possibly be the one

they were waiting for—the one called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace? If the story ended at the cross, it would be hard to see how Jesus was the one. But, the road to the cross was the great descent; from there it turns and quickly ascends until we see Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father, on an eternal throne, and in a way that is more glorious than any could have ever envisioned.

3. Read Hebrews 10:12. After Jesus ascends to heaven, where is he and what is he doing?

When Jesus sits at the right hand of his Father, he declares that his rule is in session!

**4. Read Ephesians 1:20-23.**

**- Where is Christ seated?**

**- What is under his feet?**

**- Given the circumstances of your life today, how does it give you hope to know that Jesus is seated on his throne and all things are under his feet?**

Not only is Jesus currently ruling and reigning over all things, he is ruling and reigning over our current circumstance. But the current session of Jesus means something else for us, too.

5. Compare Ephesians 1:20 with Ephesians 2:5-6.

Ephesians 1:20	Ephesians 2:5-6
...He worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places...	...Even when we were dead in our trespasses, [he] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

**- From what was Jesus raised? From what are we raised?**

- Where is Christ seated? Where are we seated?

Everything we are given is given to us if we are in Christ Jesus—what is his becomes ours. In Christ, we die; in Christ, we are raised; in Christ, we will ascend; and in Christ, we are seated in the heavenly places! In the garden, Adam and Eve were given dominion—they were given the privilege of being vice-regents to rule over God’s creation. Part of the restoration of all things, as we will see in chapter 10, is the restoration of dominion.

#### **6. Read Revelation 3:21. Where will Jesus seat us?**

It is too much to even fathom! But what God declared very good in the beginning, he will declare very, very good in the end.

But how do we know? We have eyewitnesses to almost every other aspect of Jesus’ saving work. People saw his birth. They saw his crucifixion, resurrection, and even his ascension. We have eyewitness accounts of the mighty acts of God. But how do we know Jesus is seated on his eternal throne?

7. Read Acts 7:55-56. Who did Stephen see? Where was he?

8. Read Revelation 5. John tells us four times that he “looked” or he “saw.” What does John see (v. 1)?

We can be sure that Jesus is seated on his throne. Not only has it been promised from ages past, it is the current reality, and our future hope. And our King is one who can “sympathize with us in every way” (Heb. 4:15) and is currently interceding for us from the throne (Rom. 8:34). We have been given a good, righteous, powerful, and loving King who rules and reigns for our good.

### **Take-Away**

The incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus returns to the throne room and sits down at the right hand of the Father. It is truly finished.

### **For Further Study**

1. Read Ephesians 2:4-7. Where has God seated us?

- Read Colossians 3:1-4. What are we to do as a result?

- List 2-3 ways you do this.

2. Read Romans 8:31-35. What are some of the ways it helps you to know that no one can condemn you or bring a charge against you because the king is on his throne and he, himself—the one seated at the right hand of God—is interceding for you.

## Scripture Memory

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven  
given among men by which we must be saved.  
Acts 4:12

## DAY 5: Pentecost

This great story of redemption has, from the beginning, been a work of our Triune God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been working together from the very first page of Scripture. But the Father has been in the spotlight throughout the Old Testament. However, in the incarnation—the birth of Jesus—the Son comes to the front of the stage. And in today's lesson the Spirit, at Pentecost, steps into the spotlight. Remember though, God is the same yesterday, today, and forever and the work of salvation has always been a Trinitarian act: planned by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit.

1. Read John 16:4-7. What does Jesus say is “to their advantage”?

- Why?

Can you imagine being one of the disciples and hearing Jesus say it is better for them if he goes away? The person they have hung all their hopes on, the one they have left jobs and families for, is not only telling them he is leaving, he tells them it is actually best for them. We are going to spend today looking at why and how that was true.

2. Go back and review Chapter 6, Day 5. We looked at what the Israelites, and we, need most—a new heart. Read Ezekiel 36:25-28.
  - What is God promising to give them (v. 27)?

- What will the result be (v. 27)?

What happens at Pentecost is the fulfillment of these promises! As Sinclair Ferguson writes, “Pentecost publicly marks the transition from the old to the new covenant, and signifies the commencement of the ‘now’ of the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2).”<sup>43</sup> It is at Pentecost that the kingdom of God is fully inaugurated.

3. Read Acts 2:1-4. Describe the scene in your own words.

- What filled them?

I have said that the story just keeps getting better and better. The road of exaltation keeps going higher and higher. But what could be better than what we saw in yesterday’s lesson—Jesus seated on his heavenly throne? How about God himself coming down again—this time to dwell in the hearts of his people?

4. Read Romans 8:9-11. Who is said to be in you in v. 10?

- Who is said to dwell in you in v. 11?

The Father sent the Son and the Father and the Son send the Spirit. God himself now dwells in the hearts of his children through the pouring out of his Holy Spirit. Christ dwells in us because he has poured his Spirit into our hearts. And God in us is even better than God next to us, which is why it was better if Jesus went away. The new covenant, promised in Ezekiel 36 and fulfilled at Pentecost, accomplishes that which the old covenants could not—holiness of life because the Holy Spirit now dwells in the hearts of God’s people.

*God in us is even better than  
God next to us, which is why it  
was better if Jesus went away.*

5. Read 1 Corinthians 3:16. What are we called? Who dwells in the Temple?

- Go back and read Exodus 40:34-35. What filled the Tabernacle?

- Go back and read 1 Kings 8:11. What filled the first Temple?

- What was the purpose of the Temple (review chapter 6, Days 2 and 4)?

The Tabernacle and, later, the Temple, was the place where the presence of God was to be mediated to the rest of the world. The first Temple was destroyed in 587 BC and the second Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. But Jesus says that he, himself, is building a new temple.

**6. Read Ephesians 2:19-22. What is being used to build the temple of God?**

- For what purpose?

7. Read 2 Corinthians 6:16. What covenantal language do you hear?

The dwelling of God not just with his people but in his people. And the amazing news is that this isn't the end of the story. There is even more good news to come!

### Take-Away

God fills his new temple, the people of God, with his presence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

### For Further Study

1. Read the following verses and write down what they tell us about the work of the Spirit in us.

- John 15:26-27.

- John 16:7-11.

- John 16:12-15.



- Romans 8:3-4.

- 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

- Galatians 5:22-23.

## Scripture Memory

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven  
given among men by which we must be saved.  
Acts 4:12

## Points to Remember from Chapter 8

- The cross reminds us that there is no other way to the Father.
- The cross is the place of the greatest victory of all time.
- We will be raised because Christ was raised!
- The ascension is the victorious entry of the conquering King.
- Jesus is seated on his throne and his court is in session.
- Jesus pours his Spirit into his people--the church--and fills the new temple with his glory.



# 9

## Waiting for Our King to Return

I have stressed that the Bible was never intended to merely be a list of doctrines we are to intellectually conquer or a series of standalone truth statements to be individually applied to our lives. It is a story of how God is working in our world on our behalf. We have spent the last eight weeks looking at the story of how God is working in our world, making all things right again, calling a people to himself so he can be their God and, once again, dwell with them. We have been following the story line as it has progressed from “once upon a time,” to “but then an evil serpent,” through our “knight in shining armor” who came and defeated our evil enemy. We have not done this merely for the purpose of being informed—we have spent this time so that we will be transformed. If you remember, in the introduction, I warned you that you were not, for one minute, going to be able to just sit back and enjoy the show. This drama of redemption, this grand story of “God’s work in our world on our behalf,” is intended to invite you in, call you onto the stage, and transform you into one of its greatest participants. The story of each of our lives fits within God’s bigger story—we are to live our daily trials, victories, joys, sorrows, fears, and celebrations in the context of the bigger story. We lose sight of this, but we were created to be participants in this bigger story, not observers living outside of it.

We ended last week with the glorious outpouring of the Holy Spirit. From the day of Pentecost until now, all believers have been unalterably “sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30)—God, himself, dwelling in his people. But the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is just a foretaste of what is to come. God has promised that he will return

for his people and will dwell with us for all eternity. That is our glorious hope of what is to come. But what about now? Where does that leave us? We are in-between the first and second comings of Christ; we find ourselves living in this time between the great rescue and the great conclusion. What do we do as we wait? Sit and twiddle our thumbs? Entertain ourselves? Try to be good girls who go to church on Sunday and maybe a Bible study or two thrown in for good measure? Tell a couple of people about Jesus? Most of us tend to wonder what the connection is between what we read in the Bible and what we do during the week. One of the biggest questions we ask ourselves is, “How does my faith affect the years, weeks, days, and moments of my life? What do I do to live out my faith?” If the Bible is the great drama that we have been arguing it is, where is the script for our part in the play? This week’s study is intended to help us answer that question.

*The story of each of our lives fits within God’s bigger story—we are to live our daily trials, victories, joys, sorrows, fears, and celebrations in the context of the bigger story.*

In his book, *The Drama of Doctrine*, Kevin Vanhoozer says that all of history could be divided as if it were a five-act play: Act 1 is the story of creation and the fall; Act 2 is the story of God creating and establishing Israel; Act 3 is the birth and life of Jesus; Act 4 begins with Pentecost and goes through the end of the age; and Act 5 is the final consummation of all things in the new heavens and the new earth.<sup>44</sup> As Williams points out, we have the script for the first three acts:

[The first three acts] convey the characters, themes, settings, and action of the drama of redemption from creation through the story of Jesus. We have scene 1 of act 4, the birth of the church at Pentecost and the spread of the church as far as Rome. And the final act, act 5, although lying out in the future before us, has been penned as well. We know how the play ends.<sup>45</sup>

And this is where our stories fit in! We are living in Act 4—between the birth of the church and the final act. Vanhoozer asks, “‘Now’ is our scene. How shall we play it?”<sup>46</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre answers by saying, “I can only answer the question ‘what am I to do?’ ... if I can answer the prior question, ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”<sup>47</sup> We know the story we are in, so how do we now live in light of our part?

If you were in New York City at the Minskoff Theater on Broadway watching *The Lion King* and, all of a sudden, the person playing Simba began quoting the monologue from *Hamlet* that begins, “To be or not to be, that is the question,” you would wonder what was going on. Why? Because you would know his words and actions didn’t fit. They weren’t part of the story line and they didn’t fit the script. If the actor were to later explain that he wasn’t given the lines for that scene and he was simply improvising, you would know that he wasn’t improvising well. He wasn’t following the trajectory of the story. His words and actions were not helping the story move from where it started to where it was going to end.

That is the point that Williams and Vanhoozer are making. We might not have a script for our lives, but we know several things. We know 1) what story we are in, 2) how that story began, 3) how that story will end. Therefore, we can live in a way that both embodies and furthers the storyline—we can live in a way that is consistent with the “script.”

We are in the story that stretches from before time began and reaches into time eternal; we are in the story of how the Maker of heaven and earth is redeeming his good creation and restoring it back to all it was intended to be. We are in the great drama of the redemption of all things—and we have a part to play.

***We are in the great drama of the redemption of all things—and we have a part to play.***

### Pray

“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17). Pray that what we do and what we say would be consistent with the story we are in.

## DAY 1: Image Bearing

So God created man *in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the

birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. (Gen. 1:27-28, emphasis mine.)

God “is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). His purposes and plans stand firm forever (Ps. 33:11). The mission of God has never changed. If we are going to live in a way that faithfully embodies the story line, we need to see that the goal of the mandates given to God’s people has not changed. We are going to go back through the story and see how the mission of God—entrusted and given to Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Israel, David, and, ultimately, Jesus—is now given to us to carry out. As we look at the Scriptures and answer the questions, be asking yourself, “Am I doing this? Am I participating in the drama of redemption in a way that is consistent with the story line and faithfully embodies the script?” Because the scene you and I have been called to play is now!

Go back and review chapter 2, Days 4 and 5. You will see that we looked at the mandates given to Adam and Eve in the Garden: Genesis 1:27-28 “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” What was the scope of their mission? They were to fill the whole earth. What were they to do? They were to be fruitful, multiply, have dominion, and fill the earth with the glory of God. Who were they to be? Image bearers. Has God changed his mind or his mission? No!

1. Read 1 Corinthians 15:49. Whose image are we to bear?

Adam and Eve were created in God’s image. The ability to accurately reflect his image was lost when they rebelled. We now have to be conformed and transformed back into his image.

2. Read Romans 8:29. To whom are we being conformed?

**3. Read 2 Corinthians 3:18. Do you see evidence of this in your own life? If so, write down a few examples.**

This transformation involves our participation! We have to renew our minds (Rom. 12:1-2) and participate with God’s work in us to transform us. We have to put off the old self and put on the new—the one that more accurately bears the image of God.

**4. Read Colossians 3:8-10. List what we are to do to put off our old self?**

- What does v. 10 say about the renewal of our new self?
  
- Which of these do you need to put off (what in your life does not accurately reflect the character of God)?
  
- In what ways might you be a faithful participant in this part of the script?

We are image-bearers in all we do. We are image bearers as we cook, write, study, create, play, think, help, work, teach . . . in all the areas of life. Only now, we bear this image in a way that is marred by sin, so we imperfectly image-bear. That is why we have to be re-created in the image of God. As we are conformed more and more to the image of Christ, we are more and more being restored into all that God created us to be—which means that we are more and more able to reflect his image in all the areas of life he has called us to go. And that is the truest sense of human flourishing—to be all that God created us to be.

### Take-Away

We are still called to bear the image of God and take it into all the world.

### For Further Study

1. What has God used in your life to conform you to the image of God?
  
2. In what ways are you currently being conformed?

### Scripture Memory

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

## DAY 2: Be Fruitful and Multiply

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth* and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. (Gen. 1:27-28, emphasis mine).

I’ve heard it said before that we all have a “dash”—that line on our tombstone connecting the year we were born and the year we die. Mine will be “1967—?” The question becomes, *what did you do with your dash?* Understanding our role in the story is the only way we will ever live our dash in the way were intended to live it.

Who are we? Image bearers. What are we to do? Be fruitful and fill the earth with God’s glory. But what does it mean for us to “be fruitful and multiply?” In Genesis 1:28 it meant exactly what it sounds like it means—have babies, lots of babies. This was how Adam and Eve were going to fill the earth. They were to have babies, raise them to know and obey the word of the Lord, and fill the earth with people who knew and worshipped the living God. What about us? To participate in the mission of God, do we need to be more like the Dugger family and have nineteen children? We can. But there are other ways to fill the earth with people who know, love, and worship the living God, too.

1. Read Colossians 1:3-10 (below). Underline the words “bearing fruit” and “increasing.”

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, <sup>5</sup>because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, <sup>6</sup>which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing--as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ... <sup>9</sup>And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup>so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

- What is bearing fruit and increasing in v. 5-6?

- Who is bearing fruit and what is increasing in v. 10?

Dr. Gregory Beale helpfully explains:

The implication is that the notion of physical newborn children “increasing and multiplying” in the original Genesis 1:28 commission now includes people who have left their old way of life, have become spiritually newborn, and have come to reflect the image of God’s glorious presence... [and we can] view the literal commission about progeny to be interpreted in the new age as the increase of the reception of God’s word in new believers and the multiplication of believers.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, the gospel itself bears fruit and multiplies image bearers. So one way we are to now be fruitful and multiply is by allowing the gospel to increase in us and by going, sharing that gospel, and making disciples along the way.

**2. Read Matthew 28:18-20. According to these verses, what are we to fill the earth with now?**

3. Read John 15:8. What are the disciples to do? What is the result?

4. Read Galatians 5:22-23. What fruit is being born? How are bearing fruit and image bearing connected here?

5. In what ways is the gospel increasing and bearing fruit in your life?

**6. In what ways are you currently participating in the mission of God by being fruitful and multiplying (making disciples)?**

As we trace the threads of the story, we look to see how Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of each piece. He



is the faultless Adam: the perfect image of God, the one who has all dominion. He is the final Abraham: one sent from his home to the place God told him to go and the ultimate blessing to all the families of the earth. He is the perfect Israelite: he is truly holy as his Father is holy. The problem is that we stop there. Fulfilled in Jesus? Done. But fulfillment does not mean the story has ended. We don't close the book after the resurrection because the story is not over yet. And we need to know how the story is to be carried on by us. Fulfilled in Jesus? Yes, but still to be carried out by us.

### Take-Away

The mission of God has always been to fill the earth with his presence by filling the earth with image bearers that know and worship him.

### For Further Study

1. Read Acts 6:7. What increased? What multiplied?

### Scripture Memory

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

## DAY 3: Dominion and Righteous Rule

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and *fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. (Gen. 1:27-28, emphasis mine.)

If you have seen Disney's *The Lion King*, what does the opening scene look like as the sun rises over the Serengeti? Like I mentioned in chapter 1, the land is beautiful, the animals are flourishing, and the world is functioning as it should. Why? Because the good king Mufasa is on his throne. What happens when Mufasa's evil brother, Scar, becomes king? The land dries up and the animals starve. Why? Because when dominion is used for evil, everything suffers. God gives dominion so his creation will flourish.

I had a professor ask me one time, "Who is flourishing because of your influence?" I now ask myself that question on a regular basis. Why? Because the reason we are given influence or dominion at all is for

***Dominion and influence are given so that the kingdom of God can grow by filling the earth with the knowledge of God and his word.***

the flourishing of others. Dominion and influence are given so that the kingdom of God can grow by filling the earth with the knowledge of God and his word. And as this happens, disciples are made and people flourish.

1. Read Matthew 28:18-20.  
- What authority has been given to Jesus?

- What does the “therefore” in v. 19 mean?

- Where are the disciples to go?

- What are they to do?

2. Go back and read Genesis 12:3. Who was to flourish (be blessed) because of Abram?

3. **Looking at Genesis 1:27-28 (above) and Genesis 12:3, write down some of the ways the commission given in Matthew 28:18-20 is a reissuing of these two previous commissions.**

Who are we to be? Image bearers. What happens when we do this well? We bring the rule and reign of God to bear and the kingdom of God advances, filling the whole earth. As a result, people are blessed and all of creation flourishes. One of the most amazing pieces of this is that God is at work to repair, redeem, and restore what man broke (remember Genesis 3). But, instead of pushing man aside and saying get out of my way, I’m having to fix what you broke, he actually calls us back into his work and entrusts us again with his mission. He is a God of grace, a God who redeems us even as he is using us in his mission of redeeming all things.

This mandate to mission should cause us to ask several questions: how do I participate, where do I go, and what do I do? If the call is to fill the earth and be a blessing to all peoples, then we need to know what areas of life need to be redeemed. What areas of life have been stained by sin? Did the fall affect all areas of life? In other words, has business been affected by sin? Politics? Art? Families? Education? Absolutely! And the list is almost endless. So where does God send his people? Into all areas!

4. Read Mark 16:15. What is the scope of the mission Jesus gives his disciples?

- **What are some areas that you have been sent into on God’s mission to redeem all things?**

**- In what ways can you faithfully play your part?**

I like how Amy Sherman explains it in her book *Kingdom Calling*. She tells of a time that Rev. Jeff White came to her church to teach a workshop:

He talked about the work of King Jesus in bringing restoration and held up one of those tiny pink taste-test spoons from Baskin-Robbins. You know, the spoons that offer you a foretaste of the ice cream to come. Jeff challenged attendees to see themselves as such spoons, for our role in the world is about offering foretastes of the kingdom to our neighbors near and far.<sup>49</sup>

5. Who is flourishing because of the influence and dominion you have been given? (friends, employees, employers, co-workers, spouse, children, neighbors...?)

- In what ways are you (or might you be) a tiny pink taste-test spoon to them?

## Take-Away

Dominion, authority, and influence are given to us in order to fill the earth with the presence of God.

## For Further Study

1. Read Matthew 28:18-20. What is the connection between image bearing and making disciples?

## Scripture Memory

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

## DAY 4: Go and Be a Blessing

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go. ... and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3, emphasis mine.)

If we had to summarize God’s command to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 it would be this, “Go and be a blessing.” Or, as Chris Wright argues, “go” for the purpose of being a blessing.<sup>50</sup> Remember chapter 4, Day 4? We looked at the importance of the phrase so that; God called Abraham so that he would be a

***If you are in Christ, you and I are part of the glorious fulfillment of God accomplishing what he set out to accomplish through Abraham***

blessing. And just whom was God going to bless through Abraham? No less than all the families of the earth. Has that happened? Partially. If you are in Christ, you and I are part of the glorious fulfillment of God accomplishing what he set out to accomplish through Abraham! And, one day, the fullness of God’s mission will be complete as we worship around the throne with “every nation and tribe and language and people” (Rev. 14:6)—people from

all the families of the earth. But, remember where we are in the story; it is not finished and we have a part to play. Understanding the call for Abraham is key to our understanding the call on our lives. We, too, are called to “go and be a blessing.”

Go: Where was Abraham called to go? He was called to leave his country, family, and home. But he wasn't just called from something, he was called *to* something—to the land God would show him. He was called to walk away and walk towards. He was called out and he was called in—he was set apart for God's purposes.

What about us? Have we been called out and set apart? Have you been called from and called to? Have you been called to walk away and walk towards? You and I may not be called to leave family, home, or country, literally (although we might be), but, as Christians, we are called to walk away from our former ways of life. Scripture tells us that we have been transferred from our former home, the domain of darkness, and have been transferred into a new place, the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13). We are people who have been called out to follow God and called into the things of God.

It is important to note that God did not call Abraham because of anything good or righteous Abraham had done. God called Abraham because God chose to call Abraham—based only on God's sovereign, free initiative and will. The same is true for us. We do not earn or merit the salvation of the Lord; he calls us his own because he has chosen to do so. But, like Abraham, that call requires a response; it requires obedience. For Abraham, he had to get up, put some clothes in a bag, saddle a donkey or two, and start walking. For us, we need to get up and start putting off a few things and putting on some others. Obedience matters.

1. Read Ephesians 4:22-32.

- Using the chart below, list everything Paul says to put off (or walk away from) and everything he says to put on (or walk into)

Put off/walk away from	Put on/walk into

If Abraham was to be the blessing to others that he was called to be—if he was to be the faithful participant in God's mission that he was supposed to be—he had to do a few things. The same is true for us. Our obedience directly affects our ability to be faithful participants in the story. We cannot be a blessing if we are not obedient.

2. List 2-3 areas in which the Lord might be calling you to be obedient. They could be things you are to walk away from or things you are to walk into; things you are to put off, or things you are to put on; places you are to leave or places you are to go.

In order to understand how and where we are to be a blessing, we have to understand what exactly it means to be a blessing. We can bless people with our words, our actions, our time, and our resources. But what

***We are a blessing as we go,  
teach, explain, disciple, proclaim,  
and live the gospel with others.***

kind of blessing is Genesis 12 calling us to be? Wright links the command in Genesis 12—*go and be a blessing so that all the families of the earth will be blessed*—directly to the command in Matthew 28—*go and make disciples in all nations*.<sup>51</sup> The call on our lives to be a blessing has to involve calling others to know and worship the God of Abraham because ultimately we know that “in Christ alone, through the gospel of his death and resurrection, stands the hope of blessing for all

nations.”<sup>52</sup> We are a blessing as we go, teach, explain, disciple, proclaim, and live the gospel with others. We do this with our words, our actions, our time, and our resources. We take all of what we have been given and “bring it to the table,” so to speak, of blessing others. As God told Abraham, you have been blessed so that you will be a blessing.

3. In what ways have you been blessed? Make your list as specific as possible.

**- In what ways might those blessings have been given so that you would be a blessing?**

Remember, we are called to be participants in God's great drama of redemption. And one way we can know what faithful improvisation might look like in our lives is to see where and how God has blessed us—we are blessed by God to be a blessing to others. How has he blessed you? What gifts and resources has the Lord given you? What lessons has he taught you? What story has he given you? Where do your joys and sorrows lie? What fills your time? Who is in your path? Our blessings come in many shapes and sizes, but bless us he does. The call of Abraham is our call too. Our salvation is never for our sake alone. We are saved and then called to be mediators of that salvation to others. We get to be the vehicle God uses to take his salvation to those around us. You have been called out, set apart, and you have been blessed. And both your calling out and your blessings are essential to the part you have to play in the unfolding drama all around you. You are not in the audience—you have been called into the spotlight and equipped with the blessings needed to play your part.

### Take-Away

You have been blessed in specific ways to be a blessing in specific ways.

### For Further Study

1. Read John 17:18. Jesus says that the Father sent him. In light of Genesis 12:1-3, how does this make Jesus the even greater Abraham?

### Scripture Memory

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

## DAY 5: Holiness Matters

"For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. *You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.*" (Lev. 11:45, emphasis mine.)

What are we studying this week and why? We are looking back through the story to see how it should inform the way we live. We are participants in this story, actors in the great drama, and, if we want to be faithful to the story line (and not like someone reciting *Hamlet* in the middle of *The Lion King*) then we need to know the trajectory of the story. Today we are looking at God's call on his people to be a holy bunch of people. We've been hinting at it all week—how do we bear God's image? We have to be holy. How are

we to be a blessing to all the families of the earth? We have to be holy. But today, the requirement of our holiness is going to come front and center.

Holiness involves both being set apart as well as being ethically and morally righteousness. In other words, the call to be holy means that we have been set apart, called to live our lives differently, than those around us in that we are to be people characterized by the pursuit of righteousness, justice, kindness, and humility.

***Our holiness says as much about God as it does about us. What kind of people are we to be? Holy. Why? Because we serve a holy God.***

We tend to think of holiness in one of two ways—either it doesn't matter because we are "saved by grace" or we think that our personal holiness is the end of the game, the goal, of the Christian life. Neither of these is true. Rather, holiness matters, it always has. Both our personal holiness and our corporate holiness are of vital importance. But our holiness is not the ultimate thing; our holiness serves the greater purpose of the mission of God. Our holiness says as much about God as it does

about us. What kind of people are we to be? Holy. Why? Because we serve a holy God.

1. Read Leviticus 11:44-45. What phrase is repeated twice? Restate it in your own words.

If you remember, Leviticus is the book that contains rules and regulations about ritual cleansing and purity, given to the people so they would know how to approach the holy God who was now living in their midst. It is a book that loudly proclaims both the holiness of God and the need for God's people to be holy. It is set in the context of both the kingdom and mission of God. What does God's kingdom look like? It is a kingdom with a holy king and holy subjects (Ex. 19:6: "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"). How does that holiness serve the mission of God? It both displays holiness to a watching world and it is to cause others to want to know this good, righteous, and holy King (review Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

If we want to know how we are to live the years, weeks, days, and moments of our lives in a way that is consistent with the story we are in, we have to understand that our holiness matters. One of the first ways we learn to faithfully stick to the script is to learn that we are to live as holy people. Anything else is not consistent with the story line. At some level, we all know this is true. We say things like, "Don't talk the talk if you're not going to walk the walk." Or we grimace in sadness when a pastor or spiritual leader morally fails. We know that there should be a consistency between what we profess and how we act—we are to watch both our life and our doctrine closely (1 Tim. 4:16). But, even if we are convinced holiness matters, do we understand the far-reaching, missional aspect of our holiness? Many of us tend to think (or at least I know I did!) that our individual pursuit of holiness is a matter between "God and me." But it is so much greater. Wright says the call to holiness for Israel (and, subsequently for us) "was not merely for their (our) own good or even merely to keep God happy."<sup>54</sup> Both of those aspects are true, but that is not all!



2. Read 1 Peter 2:1-2 (below).

<sup>1</sup>So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. <sup>2</sup>Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation--<sup>3</sup>if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. <sup>4</sup>As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup>you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup>For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." <sup>7</sup>So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," <sup>8</sup>and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. <sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup>Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup>Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

- Into what are the people of God being built (v. 5)?

- For what purpose (v. 9)?

- How are the people of God to conduct themselves (v. 12)?

- For what purpose (v. 12)?

**- In your own words, write down what God is doing in his people, for his people, and through his people. What role does their holiness play?**

3. Read 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1.

- What does God call us (v. 16)?

- What is the covenantal phrase he uses?

- What is the command in v. 17?
- What is the only appropriate response (7:1)?
- What are you doing in your life to “bring holiness to completion?”

The physical Tabernacle is gone and the physical Temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed. Why? Because they are no longer the place where the glory of the Lord dwells. The glory of the Lord now dwells in you and me, individually but also corporately. I am a temple of the living God; you are a temple of the living God. But most importantly we are the temple of the living God. As Richter says,

The Presence from which Adam and Eve were driven, that rested on Mt. Sinai with thunder and storm, that sat enthroned above the cherubim, now resides in you. It is nearly too much to apprehend. And just as the old covenant Temple housed the Presence in order to make God available to saint and sinner alike and stood as a testimony to the nations that Yahweh dwelt among his people, so too the church. You and I, and we as the church, are designed to be that place which believer and unbeliever can come to find God. Moreover, our restored lives are God’s testimony to the nations that he lives and dwells among us. And whereas the Temple was one building that could only be in one place, the church is an ever-expanding community that is slowly, steadily bringing the Presence to the farthest reaches of the world.<sup>55</sup>

Do you see what she is saying? Our holiness serves as a testimony to both the power and presence of the Lord. And God is now using us, as those he has made holy, to mediate his presence—his holy presence—to the world.

We pray, “Your kingdom come.” But as we do, we have to realize that the kingdom only comes when people acknowledge and reflect God’s holiness. If God’s holiness is not present in his people, his kingdom is not present in that place. Our holiness matters—be holy as he is holy.

## Take-Away

Our holiness matters.

## For Further Study

1. Read Isaiah 6:1-8.
  - What does Isaiah see (v. 1-2)?
  - What does he hear (v. 3)?
  - What is his response (v. 5)?

- What is God's response (v. 6-7)?
- What does God ask (v. 8)?
- How does Isaiah respond (v. 8)?
- What does this have to do with God's holiness, our holiness, and our mission?

## Scripture Memory

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

## Points to Remember from Chapter 9

- We each have a part to play and our "scene" is now!
- We are being conformed into the image of Christ so that we can be accurate image bearers in all areas of life.
- We are called to participate in the fruitful multiplication of more people who know, love, and worship God.
- We are given dominion to help bring a taste of God's rule and reign to a hungry and needy world—so that others flourish.
- We are blessed so that we will be a blessing to others.
- We are to live as a holy people.



# 10

## Happily Ever After

What does a good ending to a good story look like? To reference *Tangled* one last time, we know that a good and right conclusion to that story involves Rapunzel being restored to the same kingdom from which she was taken. We long to see her returned to the same parents from which she was stolen. It would not do to have her given to new parents or returned to another kingdom—we know that a good and right conclusion involves a restoration of all that was declared good and right in the beginning. The ending is tied to the beginning. Our story is no different. We will spend this week looking at what will be “new” about heaven and what pieces of the story we can anticipate finding in heaven!

Where did we begin this study? We began “in the beginning”—literally. We began with “once upon a time” there was a beautiful garden and this garden was a magnificent kingdom for a good and powerful King. This great King had children he loved and adored—children he walked with and talked with, children he dwelt with and fellowshiped with. All was good and right in the world and, ever since Adam and Eve were expelled from this place, we have been longing for that place again.

Heaven is not some ethereal place disconnected from the story. It is not a separate place that is new and utterly different from the first creation of God. Instead, heaven is the place where the story is made complete; it is the perfect renewal of the creation and the place in which we were created to dwell. It is the final completion of all that God began in Eden. We know the only way for this story to be brought to its intended and glorious conclusion—for us to experience the “happily ever after” that our hearts long for—is for us to see all things fulfilled, restored, and made right. But, for some reason, we tend to detach our hopes and thoughts about heaven from the rest of the story.

*Heaven is the place where the story is made complete; it is the perfect renewal of the creation and the place in which we were created to dwell. It is the final completion of all that God began in Eden.*

When our second son was around seven years old, he announced from the back seat of our minivan that he didn’t want to go to heaven when he died. I quickly looked in the rearview mirror and asked him why— why would he not want to go to heaven? He gazed up at me with deep sincerity and answered that he did not want to “sit around all day in a choir robe and sing.” That

was how he pictured life in heaven and that, to a seven-year-old boy, sounded like no fun at all. His view and understanding of heaven affected his desire (or lack thereof) to be there. And, if his view had remained (it didn't), eventually his actions would have reflected his lack of hope. Why? Because our understanding of the future affects our hopes for the future—and our hopes for the future shape our behavior in the present.

So we need to understand what we can about heaven for two reasons—1) our hope would increase and 2) our actions would more consistently reflect our hope. We need more consistency between what we believe and how we live. I can't help but think about Kara Tippetts. Kara was a thirty-eight year old woman, the wife of a pastor, the mother of four young children, who died this past Sunday afternoon after a battle with breast cancer. If you are unfamiliar with her story, I urge you to read her blog "Mundane Faithfulness" or her book *The Hardest Peace*. Thousands of people have been ministered to by her because she was a woman who let her understanding of her future inform, change, shape, and rule the way she lived and the way she died. My prayer is that the same will be true of us.

## Pray

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13). Let's pray that our hope of glory would inform and change the way we live today.

## Day 1: All Things New

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth  
had passed away, and the sea was no more.  
Revelation 21:1

What pictures come to mind when you think of heaven? I remember the picture that was in my white leather Bible with a zipper. Heaven, according to this picture, was a place in the clouds with white castles, angels in white robes, a surreal sun with rays going in every direction, and a big brass gate at the entrance. It looked more like the place my seven year-old son was hoping to avoid than the place I see portrayed in the Bible.

Even though heaven will be more glorious than we can imagine, God does give us glimpses—both of what the world was like when all was as it was supposed to be as well as what his world will look like when all things have been made right again. And we have to remember that the first informs the second. Our final destination will not be a completely new and different place; it will be a renewed creation. God is not tossing out his original creation and starting over; he is redeeming and restoring the one he originally made. How do we know? The Bible tells us so.

1. Read Romans 8:18-25.
  - According to v. 21, what will be set free from corruption?

- In verse 23, Paul tells us that not only is creation groaning for redemption, but something else, too. What is that something else?

Paul explains that all of creation—everything that was called into existence in Genesis 1—is waiting, groaning even, for redemption. And that redemption (v. 23) will, somehow, be like the redemption of our bodies. To understand the redemption of our bodies (and therefore of all creation), we have to look at the only resurrected body we know—the body of the resurrected Jesus (when I say resurrected, I mean resurrected not to the same mortal body like Lazarus was, but resurrected to an immortal body!). There was both continuity and discontinuity between Jesus’ body before it was resurrected and after; some things were the same, others were changed. He was both recognizable (John 20:19-20) and unrecognizable (John 20:15). His first body was perishable, corruptible, and mortal, his second imperishable, incorruptible, and eternal. But it was his body that was resurrected—not a brand new, totally different body. The body that went into the tomb was the body that came out of the tomb. What Paul is telling us in Romans 8 is, not just our bodies, but all of creation will experience this same glorious redemption.

**2. Read Revelation 21:1. In light of the Romans passage and what we discussed above, what questions might you have?**

At first glance, it looks as if John is telling us that the first heaven and the first earth are being pushed out of the way, done away with, and it is a brand new heaven and earth that will be ours. But what’s wrong with this understanding? Well, first of all, we know that Scripture does not contradict Scripture. And Paul tells us that all of creation is eagerly waiting for the redemption that will be like the redemption of our bodies. Anthony Hoekema writes,

Those raised with Christ will not be a totally new set of human beings, but the people of God who have lived on this earth. By way of analogy, we would expect that the new earth will not be totally different from the present earth but will be the present earth wondrously renewed.<sup>56</sup>

So what does John mean when he writes that he saw a new heaven and a new earth? Williams says, “New means new in quality rather than new in time or origin.”<sup>57</sup> Albert Wolters explains that God does not give up on his creation: “[God] hangs onto his fallen original creation and salvages it. He refuses to abandon the work of his hands—in fact, he sacrifices his own Son to save his original project.”<sup>58</sup>

And this makes sense with the rest of the story. God is going to re-new his people and his creation. Randy Alcorn explains,

God has never given up on his original creation. Yet somehow we have managed to overlook an entire biblical vocabulary that makes this point clear. Reconcile. Redeem.

Restore. Recover. Return. Renew. Regenerate. Resurrect. Each of these biblical words begins with the re- prefix, suggesting a return to an original condition that was ruined or lost.<sup>59</sup>

3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

- If someone is “in Christ” what are they called (v. 17)?

- What has passed away and what has come (v. 17)?

- What does this mean in your life (what has gone and what has come)?

**- In what ways might this help us better understand Revelation 21:1-2 (how does our own “new creation” inform the way we understand the new heavens and the new earth)?**

I’m hammering the point that God is renewing his original creation, not making a brand new creation—what God called very good in the beginning he will make very, very good in the end.

Now, you might be saying, “So what? What difference does it make?” For starters, it informs how we are to

***We look back to Eden to catch a glimpse of what we can anticipate—and then we realize it will be even better than that because God is making it anew!***

live here. How many times have you heard, “this world is not my home”? Well, actually, it is! Not the way it is now. We have said over and over that things are not the way they are supposed to be. This world is under the curse. This world proves to be a tough place to work, produce, and profit—it is by the sweat of our brow and the hair of our chinny-chin-chin that we labor. And it is in this world that we experience sin, suffering, tears, shame, and death. But, remember, none of these things were part of the original creation. We look back to Eden

to catch a glimpse of what we can anticipate—and then we realize it will be even better than that because God is making it anew.

Understanding that God is in the business of restoring all of his good creation has changed the way I view the world. I love it more. I pause and appreciate more the beauty of a harvest moon. I delight more when I jump into the lake and feel the pleasure of cold water on a hot summer day. I worship God as I ride my horse through a musty forest and feel the cool breeze on my face. I look around me and rejoice that the beauty of this place—my home—will be both redeemed and be mine forever and forever.



- 4. Make a list of some of your favorite parts of this world and how you anticipate enjoying them forever.**

Understanding the cosmic scope of redemption also changes the way I view God. His creation is not just some nuisance to him. He loves what he made and that includes you and me. He has been working to save us, not get rid of us and start over. As I realize this more and more, I rest more and more in his love.

5. What about you? How does the fact that God loves and is redeeming all of his creation cause you to think about how God views you?

## Take-Away

One thing we can know for sure, our eternal future will be more grand, glorious, and wonderful than anything our minds can conceive.

## For Further Study

1. Read Revelation 21:2.
  - To whom do you think the “new Jerusalem” and the “bride adorned for her husband” refer (Eph. 5:25-27)?
  - Where does the bride begin and where is she going?
2. Read Revelation 5:9-10.
  - What has the Lamb made the ransomed people to be (v. 10)? Where have you seen that before?
  - Where will they reign?

3. In what ways do these verses shape the way you understand the final destination of the people and kingdom of God?

## Scripture Memory

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”  
Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”  
Revelation 21:5

## Day 2: The Tree of Life

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.  
(Rev. 22:1-2)

In March of 2014, my mom and I took my two daughters to Florida for their spring break—first to Disney World and then to the beach. We decided to take a day trip and drive to St. Augustine, a small town on the northeast coast of Florida. St. Augustine is a beautiful town famed for being one of the oldest Spanish settlements in the United States. It is also famed for being the home to the highly sought after (and highly illusive) fountain of youth. My mom and I were, of course, very interested in finding this fountain! We found it, and yet, it has proven to be less than magical. My hair has continued to gray, new wrinkles seem to show up every morning, my mother’s arthritis has continued to plague her, and there seems to be a never-ending source to our aches and pains.

***The reason we long for a fountain of youth is because we were created for it.***

Part of the reality of this world is that we age and our bodies slowly wind down. And yet, we all seem to fight it. There is something about aging we know, deep in our souls, is not the way it is supposed to be. We look in all kinds of places for weapons with which to fight this enemy—everything from the fountain of

youth to the fountain of new medical breakthroughs. We exercise, take vitamins, buy the latest face serum, color our hair, surgically restructure, and hope that, before it’s too late, someone will discover “the cure” for this horrible disease called aging.

The reason we long for a fountain of youth is because we were created for it! Remember in the Garden—

the Tree of Life? What was its purpose? It gave Adam and Eve (and any who had access to it) immortality. The Tree of Life was the true Fountain of Youth—take of it and you will never die. So our hearts are actually right to long for immortality, but, like the song says about looking for love, we look for it in all the wrong places.

Where should we look?

1. Turn to Revelation 22:2. What is on either side of the river?

- What do the leaves do? What do you think that means?

Alexander explains,

In keeping with its designation, the tree of life produces fruit that gives immortality... Citizens of the new earth will experience and enjoy both wholeness of body and longevity of life. They will have a quality of life unrestricted by disability or disease. To live in the New Jerusalem is to experience life in all its fullness and vitality. It is to live as one has never lived before. It is to be in the prime of life, for the whole of one's life.<sup>60</sup>

Do you see what he is saying? He is saying the things we long and strive for—health, wholeness, longevity—will be ours because we will once again have access to the Tree of Life. We will have the complete healing of our minds, hearts, and bodies—no more depression, anxiety, shame, fear, hurt, pain, or any of the myriads of things that plague us.

2. Compare Genesis 2:8-10 with Revelation 22:1-5 (below).

- Underline the words that show the continuity between the tree in the garden and the tree in the new garden.

Genesis 2:8-10	Revelation 22:1-5
<p><sup>8</sup>And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup>And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. <sup>10</sup>A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.</p>	<p><sup>1</sup>Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup>through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup>No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup>They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.</p>

God's mercy compelled him to expel Adam and Eve from the first garden (Chapter 3, Day 5). If he hadn't, they would have lived in their new state of sin and misery forever. And God loves us too much to leave us in that state. In fact, this entire story of redemption is the story of the great lengths to which God goes in order to ensure that we don't live in that state forever but to bring us again into a state of holiness and then allow us to live forever in his presence. So the question becomes how will we have access to the tree of life again? And the answer is so beautiful I can barely take it in.

Acts 13:29 says, "And when they had carried out all that was written of him [Jesus], they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb." Acts 5:30 says, "The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree."

3. In these verses, what is the cross called?
4. Read Galatians 3:13. What happened because Christ was hanged on a tree?

It was mercy that kept us from access to the first tree of life and mercy that takes us back to the tree again—all through the work of another tree. This tree was an instrument of death, but the tree of death is what brings us again to the Tree of Life. That is the paradox of the gospel—life (ours) through death (Christ's). So, as we set our hopes on heaven, know for certain that the Lord is returning us to that which we were created for—life, health, and wholeness. He will wash away every sin; he will deliver us completely from the penalty, the power, and even the presence of sin; and then, and only then, give us access again to the Tree of Life.

## Take-Away

We will again have access to the tree of life through the cross of Christ.

## For Further Study

1. Read Revelation 2:7. This can sound like we are the ones who have to conquer. Based on what you know to be true about both the work of Christ as well as our union with him, how would you describe how you will be granted access to the Tree of Life?

- At the same time, God's children are called to persevere in their faith—through trials, persecution, suffering, and temptation. Are there areas of your life in which you currently need to be reminded of the joy set before you so that you can persevere?

## Scripture Memory

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Revelation 21:5

## Day 3: The Throne of God

“At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven,  
with one seated on the throne.”

Revelation 4:2

At the center of any kingdom is the palace, and at the center of any palace is the throne room, and the center of any throne room is the throne. But there is a vast difference between walking into a throne room with an empty throne and walking into one where the king is seated on the throne. That is because a kingdom, a palace, a throne room, and a throne are ultimately all about the one who sits on the throne. The kingdom of God is no different.

***A kingdom, a palace, a throne room,  
and a throne are ultimately all about  
the one who sits on the throne.***

In some ways, this story has been all about the throne—or, more accurately, the One seated on the throne. God has eternally been on a throne ruling over a kingdom that encompasses all of heaven and all of earth. But our access to that throne has varied. Our story began with Adam and Eve, the children of the King, having full access to their Father. They walked with him in broad daylight—so much so that they knew the sound of his footsteps. But when they were exiled from the garden, they no longer had access to the presence of the King. And, as our story moves forward from this point, we see that one of the glorious aspects of God’s redemption is that he works to grant access to his children again!

But the restoration of access has been gradual, progressive. Remember when God established the Tabernacle (Chapter 6, Day 2)? We briefly looked at how the Tabernacle was more than a mere tent in the desert; it was a palace for the King. The Holy of Holies served as the throne room of God where he chose to be enthroned above the cherubim (2 Sam. 6:2). And his glory filled the place! It is worth stopping for just a minute and remembering that this earthly throne room in no way meant that God’s eternal throne had been abdicated.

1. Read Psalm 103:19. Where is God’s throne?
2. Read Psalm 45:6. When was God’s throne established?

But God, in the Tabernacle (and later the Temple), was beginning the process of granting access to his throne room once again. However, it was far from full access. Do you remember all of the sacrifices, and

the rituals, and the offerings that had to be made? Do you remember that only one man, the high priest, could enter the Holy of Holies? And do you remember that this one man could only enter into the throne room once a year? That is a far cry from the access that Adam and Eve had in Eden. But it was the mercy of our King that prevented full access. We have to remember that coming into the presence of a king is a frightening thing—but coming into the presence of a holy, eternal, divine king is a terrifying thing.

3. Read Isaiah 6:1-3. Describe what Isaiah saw.

- Where was the Lord?

- What are some reasons the seraphim might have covered their faces and their feet?

- What were the seraphim calling out and why do you think they were saying this?

4. Read Isaiah 6:4-5. Describe Isaiah's response and what you think he was feeling.

The interjection “woe” is an utterance of fear, grief, anguish, and despair. Isaiah is crying out in shock that he is in a place that will completely undo him—he is sure he cannot see what he is seeing and live. It is the terror of the unholy coming into the presence of the Holy. And this is the terror we should feel at the thought that we will one day be ushered into the throne room, before the throne, and into the presence of the One seated on the throne. That is to say, it is the terror we should feel if we are ushered in on our own.

5. Read Philippians 2:5-8. Using the imagery of the throne room from Isaiah 6, describe what Christ removed, what he stepped down from, and what he left behind.

6. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Why did Jesus do what Philippians 2 says he did? What does that mean for us?

We cannot stand before the throne of God in the filth of our sin and misery. We would not survive. And yet our Father-King longs for us to be ushered back into his presence. So the rightful heir to the throne removed his crown, took off his royal robes, and stepped down from his throne. He took on our filth and gave us his purity. And those things he took off—his crown and his royal robes—he then puts on us so that he can freely bring us back into the throne room, before the throne, and ultimately, before the One seated on the throne. We can stand in that place only if we are clothed in Christ himself.

7. Read Revelation 7:9-17. Where are all the people standing (v. 9)?

- What are they wearing (v. 9)?

- What are they saying (v. 10, 12)?

- Describe how they must feel (vv. 15-17)?

You see, we no longer have to cry out “woe is me” if we are clothed in the pure, white robes of Christ. Instead, we will be free to stand before the throne of God—the place we were created to be—and do that which we were created to do—fall on our faces and worship so great a King.

But what about now? What access do we have today? Do we have more access than the Israelites worshipping in the Tabernacle or Temple? Are we to feel utter despair like Isaiah felt until we reach heaven?

**8. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. What is the throne called?**

- **How are we to draw near?**

- **What will we find when we do?**

We will one day be granted such full and complete access that I believe we will know what the footsteps of our King sound like—we will know the sound of his voice and even know the beauty of his face. But, until then, we have had a great and final high priest offer the great and final sacrifice. As a result, we can now draw near the throne of grace—and we will receive mercy and help from the One seated on the throne.

## Take-Away

God sits on an eternal throne and we will one day be ushered back into his throne room to stand before the One seated on that throne.

## For Further Study

1. Revelation 4:1-11.

- How is this similar to Isaiah's vision and what does that tell you about the reality of what each man saw?

- What is the response of the 24 elders?

- What do you think your response will be when you are ushered into the throne room and stand before the One seated on his throne?

2. Read Revelation 3:21. Where does Jesus say he will seat us?

- How does this tie into what God gave Adam and Eve in the garden (in what way does the ending tie into the beginning)?

## Scripture Memory

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Revelation 21:5



## Day 4: The Dwelling of God

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God”

Revelation 21:3

Out of all that was lost when Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, there is one loss that stands out as greater than the rest—Adam and Eve lost the ability to dwell with their Father and he with them. Early in this study we looked at the heart of God and his desire to be with his people: I will be your God, you will be my people, and I will dwell with you is the heartbeat of our God. This has been the main thread of our story. It began in the garden and has moved the entire story forward; the great dilemma in our story is that a holy and faithful God longs to dwell with his people; however they (we) are unholy and unfaithful and unable to solve or fix the dilemma. But God has been moving and acting, promising and fulfilling, and dying and rising again in order to accomplish his plan and solve the great dilemma. And, along the way, we have seen him progressively advance his goal.

We have seen how he moved near and dwelt with his people in the Tabernacle and the Temple; but that nearness required priests and sacrifices and cleansing. We have seen how he took on flesh and dwelt among his people; but that nearness was temporary. We have seen how he currently dwells in his people through his Holy Spirit; but this nearness is one we can't see. If the greatest loss of Eden was dwelling with God, how much more will the greatest gain of heaven be dwelling with him for all eternity?

*If the greatest loss of Eden was dwelling with God, how much more will the greatest gain of heaven be dwelling with him for all eternity?*

1. Read Leviticus 26:11-12. Take a minute to trace and explain the unfolding of the promise in verse 12 (“I will walk among you”) throughout the story. In other words, where in the story have you seen the promise be a reality? Name as many places as you can think of.
2. Read Revelation 21:22.
  - What does it mean that there is no Temple? (Go back and review Chapter 6, Day 2)?
  - What (or who) will our temple be?

The Tabernacle and the Temple were God's way of drawing near his people but, as Richter pointed out, they both draw attention to the "agony of redemptive history."<sup>61</sup> What she means is that both the Tabernacle and the Temple show God's people that he wants to dwell among them, but the complicated system of sacrifices, offerings, and rituals reminds God's people that he can't fully dwell with them.

As wonderful as the Tabernacle and the Temple were, they fell short of the fullness of the glory it will be to truly dwell with God. In the new heavens and the new earth, we will see him as he is (1 John 3:2). We will walk with him, again, in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). We will be able to speak with him face to face (Ex. 33:11; 1 Cor. 13:12). We have been given a foretaste of what that will be like in the incarnation of Jesus—he did walk with his people and sat with them face to face. Jesus said that anyone who had seen him had seen the Father (John 14:9). But that was just a foretaste because the disciples were still sinful people, the world was still under the curse, and the presence of the Lord was limited geographically and temporally. However, when we dwell with the Almighty and the Lamb in the new heavens and the new earth, our cleansing will be complete, our veils will have been lifted, and our access will be unlimited. Picture that for just a minute. Use your sanctified imagination to anticipate the reality that will be ours one day.

**3. Make a list of words that come to mind as you dream about what this will be like. Is there one aspect you most long for?**

4. Read Revelation 21:3.

- Describe the voice speaking.
- From where does it originate? What does that mean (reference chapter 2, Day 2 and chapter 10, Day 3)?

5. Read Revelation 21:4.

- Who will be wiping your tears away?
- What shall be no more?

- **In your own words, describe what these verses tell us about what life will be like when we once again dwell with our very good, very loving Father.**

- **In what ways is this verse the glorious conclusion we have been waiting for?**

And so the story ends, but what a story it is! From the garden to glory God has a plan. Richter says, “At the end of all things, God is once again with his people. Access to the Presence is restored. Adam has returned to the garden. Redemption has been accomplished.”<sup>62</sup> This story encompasses all of creation and every life that has ever been. And, at the same time, the Author of this story knows every hair on your head. He treasures you, made you with a purpose, loves you, and is longing to dwell fully with you one day and for all time. He is working all things together for your good and the good of his people. And he is calling you to take your place in the story. My prayer is that, as we have studied this grand drama that holds together from beginning to end, you and I will rest more in the fact that the same Author holds our stories together from beginning to end and we will live more faithfully to the plan of God. He is working all things together for our good and his glory. And he is accomplishing the great redemption that will one day reunite us in his presence—we will again dwell with our God. Hallelujah! What a Savior; what a story.

## Take-Away

The story is not over until we are once again dwelling with God and he with us.

## For Further Study

A question that has come up numerous times, even this week as I’ve been thinking and writing about heaven is this, “So where is heaven? If it is not going to be a totally new place, where is it now? Where should we fix our eyes and set our hope?” I find Williams, once again, to be most helpful:

At present, because Christ is ascended to the Father in heaven, heaven is the sphere of the present fulfillment of the promise of salvation. Andrew Lincoln appropriately writes, “Because Christ has been exalted to heaven, heaven rather than earth temporarily provides the chief focus for salvation and for the believer’s orientation until Christ’s coming from heaven when salvation will then embrace heaven and earth ... This earth is not our home until Jesus comes, brings heaven with him, and makes all things new.”<sup>63</sup>

Remember, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). And what does John see coming down? Nothing less than the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21:1-2). So where is heaven? It is the place where God the Father and God the Son sit enthroned—because heaven is all about them. For now, heaven is the place where they currently sit. But one day that throne and that kingdom will come down and encompass both heaven and earth.

1. Use your sanctified imagination to write a description of what your life might be like on the new earth.

## Scripture Memory

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Revelation 21:5

## Day 5: Putting It All Together

Think back to the young man we talked about in the introduction, the one who didn’t think *The Passion* had much of a plot. How would/could you now answer him?

1. Take some time to make a list of what you now see as the main parts to this story of redemption (flip back through the study to make sure you get them all!).

**2. Use this list to write an answer to the following questions:**

- **Why do I need Jesus?**

- **What is Christianity all about?**

## Scripture Memory

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Revelation 21:5

## Points to Remember from Chapter 10

1. The story of our redemption is one story that stretches from the garden to the new heavens and the new earth.
2. All that was good and right in the garden will be ours again including the tree of life, access to the throne room, and intimacy with the One seated on the throne.
3. The story of the Bible is one plot line—God is redeeming and restoring his creation.
4. From the garden to glory, our God is a God to be worshipped and adored.

## Memory Verses

2 Peter 1:21:

Genesis 1:31:

Genesis 3:15:

Leviticus 26:12:

Exodus 19:5-6a:

2 Samuel 7:16:

Matthew 1:23:

Acts 4:12:

Matthew 28:18-20:

Revelation 21:5:





## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2005), p. 12.
- <sup>2</sup>Michael D. Williams, Covenant Theology, Covenant Theological Seminary, Fall 2010.
- <sup>3</sup>Timothy J. Keller, *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (New York, N.Y.: Dutton Redeemer, 2011), p. 21.
- <sup>4</sup>Collins, C John. *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2003), p. 185.
- <sup>5</sup>Tim Keller, Twitter post, February 23, 2015, <https://twitter.com/timkellernyc/status/569890726349307904>.
- <sup>6</sup>Collins, C John. *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R., 2006), p. 164.
- <sup>7</sup>Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry Into the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), p. 103.
- <sup>8</sup>G.K. Beale, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2014), p. 30.
- <sup>9</sup>Collins, *Science and Faith*, pp. 124-32.
- <sup>10</sup>Williams, *Far as the Curse*, 64.
- <sup>11</sup>Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 104.
- <sup>12</sup>C John Collins, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2011), p. 55.
- <sup>13</sup>Collins, *Genesis*, 1-4,153 fn16.
- <sup>14</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary On the Old Testament*, 67.
- <sup>15</sup>Williams, *Far as the Curse*, xiv.
- <sup>16</sup>Williams, *Far as the Curse*, 88.
- <sup>17</sup>Williams, *Far as the Curse*, 114-15.
- <sup>18</sup>Williams, *Far as the Curse*, 95.
- <sup>19</sup>Williams, *Far as the Curse*, 22.
- <sup>20</sup>Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 174.
- <sup>21</sup>Williams, *Far as the Curse*, 34.
- <sup>22</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 386.
- <sup>23</sup>T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), p. 15.
- <sup>24</sup>Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 182.
- <sup>25</sup>Jay Sklar, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 3, Leviticus: an Introduction and*

*Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014), 37.

<sup>26</sup>Williams, *Far as the Curse*, 180.

<sup>27</sup>Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 201.

<sup>28</sup>Christopher J H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995), 12.

<sup>29</sup>Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 203.

<sup>30</sup>Matthew 1:23. English Standard Version.

<sup>31</sup>Collins argues that the promise of Genesis 3:15 is a “promise of a specific human who will do battle with the evil power that spoke through the serpent, and at cost to himself will defeat the enemy, for the sake of humans (that is, not for himself).” C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2006), p. 156.

<sup>32</sup>Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012), p. 470

<sup>33</sup>Peterson, *Salvation*, 472.

<sup>34</sup>Peterson, *Salvation*, 474.

<sup>35</sup>Peterson, *Salvation*, 274

<sup>36</sup>Sklar, *Leviticus*, 27-28.

<sup>37</sup>Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: a Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 5.

<sup>38</sup>These thoughts are taken from a sermon preached by Dr. Jay Sklar at Covenant Theological Seminary on April 28, 2011.

<sup>39</sup>Peterson, *Salvation*, 13.

<sup>40</sup>Peterson, *Salvation*, 64.

<sup>41</sup>Peterson, *Salvation*, 86.

<sup>42</sup>Peterson, *Salvation*, 152.

<sup>43</sup>Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit, Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), p. 57.

<sup>45</sup>Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 2-3.

<sup>46</sup>William, “Theology as Witness,” 14.

<sup>47</sup>Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 56.

<sup>48</sup>Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 213.

<sup>49</sup>D. A. Carson and G. K. Beale, eds., *Commentary On the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Nottingham: Baker Academic, 2007), 844, 846.

<sup>50</sup>Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2011), p. 23.

<sup>51</sup>Christopher J H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), pp. 200-01.

- <sup>52</sup>Wright, *The Mission of God*, 201.
- <sup>53</sup>Wright, *The Mission of God*, 213-14.
- <sup>54</sup>Wright, *The Mission of God*, 221.
- <sup>55</sup>Wright, *The Mission of God*, 336.
- <sup>56</sup>Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 222.
- <sup>57</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 280-281.
- <sup>58</sup>Williams, *Far as the Curse*, 281-88.
- <sup>59</sup>Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1985), p. 58.
- <sup>60</sup>Randy C. Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2004), p. 88.
- <sup>61</sup>Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 156.
- <sup>62</sup>Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 182.
- <sup>63</sup>Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 224.
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Satan will make every effort to entangle men and women in the rat race; this drive to acquire and achieve pushes them beyond their limits and results in intense anxiety. If Satan can tempt people to desire rewards, riches, and recognition—vanities—his battle for souls is half over. However, when dealing with the sincere Christian who is determined to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” Satan will use another device. He will tempt the believer to doubt God and his ability to grant success and fulfillment in the Christian walk.

Sometimes he tries to give us a “grasshopper complex.” Ten of the twelve spies who were sent to check out the new land after the Jewish captivity came back with a negative report. “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.” And later, “We seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them” (Num. 13:31-33).

Satan has favorite lines he uses to give us a grasshopper complex. “The calling of the Christian life is too great,” he whispers, “There are too many obligations and obstacles,” “God expects too much,” “The Christian life is impossible,” “I am too small and helpless.”

If these lines are not enough, Satan will sometimes help escort a person, either bodily or in his imagination, to some spot where he can view the glitter and glamour of the world. Just as when Satan tempted Christ, leading him up to a high mountain to show him the wealth of the world (Matt. 4:8), this is simply the old carrot trick. Satan will dangle the prize in front of our nose trying to provoke a chase. Then, using one of his most subtle tricks, he may even tape a Scripture verse to the carrot.

One way or another, Satan will use his limited power to trip the Christian. For whether we call it grasshoppers or carrots, we can’t keep our eyes on Christ and the world at the same time. The apostle John said it well:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:15-17).

Christ’s teaching on this subject is clear. Having warned his listeners about the danger of pride (Matt. 6:16-18), Jesus directs their attention to an ungodly love of money. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (vv. 19-21). The danger is evident. If hope, health, and hap-

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piness are based on what money can buy and accomplish, the results are never lasting. Why? If someone on the outside doesn't covet and steal our possessions, moth and decay will wreck them from within.

I'll never forget a conversation I had with the construction foreman when my husband and I were building our dream home years ago. I must have offered some suggestions about the insulation or protective treatment for the house, because this Christian man turned to me, looked me in the eye and said, "Remember, a lizard can be caught with the hand, yet it is found in kings' palaces" (Prov. 30:28 NIV).

After warning against choosing this world's riches as our reward, Christ draws his listener's thinking to something far better. Eternal life with all of its riches and joys is not subject to decay from within or theft from without. Treasures laid up in heaven are under God's care. He will keep them safe for us. In Peter's first letter to the scattered Christians of his day he said, "According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-4).

### Life and Death

If, during our entire lifetime, we should attend only one funeral and view only one corpse in a casket, we would make a profound observation: the corpse has no use for money and no cause for pride. Any treasure he has accumulated is left behind. Any recognition is soon forgotten. And yet, at death, the believer's soul is immediately transported to heaven where the Savior greets them. Christ welcomes his child to a prepared room where he or she will continue to live forever in the presence and praise of the King.

When the apostle Paul thought about the glories of heaven he made a confession to the Christians at Philippi: "I am hard pressed between the two [life and death]. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Phil. 1:23). Paul said he wanted Christ exalted in his body, whether by life or by death. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (v. 21).

Like Paul, you and I have no way of knowing when God will take us home to heaven, but while we remain on earth we can follow the instructions he gave the Romans. Considering the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, and knowing that "from him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom. 11:36), Paul urged his dear brothers in Christ "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (12:1-2).

We offer our bodies as living sacrifices as we voluntarily devote them to God's service. He offered his body as an atonement for our sins. Our bodies are but a free-will offering, dedicated to his use and honor. This dedication is possible only because Christ resides in our hearts.

Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:34-35). He also said, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45).

Not long after my husband and I married I saved this verse by an anonymous writer: "No service in itself is small. None great though earth it fill. Yet that is small which seeks its own but great that does God's will."

Several years ago I clipped the following from our church bulletin:

Father, where shall I work today?  
And my love flowed warm and free.  
Then he pointed me toward a tiny spot  
And said, "Tend that for me."  
I answered quickly, "Oh, no, not that!  
Why no one would see,

No matter how well my work was done,  
In that little place for Thee.”  
And the word he spoke, it was not stern,  
He answered me tenderly:  
“Ah, little one, search that heart of thine;  
Art thou working for them or Me?”  
Nazareth was a little place  
And so was Galilee.

As we offer holy and pure lives up to God as a service of worship, we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This renewal is a total and constant offering of ourselves to the Holy Spirit. In doing this we continue to die to sin and live to righteousness. In short, it is the process of sanctification. We are being transformed into Christ-likeness. The same idea is expressed in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

As you and I yield to the Holy Spirit and his transforming power we are promised much fruit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (Gal. 5:22-23). Can a Christian possess all of these qualities or fruit and still be filled with anxiety? Of course not. Maybe we should consider why.

Love - An anxious person is overcome with thoughts of self. When self concerns fill the mind it is difficult, if not impossible, to show love to others.

Joy - An anxious person moans, complains, pouts or sulks over life's difficulties. Consumed by burdens, the anxious person experiences little joy.

Peace - An anxious person runs back and forth through the world searching for an answer or an escape from the anxiety and nervousness. However, since he or she is out of fellowship with God, there is no peace; only worry and confusion.

Patience - An anxious person is often hurried and can act too quickly when making a judgment or decision. This restlessness and intolerance does nothing to attract friends to the individual or to Christ.

Kindness - An anxious person is often so frustrated with his or her own problems that no attention or time is given to the needs of others. Filled with selfish thoughts, this person rarely listens to others and may be annoyed when they ask for advice or help.

Goodness - An anxious person may possess integrity in moral life yet have such a fixed thought pattern of self interest that thoughtfulness and consideration are either lacking or absent in everyday living.

Faithfulness - An anxious person may begin to drift out of fellowship with God. Neglecting the Word and prayer only leads the individual into more anxiety and unhappiness.

Gentleness - An anxious person comes across as abrasive, harsh, or irritable. Even when efforts are made to be polite others can sense the worry and nervousness from facial expressions and tone of voice.

Self-control - An anxious person has a problem with restraint and self-discipline. Indulgent, this individual often seeks pleasure and possessions more than grace, growth, and godliness.

### Yet There is Hope

The Christian can possess and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit because God has promised it. Again, hope is near because God is near. Christ reminds us, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6). The promise is also offered in John 7:37-38: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

If our bodies need physical water to stay healthy, surely we need Christ, the living water, far more. But we must thirst, we must come, and we must drink. As we do this, we experience exactly what Paul said we

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would, after he gave his definition of the fruit of the Spirit: “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal. 5:22, 24-26). By crucifying the flesh and walking by the Spirit, we drop out of the rat race.

#### How to Be a Dropout

Admit - You have been caught up in the world: “All that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world” (1 John 2:16).

Repent - The driving force of the rat race will cause you to take your eyes off Jesus. Remember: Satan drives, but Jesus leads. Repent and claim Christ’s promise, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Commit - James writes to the converted Jews, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28). Promise today to follow and obey your Shepherd. Christ not only leads you but holds you in his hands.

#### Other Voices

“Christ is not about trying harder; it means transferring our trust away from ourselves and resting in him.”  
Tim Keller

“We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.” Winston Churchill

#### Hymns

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” by Isaac Watts

“What a Friend We Have in Jesus” by Joseph Scriven

Do you look radiant today? If not, you can.

Not long ago, I found a secret for a radiant face and I found it in Scripture: “I sought the Lord, and he

answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed” (Ps. 34:4-5).

You and I could sign up for almost any course in poise, charm, or beauty and yet not find an answer this profound. No charm or make-over can erase the fears and worries in our life, and these anxieties always show in our face.

But “Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.” Our problems come when we look (or stare) at our fears and then turn to ourselves or other people for the answers. Yet, David wrote, “I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.”

I had a friend in high school who was endowed with striking physical features. Short, bouncy, red hair framed an almost pixie face. Blue-green eyes with curly lashes charmed boys, friends, teachers, or anyone she met. Marge (not her real name) seemed to have life by the ears. When I attended her wedding soon after college I thought, “Now this is a happily-ever-after story if I ever saw one.” But, like many high school relationships or acquaintances, I knew nothing about Marge’s spiritual situation. Years passed and all I heard were statements like, “Marge’s life is in trouble.” “Did you know Marge has a problem with alcohol and drugs?” “Marge has gotten a divorce. Her husband has the children.” Once I saw Marge at a high school reunion but hardly recognized her. The pixie face appeared drawn and haggard. Her voice had no inflection and every sentence tapered off into a dull monotone.

I was the only classmate who attended her graveside service several years later. Marge died at the age of forty-five and yet I fear she never really lived at all. My mind played an “if only” game as I stood by her grave. “If only Marge had known the joy of life in Christ. If only she could have trusted him as Savior and sought him to deliver her from all her fears.”

### Optimism is Infectious

In contrast, my husband had an aunt who was still radiant in her nineties. If wrinkles can glow, hers did. Aunt Hazel had a way of making everyone feel like a special object of love. Years ago someone gave her a needlepoint that fit her perfectly. It read, “One day I met a man who didn’t have a smile so I gave him one.” From playing with children, to teasing a bride and groom, or writing a letter to a friend in a nursing home, Hazel’s optimism remained infectious. Her ninety-plus eyes held a sparkle that came from something deep inside. Hazel knew the Lord and was familiar with his strength. This strength carried her through the death of two husbands, a daughter’s stroke, two brothers’ serious problems, and other situations that many would consider devastating. When I think of her I am often reminded of Proverbs 15:15, “The cheerful heart has a continual feast”(NIV).

Some women only feel beautiful when their make-up and hair is perfect, or when they are wearing a designer outfit. If they have recently shed a few pounds, so much the better. They feel radiant—at least for a few hours. But Peter, a once impulsive man who was likely given to first impressions, gave this instruction to women: “Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious” (1 Peter 3:3-4). Does this mean Christian women are never to wear nice clothes or jewelry; never to cut or style their hair? Of course not. The danger lies in our preoccupation with these things.

The media does nothing to discourage this obsession with physical appearance. To make matters worse, ninety pound nineteen-year-olds seem to be the norm. It is likely that women of every generation have felt the same temptation to follow the trends of their day. Not long ago I did a study on the life of Sarah, Abraham’s wife. Do you remember Sarah’s problem? She was beautiful. Sarah was so beautiful that it frightened Abraham. Once, while experiencing a severe famine in their land, Abraham and Sarah decided to move to Egypt. Just before entering the country, Abraham took her aside and said, “I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that



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my life may be spared for your sake” (Gen. 12:11-13).

### Real Beauty

If this story were a news headline it might read, “President Falls for Middle-Aged Woman,” or in this case, Pharaoh. Something can be learned from her story.

First, Sarah was beautiful on the outside and probably enhanced this beauty with clothing and jewelry.

Second, and more important, is that although she may have felt Abraham’s instruction was unwise, Sarah submitted. Referring back to Peter’s letter, this characteristic should be admired more than beauty. Peter wrote, “Let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious” (1 Peter 3:4). He goes on to say, “For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening” (1 Peter 3:5-6).

While our wardrobe and jewelry fade and go out of style, you and I can wear one ornament that will last forever: the grace of God. The longer we wear it, the brighter and better it becomes. Whether nineteen or ninety-one, single or married, the woman who looks to the Lord is radiant!

The reverse is also true. Anyone without the quiet and gentle spirit of Christ and who fails to submit to him as Christ submitted to the Father is void of this radiance. Physical attractiveness pales when there is no beauty in the soul.

Once, when Bill and I were on vacation, we stopped at a quaint restaurant for dinner. After the hostess placed us at a table I noticed the two women beside us. Although they were both attractive, one looked as if she had just stepped off the stage of the Miss World Pageant. This young woman had the biggest, most penetrating eyes I’ve ever seen and her lashes and dark brows framed a rose-kissed face. I wondered if either of us would be able to take our eyes off this perfect specimen of beauty.

As it turned out, we did have trouble concentrating on our order, because soon after we sat down we began to hear some of the foulest conversation I’ve ever happened upon. The woman spoke of her illicit love life without shame and her vocabulary made us both blush. In a matter of moments her beauty and intrigue faded. All we could hear or see was the vile out-pouring of her soul.

Although this may be an extreme example, it emphasizes the importance of developing inner as well as outer beauty. Many of us may feel we don’t possess obvious external beauty and that we can’t afford a bag of the latest beauty products. However, we can define and maximize our most attractive features. Most women don’t need a hard push in this direction when we consider the popularity of the courses and counseling sessions available in color coordination and makeovers. What is needed is a stronger emphasis on beauty secrets for the soul.

With God’s help, the beauty of Jesus Christ can shine in us wherever we go. Writing to the Christians in Corinth, Paul said, “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing...” (2 Cor. 2:15). Of course, not everyone will appreciate our Christ-like qualities, but God often uses them to encourage the believer, or convict the unbeliever of his or her sin. As for those who are perishing, they will be without excuse because they refused the light made available to them through us, other believers, general revelation, and the Word of God.

How can the aroma and beauty of Christ be part of your life, and mine? Colossians 3:12-17 gives us our dress for success.

Clothe yourself with:

- Compassion: sensitivity and mercy
- Kindness: reconciliation with God and mankind.
- Humility: Self-sacrifice and submission

- Meekness: Mildness, consideration and mercy
- Patience: Endurance and self-control
- Forgiveness: Grace and pardon
- Love: Jesus Christ operating in me
- Thankfulness: Gratitude and appreciation

How to obtain this clothing: (vv. 15-16)

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...”

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...”

Finally:

“...Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, [not in the name of a well-known, designer label] giving thanks to God the Father through him” (v. 17).

After we have “dressed for success,” we must add a few additional pieces to our wardrobe. In Ephesians 6:14-20 Paul says they are necessary if we are to face the world and Satan (adapted from a talk by Suzy Thetford):

Belt/Girdle - The girdle is seldom worn today, yet other pieces of control underwear do hold in loose parts. Is God himself holding my life together?

Vest/Breastplate - Covering my heart like a vest, God’s breastplate represents the righteousness and protection God gives me in the person of Christ.

Footwear/Shoes - Shoes are selected according to particular weather conditions and job descriptions. Like shoes, the Gospel of God’s peace will guard my steps in this world. Enduring every rough temptation and trial, they will also take me safely to heaven.

Coat/Shield - As a plastic raincoat would do me little good in severe weather, so any protection I choose other than God’s shield of faith is useless. God himself gives me faith and this is the only covering and protection I need against Satan. With it I can withstand the rains, hailstorms and tornadoes of this world.

Hat/Helmet - Satan would attack my mind, having me doubt my salvation. He tempts me daily to the allurements of this world. I need a head covering: God’s helmet of salvation.

Bible/Sword - The other parts of my outfit are to defend or protect me from attack. God’s Word is my offensive weapon, serving as a sword. If a sword is of no value in a scabbard my Bible won’t be much help sitting on the coffee table. But when I have the Word with me, even hidden in my heart, I can apply it correctly and effectively in every anxious situation.

Umbrella/Prayer - As an umbrella covers all my other preparation and dressing, so prayer envelops every situation and endeavor for as long as I live. I will also pray for others, asking for God’s umbrella of grace to cover them, too.

At this point someone might be thinking, I understand the importance of this spiritual dress but, frankly, my biggest problem is accepting the aging process. I feel all used up. I hate this lagging muscle tone, extra weight, and most of all, the wrinkles. Let’s be practical. Is this normal, or am I vain?

Recently, when I looked in the mirror and found some new furrows in my forehead I thought again of Aunt Hazel. When Bill and I were newlyweds and Hazel was knee-deep in middle age, she related this little story. One day while Hazel was sitting at her vanity applying make-up she noticed her granddaughter watching her intently.

“Grandma,” Jennifer asked. “Why are you patting all of that powder on your face? Is it to cover up the cracks?”

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“Yes, you’re exactly right,” Hazel responded to Jennifer, and now to us. “I’m filling in a few cracks.”

“Aren’t children observant?” Hazel’s eyes twinkled. Then, as I looked into her long-loving eyes, I seemed to hear them say, “Yes, I’m pleased to have the powder but even more glad I’m here to enjoy my grandchildren. Life is good at every age.”

In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Paul said, “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Another passage I like to read about aging is in Proverbs. Referring to an ideal woman, the writer states, “Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come” (31:25). Two other versions read, “Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she smiles at the future” (ASV) and “She is a woman of strength and dignity, and has no fear of old age” (LB).

Is it possible for you and me to laugh at the days to come, smile at the future and have no fear of old age? Absolutely. The woman in Proverbs not only takes care of her immediate household (vv. 1-19, 21-23, 27-29), but “She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy” (v. 20). And verse 26 says, “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.” She is someone who is interested in proper nutrition for herself and her family. She keeps fit through exercise and is involved with other people. The Proverbs woman is physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually adjusted and therefore prepared for her older years, too. If God allows her to live a long life, she knows He will still have a purpose and plan for her. She does not feel used up but waits with anticipation to see how God will use her.

How does this woman manage to excel in so many areas of life? It’s certainly not her beauty and charm alone, because verse 30 says, “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”

When I was a child, a popular expression among women was “growing old gracefully.” How silly, I thought; no one wants to grow old. Although I couldn’t pronounce words like “inevitable” or “stoicism,” I suppose I knew old age was bound to come and thought everyone had to grin and bear it.

Today, I realize “growing old gracefully” is significant. You and I can have no fear of old age or anything else if we have a proper dependence on, and awe and respect for, the Lord. We can move into each new stage of life with the beautiful grace and radiance of our Savior. His strength and dignity can shine through us every single day.

In closing, it might be helpful to address a final area of anxiety for the aging Christian. Senior adults are often concerned about their financial needs and declining health. Many are on a fixed income and are afraid an illness or hospitalization would deplete their financial reserve. When this is an issue and the individual has done all he or she can to protect loved ones, comfort and help can be found in passages like Isaiah 46:4: “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you”(NIV).

Should we need one more “I will...” we can find it in Hebrews 13:5: “He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

#### Other Voices

“We all know mirrors don’t lie ... I’m just grateful that they don’t laugh.” Angela Whitten

“You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.” C.S. Lewis

“There is something in each of us that would rather look good than be good.” Anonymous

“The longer I live the more beautiful life becomes.” Frank Lloyd Wright

“Wrinkles should merely indicate where the smiles have been.” Mark Twain

Hymns

“Fairest Lord Jesus” translated by Joseph Seiss

“Rock of Ages” by Augustus Toplady

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The headline read: “Police can find no reason for this suicide. The man was unmarried.”

Although we may chuckle at the headline error, many people do feel that marriage is plagued with anxiety and problems. As a result, some postpone or even reject marriage with the “It just isn’t worth it” attitude. Many too readily divorce.

God has a different idea for marriage. Later, we will look at how a godly marriage can show the world a great deal about the Christian life.

From the beginning, God planned to give Adam a wife, but he wanted Adam to see his need for a partner. Picture Adam there in Eden. He had the good life: delicious food, perfect weather, a manicured lawn, flowers, trees, birds, and animals to enjoy. What more could a guy want? God knew. “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’” (Gen. 2:18).

God could have said, “Watch, Adam. I’ll show you how I made you.” No, God wanted this person to be even more of a mystery. So, performing the first surgery and using the first anesthesia, God put Adam to sleep. Taking a part of his body, God shaped a perfect lady for this man, a partner and helper beyond comparison. Adam’s reaction? It must have been, “Wow!” In Genesis 2:23 we read, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Adam would never forget God’s method, his object lesson or its purpose: love, oneness, mystery. This is marriage. In Mark 10, the Pharisees questioned Jesus about divorce, saying, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ [Gen. 2:24] So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mark 10:4-9). Unlike the world, this commitment and faithfulness aren’t designed with a shelf life. When Paul wrote God’s instructions to husbands and wives in Ephesus, he also quoted the passage about being united as one flesh. He compared this union to that of Christ and the church. Dying to self, husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved us. They must daily give up their lives for the well being and nurture of their wives. In turn, recognizing the husband as her head, or leader, the wife is to love and submit to her husband as the church is to love and submit to Christ. In Ephesians 5:22, Paul instructs, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”

Marriage is designed to be a picture of the gospel. When a husband and wife enter into the covenant of marriage, they have an opportunity to live out the drama of salvation. Their union is ordained and structured by God to reflect His image, glory, and unity. Even the intimacy of marriage reflects the oneness of the Trinity.

### Christ, Our Model

Enlarging on this theme, we can make two statements concerning the call and duty in marriage. Any man who understands, believes, appreciates, and obeys the Lord can, and will, be a good husband. The loving leadership and sacrifice of Christ will be his model. In the same way, any woman who understands, believes, appreciates, and obeys the Lord Jesus can and will be a good wife. Her loving submission to Christ will be her model in the home.

If a marriage is full of anxiety it is usually because both partners do not understand, believe, appreciate, and obey the Lord Jesus. However, a marriage can be restored and become anxiety-free if the husband and wife admit their failure to both God and their partner. When they are willing to confess and repent the marriage can be healed. At this point, we need to take a closer look at several problem areas in marriage. Someone has said, “It is well to remember that a misplaced ‘I’ can transform the marital relationship into a martial one.” The misplaced “I” or “me first” attitude is probably the number one reason for troubled marriages today. Is anyone saying, “Yes, that’s my husband’s hang-up all right. He’s centered on the big ‘I.’” Or, “He never thinks to call me when he’s running late. Doesn’t he know my dinner will be ruined?” Although this may sound like a minor irritation, perhaps we can recognize the difficulty. I can. It’s taken

straight from our own DuBose “I file.”

On the other hand, Bill and I realize neither of us is perfect, and we are trying to accept, rather than magnify, those weak areas in our lives—areas where God is still working. As partners, one of our responsibilities is to help each other become more Christ-like. While God is working in our mate’s life it might be wise to remember a little story. I call it the dandelion dilemma: It seems a man who took great pride in his lawn developed a crop of dandelions, and could not get rid of them. Finally, he wrote the Department of Agriculture, enumerating all the things he had tried and ended his letter with, “What shall I do now?” In due course, they replied, “We suggest you learn to love them.”

Sometimes Bill and I walk through our yard and he asks me to name the different flowers in the beds around the house. We enjoy comparing sizes, shapes, growth rates, and colors. Several days may pass and we go through the same routine of naming the flowers. I don’t think he would recognize a dandelion if he saw one. One thing is certain: Bill doesn’t criticize me—to my face or in front of other people. Our flower beds only have a few roses; Bill never forgets to acknowledge and enjoy them. Maybe he’s looking for the few roses in my life instead of the many dandelions.

Since we all suffer with “big T syndrome,” it is helpful to take a long look at Philippians 1:27 and chapter 2. In Philippians 1:27 Paul instructs, “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel ...” (NIV). Although Paul is not addressing the subject of marriage in this passage, what better way to demonstrate this oneness of faith and practice than in the marriage relationship? As you and I lead a life of oneness with other believers (especially our mates) this will be an example to the church and the world. Our oneness and unity in marriage will be a picture of the oneness between Christ and the church, his bride.

In Philippians 2:1-11, titled “Christ’s Example of Humility” in the English Standard Version, Paul continues to show the believers how to apply their faith in daily living. To paraphrase, he tells them, “You experience communion with God and Christ by the Spirit. You receive encouragement and comfort from His love. Surely, you find friendship and fellowship with Jesus every day. Your walk with God is developing tenderness and compassion within you.” If this is true, Paul says, “Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (vv. 2-4). In other words, eradicate selfishness and conceit; apply unity, oneness, and self-denial.

### Unity Can Happen

If all of this seems like a tall order, especially as we try to apply it to our marriages, we should read on. Paul tells us exactly how this unity can be accomplished. Cultivate this attitude:

[It] should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil.2: 5-11, NIV).

In the King James Version we read, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...” Think of it! The attitude or mind of Christ is opened to us. Looking into the mind and thoughts of Christ should not be simply to satisfy our curiosity but to reform our lives. As we look into the very heart and mind of



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Christ we see one who inwardly and outwardly conformed to the nature of God himself. Both God and man, we see Jesus' perfect behavior and divine glory on the outside, perfect attributes on the inside. But we are not to look and turn away. As believers, all of our attitudes and actions are to be patterned after the Lord. As we spend time with him we will begin to think his thoughts after him and our lives will exemplify Christ-likeness. In other words, as other people (especially our spouses) observe us on the outside and get to know us on the inside we should remind them of Christ Jesus.

Take a moment to stop and read this description in Philippians 1:27 and Philippians 2. In fact, if you and your husband are going through a particularly anxious time right now, take time to study this passage together. If he is unable or unwilling to discuss it with you, apply the principles to yourself. As you begin to model your life after Christ, your husband is bound to notice. You may even begin to see some changes in him, too.

Another pertinent passage is Ephesians 4:29-5:1:

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

The hardest place to apply these directions, and most easily overlooked, is in the home. And yet, there are specific "let go" and "hold on" lists. Let go of: foul conversation, harshness, fretting and fuming, quarreling and fighting, backbiting, and spitefulness. Hold on to: helpful and encouraging words (desiring to meet my husband's needs), kindness, compassion, and forgiveness.

### Imitate Christ

In summary, imitate Jesus Christ. Treat your husband the way Christ has treated you.

The apostle Peter gives some precise directions if we are to find peace in our homes, or any other area of life. He quotes a portion of Psalm 34:12-1: "Let him seek peace and pursue it" (1 Peter 3:11). Let's look at the context.

After giving instructions to wives and husbands in the beginning of chapter three, Peter writes,

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it (1 Peter 3:8-11).

Did you notice the sequence in the last sentence? Before you and I can seek peace and pursue it, we must turn from evil and do good. There is no truth in the statement, "Love is never having to say you're sorry." When you and I sin against our mates, or anyone else, Scripture calls us to turn, confess, and repent. "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Will the other person (in this case, our mate) also confess their sin, repenting to God and to us? We have no guarantees. We do, however, have a guarantee from God. When we confess our contribution to the problem and our guilt before God, the promise is clear: "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and

cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” No matter how dirty, rejected, and guilty we may feel because of our failures, God says he will make us clean.

When the prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin, David didn’t go on the defensive or try to justify himself. Guilty of both adultery and murder, he fell on the mercy of God. Claiming God’s unfailing love and compassion, David prayed,

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin ... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow ... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me ... Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you (Ps. 51:2, 7, 10, 12-13).

David asked God to forgive, cleanse, restore, and make him fruitful. In concluding his prayer, David said he would offer the sacrifice God requires from all of His children: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17).

To repent, then, is to be broken. It is a breaking with pride and selfishness. It is a breaking of the heart, not in despair, but in sorrow for the wrong. The broken heart is bare and open before its Maker. It is willing to be taken and shaped by God and His Word. It is ready, at last, to live in fellowship and obedience. Right now, there is only one person who knows the condition of your heart. If there is pain, anxiety and bitterness, you may need to do what David did: take it to God. Yes, take all of it. Like David, you cannot resurrect a dead man or erase the hurt and damage you may have caused in another’s life, but you and I can claim the unfailing love and compassion of God. We can have a broken and repentant heart. We can be restored to a rich and fruitful life. God can revive your fellowship with him and he can revive your marriage.

#### Other Voices

“Marriage is the relationship in which one is always right and the other is the husband.” Anonymous

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my rock and my redeemer” (Ps. 19:14).

“When couples love God first they love each other better.” Brela DelaHoussaye

“Marry someone who makes you fall in love with God every single day.” JCLU Forever

#### Hymn

“May the Mind of Christ, My Savior” by Kate Wilkinson



## Family Fears

Rearing children is like a rollercoaster ride. It's up and down; it's exciting and scary; it's only around once; it's over. As parents, you and I have about twenty years to invest in the lives of our children. Although twenty years may represent a quarter of our lives, when compared with eternity, we know it's a short time. When our two daughters were small, I remember sitting next to some church friends in a local cafe. Several years before, these Christian parents received word that their eighteen-year-old daughter had died suddenly in her college dormitory. As we ate our meal they asked about our girls. When we responded with a health report and how much they had grown the father said, "Spend time with those girls. Enjoy them. Before you can read two newspapers they will be grown-up and gone."

I'll never forget our friend's remark. I believe he understood the basic problem in homes today. If we are not reading newspapers, we are tapping our smart phones, texting, scrolling through Facebook, e-mailing, or a multitude of other things that crowd out family time. When these activities, our recreation, or even our jobs are given top priority, it gives anxiety a chance to thrive, and the family will suffer. People can replace us at work, but our kids get only one mother and father. It doesn't take a degree in child or adolescent psychology to recognize an important fact: if you and I want a peaceful Christian home, a home with a minimum of anxiety and stress, we must take inventory, plan, and set goals.

Someone might say, "Hello. Did you forget this is the 21st century? It's a different world. We have to cope with all of these extras bombarding our lives." But we should respond with Jesus' words:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:15-17).

As parents, our primary role is to love and lean on the Lord; learn from him, and then, as imperfect as it will be, lead our children to him. As we go about everyday living, our children need to see us applying the gospel to decisions, problems, and brokenness. God will become real to us and to them as we teach them to love the Savior who loved them first and who remains a guide through the hard times.

If all of this is true, and it is, Christian child-rearing cannot begin too early. In fact, it can begin before the birth of the first child. Our attitude should be like Solomon's. When Solomon became king, he told God he was like a little child and didn't know how to carry out his duties or govern all the people. He asked God to give him a discerning heart so he could distinguish between right and wrong. Pleased with Solomon's desires and his humility, God granted his request and blessed Solomon with abundant wisdom. If we, Christian parents, will approach our task in this spirit, we will be amazed by God's answers and blessings. Years ago I read a moving story about a family who began Christian training in their home before their daughter was two years old. On her second Christmas the mother gave her an unusual gift. It was an arrangement of beautiful handmade posters cut from old Sunday school materials and calendars. In addition to cut-outs of animals and babies, she made a large poster carefully arranged and numbered to portray the life of Christ. These pictures represented the major events of Christ's life from birth to His resurrection

and ascension. On Christmas morning the Jesus poster was her favorite gift.

Later, the poster was hung along the wall so she could stop and study it. Within weeks this little girl could tell a simplified version of Christ's life and the gospel. At age six she gave her life to Christ. As I reached the end of the story I couldn't help but wonder if all this had left a mark on their young daughter. The brief epilogue at the end gave the answer. The daughter, her husband, and their two children were serving as missionaries in Goinaniz, Brazil.

God is faithful. He says, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deut. 6:4-7). This chapter in Deuteronomy goes on to stress the importance of obeying and walking with God and concludes with, "And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us" (Deut. 6:25).

Since obesity is now a problem in our society, families can find ample information regarding nutritional meal planning. However, there seems to be a lack of counsel regarding a family's spiritual diet. Many of today's children can teach a grandparent how to use a smart phone, but are malnourished in the Bible and spiritual principles. When parents neglect their God-given duty to bring their children up in the Lord, they are only contributing to our society's moral decline. Remember Deuteronomy 6:25: "And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us."

There are counters full of books and devotional guides in Christian bookstores and church libraries. I would encourage you to take the time to study one in family worship. I have listed some of my family's favorites at the end of the chapter. If you have older children, you may want to pick a Bible theme. One family we know likes a study on the Sermon on the Mount and another is concentrating its efforts on preparing for adolescence. Whatever your choice, have each family member bring his own Bible, and allow time for both teaching and discussion. Look for ways to apply the Scripture to life and plan to commit certain portions to memory. Singing a hymn together will also add to your worship.

### Acts of Prayer

Prayer is another vital part of family worship. We can teach our children the elements of prayer at an early age. Some refer to the ACTS structure: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Get to know each child's need (carpool chats might be one possibility) and also make intercession for friends in the church family and beyond. Often our children will have suggestions in family worship, and we can listen and observe to determine concerns they might not have expressed previously.

What are some of the trouble spots for children? If you have a young child, fear of the dark may be a problem. Plan a time to consider God's care and protection. Psalm 27:1 and Psalm 34:4 would be helpful verses to discuss and memorize. If your child is facing some unfamiliar situation such as a new neighborhood or school, you could talk about Moses and his last counsel to the people of Israel concerning the promised land. Moses said, "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you" (Deut. 31:6). Maybe there is trouble with peers. Children can be cruel to each other and often the hurt goes deep. Why not review Christ's answer in Matthew 5:43-48? All of us sometime struggle with feelings of inferiority. A study of Psalm 139 will help. Teenagers, in particular, have trouble with peer pressure. Sit down with your teenager and see what God's Word has to say about conforming to the world's standards. Look up Romans 12:1-2 and 1 John 2:15-17. If sexual temptation is the problem, use 1 Corinthians 6 or Romans 6. If you or one of your children is facing a disappointment or defeat it will be helpful to read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and Romans 8:28.

Sometimes it is hard to divert a teen's attention from a good book, especially if the book is *The Hiding Place*, the story of a vibrant Christian family who suffered under Nazi terrorism. If you have read the book

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then you probably know what a success, or blessing, this was. She tells of the crowded, flea-infested barracks of the Ravensbruck prison, but how God gave the two sisters, Corrie and Betsie, an opportunity to share Christ without any interference from the authorities. She tells of the hidden Bible, the miracle medicine bottle and their overall attitude, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (I Thess. 5:16-18).

It is exciting to see God in action. He is not some god who occasionally directed the life of a bionic Bible hero long ago. He is not a god who programs us like a drone. He is a God who will show frail, even anxious, humans like you and me how to succeed, grow, and live in peace right now. Step by step, he will also teach us how to build a home characterized by love, trust, and obedience. When these three elements are part of our home there will be a minimum of anxiety.

### Love

If a home is filled with the self-giving love of Christ, the members will experience little anxiety. When the mother and father love God with their whole heart they will give themselves, their time, money, energy, and their children to him. No other desire or ambition (not football, cheerleading, etc.) will come before knowing and serving the Lord. No other calling will be greater than leading their family to Christ. This love may involve sacrifice of position, wealth, or prestige but we can be sure this is treasure laid up in heaven. It will not decay or fade away like the gimmicks and gratifications of earth.

### Trust

When mothers and fathers realize their total dependence on God and trust him to provide for every physical, emotional, and spiritual need, the family will not be plagued with anxiety. The children will observe their parents turning to a heavenly Father and they, too, will learn to trust God for every detail of life. It is also important to be utterly trustworthy and dependable as parents. Empty promises and threats do not generate trust. Children seldom learn to trust God if they cannot trust their parents.

### Obedience

Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). In other words, if we practice love and trust in our personal lives and in our homes we will also obey God consistently. The obedience is proof of our love and trust. With this obedience comes the promise, "My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." Christ has a home in our hearts. Christ is the heart of our homes.

What is the result of this love, trust, and obedience? The result, of course, is peace.

Someone may say, "Yes, all of this sounds good, but I still have a problem. My anxiety comes when I can't see how God is going to work it all out. When I feel out of control I tend to panic. Why does God sometimes ask me or my family to walk in the dark?" Sometimes our minds race with thoughts of "What if?" The possibilities appear and reappear like the black horse on a merry-go-round.

When Christians are faced with this temptation, and all of us are, I believe we can remember a wonderful ability God has given us. We can post a sign in our mind. God has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). When the dark times come we can concentrate on this sign and not our circumstances. The circumstances are not in charge. God is in charge. He will not allow anything to happen to us or to our family that is not for our good. Why? Our family has been dedicated to the Lord, and he has promised, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). And so, I will set my mind firmly on God. As I meditate on His grace and mercy he will also increase my peace.

Does this mean that the uncertain, dark times will vanish immediately? No, not necessarily. But, one thing is sure: God has his hand on the clock and the thermostat. The time will not be too long nor the tempera-

ture too great for me.

Again, someone may say, “But what if my child is in pain and I can’t help? Can God see me through this? How can I keep from feeling bitter?” The answer to a child’s pain is never easy and no Christian should minimize the hurt of a friend. Several years ago two friends and I went to visit the mother of a terminally ill child. Louise (not her real name) took a seat in a rocking chair in the living room and soon began to remind our young friend of God’s sovereignty. Swinging her leg back and forth in a rhythmic fashion, she said, “Well, we can’t understand God’s ways, but know everything will work out for good.” I couldn’t help but wonder how Louise would have reacted if this had been her child. In fact, I was sorry we had made this call as a group. How much better if we had simply sat quietly and shared in our friend’s pain.

Another type of hurt many parents face is the willful disobedience and rebellion of their children. When young people turn away from God for months or years, the pain goes deep. In his third letter the apostle John wrote, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (v. 4). The “children,” of course, refers to all believers. Several years ago I was reading from my father-in-law’s old Bible and found that not only was this verse underlined, but penciled beside it were two simple words: “Mine, too.”

As Christian parents we have no greater joy than to see our own children walking in truth. At the same time, we experience no greater disappointment or pain than when they disobey God and are drawn to a love of the world.

A while back I had one of those mailbox chats with my next-door neighbor. Mary mentioned a situation regarding her son and then added an expression her mother used to repeat when Mary was young, “Children step on your toes when they are young, but when they get older they step on your heart!” How true, I thought, as I headed back to the house. And they do not step on the heart with little ballerina slippers or even cros. Sometimes it comes with the pressure of football cleats.

Every child, of course, has a strong self-will and is basically selfish. But mirrors are never far away. Adults are selfish, too. However, as we mature in the Christian life, whatever our age, our desire will be to die more and more to self and worldly pursuits, and to model our life like the Lord Jesus.

One example of this dying to self and living to righteousness is found in John’s first letter. He writes, “Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (2:6). And, as we said earlier, we can remember verses 15-17 of this same letter: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

We try to be models for our children. Sometimes we succeed and sometimes we fail. Sometimes we succeed and they fail. The deepest hurt is when they fail again and again.

I have a friend whose son took up drugs and completely upset the atmosphere of the home. Soon, he was influencing the younger son. Life was so disruptive that they were forced to place him in a rehabilitation center that offered prolonged care. Following a year of treatment all seemed well. The father, after the pattern of the parable of the prodigal son, made this young man a beautiful ring and welcomed him back with an elaborate dinner and open arms. But the story does not have a happy ending. It wasn’t the older sister or the younger brother who rebelled, but the prodigal, who returned to his bottles and needles.

Did our friends rear their son in a strong Christian environment? Yes. Are they blaming themselves for his rebellion? No. Perhaps they have posted a sign in their minds: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” In any case, they have not taken their eyes or hearts from Jesus, and realize that faith is trust in the God of our circumstances, and not the circumstances themselves.

Many years ago I heard a suggestion on a Christian call-in program and thought it was biblical advice for any family going through a difficult time. The psychiatrist encouraged this Christian family to break the day up into segments of time. They were to ask God for direction and endurance only for this particular time

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period and not to concentrate on the entire week, month, or year ahead.

Since hearing this advice I've found numerous opportunities to practice it. In fact, over the last few weeks my plans, dreams, and ambitions for our family have been interrupted and altered several times. In spite of some traumatic changes we are experiencing the uninterrupted presence of God. It's as if he is saying to us, "Remember I am changeless and faithful. I am working out a better plan for you because you are members of my family. Trust your Father."

Today I am taking another look at that sign in my mind, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." In fact, I've added a second one: "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

Finally, what about the mother or father who has truly failed the family in some way? If this is the case and God is dealing with you, it's never too late to set things right. After you've confessed and repented to God, go to that family member. Ask your parent, spouse, son, or daughter for forgiveness. You may be amazed at the response. God can heal hurts as no other parent can. His grace, mercy and peace can be extended to you right now.

#### Recommended Reading

The Picture Bible for Little People by Kenneth N. Taylor

The Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd Jones

The Family Worship Book by Terry Johnson,

Training Hearts, Teaching Minds by Starr Meade.

These resources are available through the [PCABookstore.com](http://PCABookstore.com).

#### Other Voices

Do you ever think this thought regarding your son or daughter? "You're about to exceed the limitations of my medication!"

#### A Child's Wisdom:

Child: "Does he (Christ) live in me?"

Mother: "Yes, he does."

Child: How tall is he? As tall as my dad?"

Mother: "Yes, at least."

Child: "Well, he is gonna spill out!"

Our response: "Precisely!"

"It isn't enough to pray with your children each night, although family devotions are important. We must live the principles of faith throughout the day." James Dobson

"Sometimes we're so concerned about giving our children what we never had growing up that we neglect to give them what we did have growing up." James Dobson

#### Hymns

"Happy the Home When God Is There" by Henry Ware, Jr.

"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" by Edward Perronet

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Lonely Times

Loneliness. Even the word has a hollow ring to it. And yet, at some point in time, all of us have known the pain and isolation of loneliness.

Take a moment to think about your most lonely time. Were you all alone or with a crowd? Maybe you felt as though no one understood or cared about you or your situation. Did you share your feelings yet still feel isolated and rejected? Was there no one to listen in the first place? Are you lonely right now because you are single, divorced or widowed?

Loneliness

Loneliness takes many shapes yet the emotions are similar. Does any of this sound familiar?

I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning. For my sides are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh... My heart throbs; my strength fails me, and the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me. My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off (Ps. 38:6-7, 10-11).

Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress! Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call! For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. My heart is struck down like grass and has withered; I forget to eat my bread. Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my flesh. I am like a desert



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owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places; I lie awake; I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop (Ps. 102:2-7).

Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul (Ps. 142:4).

In each of these examples, the psalmist admits his loneliness. Yet he doesn't remain in a state of anxiety. He calls out to God confidently for relief. In Psalm 142, David writes,

I cry to you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.'  
Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me! Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name! The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me (Ps. 142:5-7).

Loneliness (one aspect of David's dilemma) can be like a prison, and David knew that God could, and would, set him free. Whatever the cause of our loneliness and rejection, the Psalms provide great comfort. Reading them, we see people who could admit their grief yet were obedient by turning to God for deliverance: "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth" (Ps. 145:18). "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken" (Ps. 16:8).

The psalmists, of course, are not the only figures in the Bible who knew acute loneliness. When his sons and daughters were killed, all his wealth taken away, when his friends accused him, and his wife rejected him, Job experienced a loneliness you and I will probably never know. Throughout his severe tests Job retained a godly character and was able to say, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth" (Job 19:25).

In the New Testament, Paul expressed lonely feelings more than once. In 2 Timothy 1:15 he writes, "You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me..." Then, in chapter four he continues, "At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me" (2 Tim. 4:16).

Like David, Paul did not stop here, however. Thankfully, he concludes, "But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it" (v. 17). Listen, finally, to his hope and assurance as he closed the letter. "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (v. 18).

After being flogged, imprisoned, shipwrecked, stoned, deserted, and even left to die, Paul could write words like these to the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). Rejoice? Was Paul some kind of lunatic who enjoyed suffering and loneliness? No. Maybe his secret bears repeating again. "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:11-13).

We should not leave our discussion of the lonely hearts of Scripture without looking into the heart of Christ himself. No one was ever more deserving of companionship and loyalty than Jesus, and yet he experienced the ultimate loneliness. Isaiah predicted this alienation when he wrote, "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isa. 53:3). One example of the fulfillment of this prophecy can be found in Mark 14:50. Describing Christ's arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane the author concludes, "And they all left him and fled."

If the alienation of friends was not enough, Christ experienced the ultimate loneliness and horror of being abandoned by the Father. As Jesus suffered in our place on that cross, God the Father turned away from the Son. Now Isaiah's prophecy was complete: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet

we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:4-5).

Punished, pierced, and left alone so that you and I may never be alone—this was Christ’s experience. Sorrow, pain, loneliness, rejection, and death—this is what Christ endured for us. His death and resurrection reconciled us to a heavenly Father and drew us into God’s own family. Lonely? How can we remain in a lonely condition when we are in God’s company? As an honored member of his family we have his undivided attention. When the circumstances are difficult and we feel isolated from other people, God’s promise still stands. After offering a list of possibilities, Paul says none of them “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39b).

### Comfort and Friendship

Once you and I have experienced the comfort and friendship of God, we should desire that our friends experience it, too. I remember a particularly trying hospital ordeal when I was twenty-four years old. Although that was many years ago, I can still remember my acute loneliness when I overheard the doctor telling my parents I was “not out of the woods yet.” But I expected to be around to watch our baby girl grow up, and I wasn’t ready to accept any other possibility. Later, when one of my best friends came for a visit, I tried to share my feelings of apprehension.

“Don’t talk like that,” my friend scolded. “You know you’re going to live.”

The truth of the matter was, I knew no such thing and didn’t need anyone to offer me false assurance. I did need someone to listen and help me sort out my feelings, someone who wasn’t afraid to let me speak of death with its strange mixture of fear and faith.

God, of course, teaches any number of lessons during our periods of fear and loneliness, not the least of which is a lesson in compassion. I made myself a promise as my friend left the room that day. In the future I would make every effort to identify with a friend’s pain. When someone needed to talk or felt helpless I would try to listen, asking God to supply his tenderness and compassion. It was years later before I understood a passage of Scripture relating to this issue. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Paul says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (NIV).

How do we receive this comfort? We receive it by asking for it. James 4:8 tells us, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” Another verse assuring us of God’s closeness is Psalm 145:18: “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.” And of course, we have the sweet pledge, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (Matt. 7:7-8).

For years I thought these verses were a blanket vow to give me anything I wanted. I was slow to realize a simple fact: if a good parent knows what will spoil the child, surely God knows what will spoil me; he also knows what will perfect me and help me grow. Often this will include periods of loneliness and pain. So, what does God offer during these hard times? This passage goes on to explain: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (v. 11). One of these gifts, in fact the best one, is the gift of His presence. Although God’s presence is promised again and again I especially like the way it’s expressed in Isaiah: “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (41:10).

As you and I experience God’s friendship and comfort, he will help us comfort others going through a similar problem. We first listen with the heart, an unhurried heart. Then, with God’s help, we can show them where and how we found relief. We point them to our Father.



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## Compassion

Recently, I read this interesting definition. “Compassion is your pain in my heart” (anonymous). Then on a greeting card, I found a description for friendship: “A rainbow from me to you.” Soon after this a friend demonstrated true compassion and offered a rainbow at the same time. He felt the ache in my heart and demonstrated true compassion. He didn’t lecture or tell me how I should be feeling about my circumstances. Instead, he asked me to describe how I felt at that moment. He listened to my hurt and we shared what we both know about God’s comfort. My situation had not changed one iota but I felt the compassion of a friend and this reminded me of the compassion of God. The isolation and loneliness was gone. Although Scripture includes dozens of examples about relating to one another, let me share two of my favorites. 1 John 3:16 says, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

The second example, Galatians 6:2 reads, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” As you and I willingly lay down our own concerns, desires, and problems in order to carry a friend’s burdens, our preoccupation with self and our loneliness will vanish. As we offer friendship and support we will usually find these gifts flowing back to us.

Someone might think, “Well, what about the shy person who wants to reach out but is afraid of being rejected?” It’s true; sometimes we will be rejected by the ones who mean the most to us. No one ever said friendship and love won’t involve risk. Christ was rejected. Even knowing the reception he would receive, Christ came, and gave, and died. Again, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

Several years ago a couple of friends and I went to visit some female inmates in Julia Tutwiler Prison. After a rather long conversation and some sharing of Scripture, one of the women asked if we would visit Debra (not her real name), a middle-aged woman dying of cancer.

After locating Debra’s dorm and section, I had an unexpected surprise. Sitting in a straight chair beside Debra’s cot was the familiar form of a long-time inmate named Lillie.

“You don’t usually come on Sunday,” Lillie exclaimed, as she jumped up. Then she quickly turned, bent over Debra, and explained I was the counselor who came to do a Bible study with her twice a month. Although I could tell it took effort, Debra smiled and turned to Lillie.

“I don’t know what I would have done without Lillie. She has looked after me constantly for days. In fact, she just got a place in the honor dorm but let it go in order to stay with me. Lillie, you haven’t had any sleep in about three days. You’ve gotta get some rest.”

“I’m fine, State Mama. Quit worrying about me.”

Later, after reading the Bible with Debra, and feeling confident she was a believer, I had another surprise. Debra told me Lillie read the Word to her every day and had told her how she could be sure she would go to heaven when she died.

“Why does she call you ‘State Mama?’” I asked.

“Well, you ought to know,” Debra explained. “I’m the only family she has here in prison. And she is the only family I’ve got.”

“We’re not alone,” Lillie told me as I left the barred dorm. “We have each other and we have the Lord. We’ll be just fine.”

In less than five minutes I was back in the fresh air and spring sunshine. Driving home to prepare dinner for the family, I thought to myself, yes, Lillie is right. For weeks I had talked to her about sharing her faith and life with someone else. Why should I be surprised now? God had given her an opportunity.

As I continued the drive home I began to realize this is exactly what God does to answer all of our lonely times. If we are willing to say no to the pull of self-pity, and in some cases, the pull of the chair, bed, TV, or whatever ties us down, God will lead us into activity and fulfillment.

Recovery begins when we consider the reason for our loneliness. It might be separation from a friend, a child leaving home, a move to a new location, single life, a divorce, or even the death of someone we love.

Whatever the pain might be, God wants to heal the hurt in our heart. Allow loneliness to draw you closer to God. Allow God to draw you closer to others.

We sometimes forget, but Christ has been in our hearts all along. He has promised to never leave us alone or without His comfort. We can shut him out of our thoughts or we can have him walk with us and sit down with us throughout the day. As we begin to experience this constant presence of the Lord our lives will be joyful and full once again.

#### Other Voices

“I set out to find a friend but couldn’t find one; I set out to be a friend, and friends were everywhere.”

Anonymous

“It is this very loneliness that throws [the Christian] back upon God. His inability to find human companionship drives him to seek in God what he can find nowhere else.” A.W. Tozer

Once a believer is refreshed in God he/she is better equipped to light a fire for another’s heart then enjoy the warmth together!.

#### Hymns

“Not I, but Christ” by Ada Whiddington

“There Is a Place of Quiet Rest” by Cleland Boyd McAfee

“Blest Be the Tie That Binds” by John Fawcett

#### Illness, Trouble, Death

“A code?” Bob asked.

“Sure, why not?” Sonny answered. “You ask the questions and I’ll knock out the answers on the telephone receiver. Look. If its yes, I’ll knock three times, and if it’s no, I’ll knock once, like this.”

Sonny Paterson rapped the receiver.

“Roger. I read you loud and clear,” Bob said. “I’ll call you Tuesday afternoon around five o’clock. Now, before we hang up, let’s pray.”

As Bob prayed, Sonny tried to commit the next few days to the Lord. Sonny Paterson, a prominent Mont-

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gomery businessman and an active layman in the church, had only three more days to talk. He would fly to Houston and on Tuesday, his larynx would be removed, cutting his communication to a knock, a nod, or a piece of paper and pencil. Later, Sonny would try laryngeal speech lessons, but for now his one objective was to have the Texas surgeon cut his cancer away.

“Amen,” Bob said.

“Amen,” Sonny replied. “I’ll be waiting to hear from you on Tuesday.”

Tuesday came. The papers were in order. Blood pressure, temperature, pulse—all checked and found normal. Waiting, saying good-bye, rolling. Then nothing until waking up with a dry, hollow feeling of having something missing. It was over, the offending cancer removed. The ring came later. Sonny checked his watch and reached for the phone. It was five o’clock.

“Sonny?” Bob said. “Is it all over?”

Knock, knock, knock, came the reply.

“Are you in much pain?”

Knock.

“Sonny, I have one more question. Has God stood with you? Have you felt His grace through all this?”

There was a pause and then it started. Not once, not three times, but again and again and again and again came the knocking until Bob Strong closed the conversation with another loud “Amen.”

As I began to write this chapter, Kayla Mueller was martyred by ISIS. A few days following the news report of Kayla’s death, her parents released a letter she had written during her confinement. She wrote, “I remember mom always telling me that all in all in the end the only one you really have is God. I have come to a place in experience where, in every sense of the word, I have surrendered myself to our Creator because literally there was no one else. ... But by God and your prayers I have felt tenderly cradled in freefall.” I also recently read a Facebook request from a boy around 11 years old. He asked his friends to pray for healing but then said something like this: “Pray for God to be honored in my illness.”

Believers like Sonny, Kayla, and this boy know their lives will be tested, but they also know God will not abandon them.

### God’s Sufficient Grace

While speaking to a group of Auburn students years ago, Elisabeth Elliot testified to God’s grace on the mission field. On a January day in 1956 Elisabeth sat by a two-way radio with four other missionary wives. Any moment they expected to hear their husbands’ excited voices with news of a successful airplane landing among the Quichua Indians in the Eastern jungle of South America. Now, at last, they would share Christ with these primitive people. But the hour came and passed and there were no voices. No cheers. All they heard was the radio’s persistent static as if to tease and torment the waiting wives.

“Yet I was not alone,” Elliot said,

“Surfacing above the static and the fear came those familiar words in Isaiah 43:1-3, ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.’”

Illness. Trouble. Death. Sooner or later, all of us must meet these enemies. However, the believer never faces these enemies alone. God has promised to defend His children. He did this for Sonny Paterson in a hospital bed and God did it for Elisabeth Elliot when she stood by a cabin door in a South American jungle listening to an empty radio and an empty sky. I believe he will also show his faithfulness to the 11-year-old boy mentioned earlier.

But how does a person get from point A (anxiety) to point B (peace) when going through a severe illness or when facing death? Does he or she simply draw a “Get out of jail free” card, then scoot pass “Go” and

collect \$200? Real life, we soon discover, is more complicated.

Elliot had to accept a stark reality. Her husband, Jim, would never return. He and the other young husbands were speared to death by those Indians. Illness, trouble, and death not only invade our lives, but often come without warning.

Some time ago, Bill and I were visiting with the family of a woman in the intensive care unit of Baptist Hospital. I remember the daughter-in-law's remark. "This morning Lou (not her real name) was cooking and whistling in the kitchen. A few hours later we had her in the emergency room."

This statement reminded me of my friend Allie, mentioned in chapter two. One sunny Sunday afternoon I attended Allie and Guthrie's fiftieth wedding anniversary. On Wednesday I attended her funeral. She was wearing the same dress.

Maybe you could add your own story here. Most of us, whether we've lived for twenty or ninety years, know trouble can arrive suddenly and with force. One of my most difficult experiences came when I was a twenty-four-year-old mother. Six weeks after our daughter, DeAnn, was born I was back in the hospital with a pulmonary embolism. While my own mother did all she could to take care of our baby, I still nursed my self-pity and doubt, wondering if I'd live to provide for our child or see her grow up. One day, while in this stupor of depression, God finally performed some heart surgery. Without the use of a scalpel, he removed a large tumor of self-sufficiency and gave me such a peace that I fell asleep. The peace stemmed from two promises. The first became a favorite verse: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). The second was a quote by Charles Spurgeon, "God will either make the burden lighter or the back stronger."

But, once again, how does someone get from point A (anxiety) to point B (peace) when illness or death stand in the middle? Perhaps we can take a lesson from David. Facing Goliath, he said,

You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel (1 Sam. 17:45-46).

When illness and anxiety strike, many of us reach for our swords, spears, and javelins. But, if we want to defeat anxiety, we can't rely on ourselves or other human means. Some people say, "God won't give you more than you can stand." I disagree. But God will supply his strength as he stands with you. If we are to triumph over a trial we must approach the enemy "in the name of the Lord of hosts" or "the Lord Almighty" (NIV).

Think of those people you know who approach all of their life "in the name of the Lord Almighty." What is different about them? First, they don't draw their swords in the face of the Lord as if to declare him responsible for their pain. They realize pain and suffering in this life is a penalty for man's rebellion against God, a penalty for sin. They have read and understood Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."

### Understanding Helps

A second attribute they seem to possess is a thorough understanding of Paul's earlier remark, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly ... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6,8). The secret of their understanding is in two phrases: Christ proved His love for us by dying while we were "still weak" and while we were "still sinners." In other words, these godly men and women recognize their own weakness and appreciate the power and grace of the Redeemer. They understand that while God is not the author of suffering, he can and does

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use it for their benefit and growth. Knowing this leads to a third principle. Mature believers realize the results of God's plan will be for their good and they submit.

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons ... For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Heb. 12:7,10-11).

1 Peter 1:7 is helpful in speaking of trials and submission: "These [trials] have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (NIV).

A fourth trait of those who approach all of life "in the name of the Lord Almighty" is one that seems strange to anyone attached to this world: they not only submit, but are joyful and thankful in their suffering. The author of Psalm 119 wrote, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word ... It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes ... I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me" (vv. 67, 71, 75). And in James 1:2-4. "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

#### Faith Tested

Finally, all who are being sanctified by suffering appreciate a fifth important fact: God has set a limit to our suffering. At any given time he may stretch us to his limit because he knows it will make us strong. Every steel mill has a testing room. Steel goes through a process of testing and is marked to indicate the amount of pressure it can stand. Stronger pieces will be used for buildings, ships, or bridges. The principle of the steel mill can help us comprehend God's testing of His children. As we have said, God doesn't test us beyond the limit, but he may stretch us to make us stronger in him. In his second letter to the believers in Corinth Paul writes,

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

When you and I go through a particular time of testing and suffering, we may feel God does not know what he is doing after all. Doubt invades our hearts. About to reach the breaking point, we wonder why God has not intervened to spare us. But God has said he not only knows our set limits but will not give us any test that he hasn't experienced himself. The writer to the Hebrews says, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered" (5:8) Then in Isaiah 53:3, "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." If Jesus Christ suffered to secure our salvation, surely we, too, can suffer if it will prove our faith, help us to die to self, and draw us closer to God.

If God uses our pain and suffering as discipline, then surely our death must be God's last earthly discipline. Many years ago I attended the funeral of an older Christian friend. It was Maundy Thursday. During the memorial service the minister related this story: "About ten months ago Jim Sims came into my office and said, 'Preacher, I saw my doctor today and I just want you to know something. I have one year to either be healed or to prepare to meet my Lord.'"

As the weeks passed Jim accepted his cancer and did, indeed, use the time to prepare to see his Lord, the



person he had known and served since his conversion when he was eleven years old. Jim died at the age of seventy-five.

Some might say, “Your friend led a full life, but what about the person who is taken before his work is finished? What about the youth, or the man or woman with a young family?” When these questions are voiced perhaps we need to consider Jesus again. Jesus was only thirty-three when he suffered the greatest physical, mental, and spiritual agony ever known and, when the cup God prescribed (judgement) did not pass, he prayed to his Father: “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do” (John 17:4). Several hours later, he uttered these profound words from the cross, “It is finished” (19:30). Finished? From man’s viewpoint it seemed His work had just begun and yet, three days later, some believers saw the resurrected Lord. Gradually, others began to understand how it all fit together. His work was finished; redemption was complete.

Others may question a child’s death. They wonder how God could allow someone who has barely begun to live, to die—someone who has had little time to offer any contribution to the world. The answer remains with God. You and I are not able to determine what God will accomplish with what we call an “untimely death.” Our friend, Jim Sims, knew about this, too. His only daughter died many years ago at the age of twelve. But, instead of blaming and rebelling, Jim and Ginny Sims grieved, submitted to God, and continued to bring their two sons up in the Lord.

Our family has followed the story of their older son. The second Jim Sims, his wife, Linda, and their three sons spent many years with New Tribes Mission serving through aviation in Papua, New Guinea. Today, this family has grandchildren who are faithfully serving the Lord. For the elder Sims and his daughter who died at age twelve we can say, “It is finished,” but the rest of the family realize they still have work to do. We do, too.

When a loved one dies it is normal and good for us to grieve and not pretend. I recently read a story about a father tucking his child in for the last time as he stood beside his casket. The son had seen him as a superman, but now he was a broken man. Months later, as the father wrote an entry in his son’s journal, the older son walked in and immediately detected his father’s tears.

“Are you okay?” Ethan asked. At first the father attempted bravery, but then realized it was more important to be real. He said, “Actually, I’m not okay. But I’m okay. Do you know what I mean?” Ethan realized it was okay to be real and to hurt. The father concluded, “I cannot run from sorrow any more than I can run from my shadow on a sunny day. I must learn to live with love and sorrow—there seems no other way.”

Most of us don’t have to live long to experience grief over the death of someone we love. As believers, however, we soon learn to express joy, even through pain. Since this person was precious to us, we prefer them to see Jesus rather than remain with us. We consider the opportunities, privileges and delights of heaven and are willing for this one “to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8, NIV). As we live in this attitude, we prepare for our own death. A minister who was seriously ill said this to his congregation: “For years I’ve tried to show you how to live. Now I want to show you how to die.”

I understand this man did, indeed, show them. He died in confidence and peace. The reason for such peace, I believe, was due to the first part of his statement: “For years I’ve tried to show you how to live...”

Our best, in fact our only, preparation for death is to know the value and purpose of life: to glorify and enjoy our God forever. Most of us have heard a remark something like this: “We have the time and money for those things important to us.” We could also say, “We are as close to God as we really want to be.”

### **Our Responsibility**

There is an old story of a young woman who was infatuated with her new love. She exclaimed over his many letters and told of the wonderful future they would enjoy together. One day, however, a close friend questioned her. “What do those letters say? Tell me something about this person you claim to love so much.”

“Oh, I can’t,” the young woman replied. “I haven’t read the letters yet.”

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Perhaps laziness is the biggest problem in our relationship with God. Many would have to confess, “I haven’t read the letters.” God’s people are not called to a lazy, indifferent, and careless reception of the Word. We are commanded to “do [our] best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Our first lesson in life and in preparing for death is, once again, to glorify and enjoy our God forever.

We also need to keep a second point in mind. Christians are not called to simply sign a fire and life insurance policy—a policy promising to deliver us from hell and secure us a place in heaven. We are called to understand, live and teach the whole counsel of God. God directs us to take every thought captive, to subdue the earth and preach the kingdom to every generation.

Since God is a God of order and knows we are easily distracted, he assigns each of us particular duties in the kingdom. These assignments are in proportion to our strength and gifts. Our job, with the help of Scripture and wise Christian counselors, is to determine and use these gifts effectively in the body of Christ. As we serve God faithfully in our present assignments we are preparing for eternity.

A third consideration is an examination of our attitude toward salvation, knowledge, and service in Christ’s kingdom. All we are and all we have are the result of God’s grace. We can take no credit and claim no merit. Even our good deeds are stained with pride and selfish motives. However, we can claim and celebrate the mercy of Christ for, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:17-18).

The apostle Paul states this idea in Ephesians. He explains our salvation by grace, through faith, and continues, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Finally, Jesus himself made the point clear when he said, “So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’” (Luke 17:10).

God honors the gifts he has bestowed on us. In John 17, Christ prayed for all believers saying, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one” (John 17:22). Paul called this a mystery in Colossians 1:27: “God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” God honors the gifts he has given because he sees Christ in us. We are sinful, Christ is righteous. We are weak, he is strong. We are foolish, he is wise. We are unclean, he is pure. We are dying, he is our life.

The minister I mentioned said, “For years I’ve tried to show you how to live. Now I want to show you how to die.” This man had learned the secret. In life and in death the believer walks with God. Writing of life, David, the psalmist said, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want ... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life” (Ps. 23: 1, 6). David said, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (v. 4).

Some day you and I will be called to walk through a literal “valley of the shadow of death.” But think of it: Christ, the light of the world, will accompany us. His light will lead us all the way to heaven where there will be no more night and we can, once again, say with David, “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (v. 6).

#### Other Voices

“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.” Corrie Ten Boom

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

“Health is a good thing; but sickness is far better, if it leads us to God.” J.C. Ryle

“It is God to whom and with whom we travel, and while He is the end of our journey, He is also at every stopping place.” Elisabeth Elliot

Hymns

“Be Still, My Soul” by Katharina von Schlegel, translated by Jane Borthwick

“More Love to Thee, O Christ” by Elizabeth Prentiss

“Blessed Assurance” by Fanny Crosby

## 12

### The Final Cure

As we conclude our study on anxiety and how we can find hope in a hectic world, let’s consider some important questions: Do you understand something of the majesty and holiness of God, and know that your soul must answer to him? By God’s grace, we can comprehend the nature and degree of sin in this world and in our lives. We must also understand that this sin has caused a breach between God and man, a breach God alone can repair. Formerly dead in sin and bound for hell, we need to understand and appreciate the perfect and complete redemption of Christ on the cross.

#### Focus on Christ

Justice must be satisfied, holiness vindicated, and the sacrifice made. Do you claim this salvation as yours and recognize Christ as your only and sufficient savior? Do you have a regenerate heart, a heart that has experienced genuine repentance and conversion? If you are a believer, Scripture calls you to repent of your sins daily, and constantly increase in the knowledge and love of God. Christ is not only for you, but in you, to provide help, strength, encouragement, and resistance to sin. Let the indwelling Holy Spirit so control you that every act of your life may be an act of worship. Cultivate a hunger and thirst for a godly life and daily seek to conform your behavior to the Word. Are your purpose and joy found in glorifying and obeying God? Does his cause and his kingdom have first place in your heart? We have been saved from dread of judgement, self-destructive autonomy, and worry about things we cannot control. Philippians 4:7 says, “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” We are no longer slaves to sin, but servants of righteousness. We have been rescued from the darkness of our former lives and brought, covered by Christ’s righteousness, into the presence of God, who no longer condemns us but has adopted us as his own children. Do you trust God, your father, to provide for all your needs in this life and afterwards to take you home to glory? How we should long to spend eternity with Christ and the redeemed!



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## Facts Regarding Anxiety

Having considered the importance of a proper focus we can turn to a second step in our final cure for anxiety. Let's look at some basic facts.

It is a lack of faith. In a negative sense, anxiety plagues us when we are consumed with ourselves and fail to trust God. It is a lack of faith, or a failure to apply our faith, in a given situation.

It is a Force and Power. In a positive sense, anxiety is a force and power. Acting as though it had a mind of its own, anxiety grips us, dragging our imagination into all kinds of possibilities for trouble. It asks, "What if this or that were to happen? What would you do then?" As a result, it depletes our energy and takes away our ability to enjoy today.

Final definition: The Greek word for worry or anxiety in the New Testament means to divide, tear, or rip apart. Again, the Anglo-Saxon word for it is "to choke or strangle. Anxiety is concern over something we can do nothing about. We neither know nor can we control the future. To worry over the future is a waste of energy. We accomplish nothing. Someone has said, "Worry is like a rocking chair. It gives us something to do but it takes us nowhere."

Worry is a sin. When we put a handle on yesterday and gaze at confessed and forgiven sin, we are thankless. When we put a handle on tomorrow and then open tomorrow's door, we are thieves. Why? Tomorrow belongs to God, not us. Again and again, Scripture commands us not to worry. One of the many places it does this is Matthew 6:34: "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself." In the Old Testament, David complained of his troubles but he learned to leave them with God. Psalm 31:15 is a good example: "My times are in your hand." Then in verse 23 he writes, "Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful."

## Facts Regarding God in Relation to Anxiety

Although we could list numerous facts and spend a chapter on each one, these few should encourage every believer.

I'm God's child.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Rom. 8:15-17).

When I stumble and sin I can run into my Father's forgiving arms!

Once I was a slave to fear. Now I'm a son (or daughter) of God. Since the eternal, everlasting God is my father and he loves me with an everlasting love, I have no need to be anxious. Francis Schaeffer was once asked what he thought was the most profound thought in Scripture. His reply came in three words: "Jesus loves me."

God will provide. "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). No need is beyond the capacity of God, and he is "my God." My God is my Father, and he will supply more than the dimensions of my need. He will give according to his unlimited riches.

God is immutable (changeless). "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Our situation will change from day to day. We will go through various trials and troubles. Our focus, however, is on God. God was faithful yesterday. He will be faithful today and tomorrow. Our concentration is not on the possible problems of tomorrow but on the changeless Christ.

God will deliver. "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of

escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

Temptations and tests are common to all humanity. Since God is merciful, he will not permit anything the Christian cannot endure through God’s strength in them. In some way, God will provide relief.

God has power and authority.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

Since all authority was given to Christ, we are to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. As we do this we will experience hardships. Christ, however, promises his constant help, presence, and power. This power is not offered now and then, but every day in all conditions to the very end.

### Faith

One of the finest definitions for faith can be found in Hebrews 11:1. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” This, of course, involves more than intellectual assent. In fact, true faith has three elements. First, faith is grounded in our knowledge of God as found in Scripture. Second, the mind moves from an accumulation of facts to a belief and acceptance of what has been learned. Third is simple trust. It is total and complete reliance upon God. The soul is at rest in him. And, as we know, this faith is all by God’s grace. (Eph. 2:8)

Does this rest or security in Christ mean we will always be in complete safety? The answer is obvious. All we need do is read the remainder of Hebrews 11, especially verses 32-39. After listing faithful men and women who savored victories, the author reminds us of others who were tortured, faced jeers and floggings, were chained and put in prison. They were stoned, sawed in two or died by the sword. Other martyrs were destitute of clothing and necessities or wandered in deserts, mountains, caves and holes in the ground. God did not grant these saints a fabulous life-style, free of sorrow and pain. Instead, he granted faith.

### Feeding Faith

As Christians, then, you and I are not called to a “wish upon a star” mentality. If God has given the initial faith, he will also help us exercise it in the face of a crisis. Jesus said the man or woman “who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matt. 7:24) Notice the next phrase. “And the rain fell.” We can expect it. It is not “if the rain fell,” but “the rain fell” (v. 25). We need to read on. “...and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock” (v. 25).

Faith is knowledge, belief, trust. It is to hear God’s Word and put it into practice. Faith is not automatic; like the human body, it must be fed. As amazing as the mind is, it is also a great flitterer. Our minds jump from one subject to another, even during prayer. No wonder we are instructed to “Set [our] minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:2-3).

You and I must talk to our faith. We must remind our minds, so to speak, of what and why we believe. As we study Scripture we talk and reason with ourselves, we remind ourselves of who we are in Christ.

The promise in Isaiah 26:3 applies to us just as much as it did to the people at the time Isaiah wrote. He says, “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.” Peace of mind. Peace of heart and conscience. Lasting peace; this is the peace promised to every person whose mind is set on the Lord, the everlasting rock.

Is this the end of it? If I have the proper focus, facts, faith, and food will all be well? Maybe not. The prob-

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lem might begin as a slow drizzle. Soon it develops into a full blown storm, even hurricane. Yes, the rock is still beneath me but my feelings and emotions are swelling with this storm. Satan is using it. He wants to drown me. This experience is a shock, shame, hurt, disappointment or tragedy. I can't feel God's support beneath me. What can I do?

We have looked at many admonitions and helps in Scripture, but no discussion of anxiety would be complete without some mention of Romans 1-8.

Romans 1-3: Without Christ, I'm a lost and helpless sinner.

Romans 4-5: Christ, my Savior, and covenant Head, died and rose again in order to purchase my salvation.

Romans 6-7: Since I'm in the process of sanctification I still struggle with sin. God, however, will give me strength and victory in Christ.

Romans 8:1-27: The grace of God is sufficient in every situation. Through this grace we understand sin, condemnation, death, the substitutionary atonement, repentance, forgiveness, new life, justification, Spirit control, righteousness, peace, adoption, sanctification, suffering, faith, patience and intercession of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:28-39: Paul says to think about and apply God's grace and adequacy to all of life's situations and problems. Here is a closer look.

- Romans 8:28-30: No limitation.

God foreknows, predestines, conforms, calls, justifies, and glorifies. He controls the universe and every aspect of my life for His glory and even for my best interest.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

- Romans 8:31-34: No condemnation.

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."

- Romans 8:35: No separation.

No person or problem can tear me away from God. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?"

- Romans 8:37-39: No defeat.

In Christ, I will see victory.

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

## Other Voices

"Jesus loves me—this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Francis Schaeffer was right. This is a profound theological statement. Jesus loves me. Through him, I can and will conquer anxiety.

“There is no bridge from hell to heaven after death.” R.C. Sproul

“Saving faith is an immediate relation to Christ, accepting, receiving, and resting upon him alone, for justification, sanctification, and eternal life by virtue of God’s grace.” Charles Spurgeon

“Now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever; in which every chapter is better than the one before.” C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*

“May every sunrise bring you hope. May every sunset bring you peace.” Lesson Learned in Life

Hymns

“Crown Him with Many Crowns” by Matthew Bridges

“Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken” by John Newton

“Lead On, O King Eternal” by Ernest Shurtleff

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