

(in)courage

DEVOTIONAL BIBLE 





(in)courage

DEVOTIONAL BIBLE 

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Letter from the Editor

"Declare his glory among the nations, his wondrous works among all peoples."

PSALM 96:3

The heart of (in)courage has always been to provide a place where women can gather to share their story and declare His glory. Since its inception in 2009, our website at incourage.me has published over 4,000 stories from more than 3,000 women.

We gather together daily to bear witness to the beauty of God's grace in our everyday lives. We share our stories because we believe it's a ministry—the ministry of being willing to "go first." To share what's really going on. To whisper what perhaps we've all been thinking and feeling. To admit when we're not fine. As friends and sisters in the body of Christ, our prayer is to continue the gift of going first through the stories here on these pages.

The (in)courage Devotional Bible is an invitation for all women to find their stories within the tapestry of the greatest story ever told—God's Story of Redemption.

After walking through the Red Sea on dry land, Miriam led all the women of Israel in dancing and rejoicing because of what God had done. After leading an army into battle, Deborah gave praise to God for the victory. After learning her prayer had been answered and a child would soon be born, Hannah sang with words of thanksgiving. After hearing the angel's words that she would give birth to the Savior who would sit on David's throne, Mary responded with gratitude and praise.

We seek to follow in the footsteps of these women. With 312 devotions by 122 women, we are telling our stories of how God's story has changed our lives. Because of His grace, we have found beauty in the brokenness and hope in the hard. With each devotion, we sing the praise of the One who has authored our story for His glory.

We believe Scripture is complete. Nothing needs to be added to it or taken from it, and we can find ourselves within it. God's Word is truth. Our circumstances may be different and our culture might not look the same, but God "is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8). We can look to Him as our unchanging source of hope.

The (in)courage community has always believed that friendship matters and we are better together. We are many voices with one heart, and we want to lift our voices so more women can hear of His goodness—that no matter where we've been or what we've done, God loves us and has a purpose for us. We are never beyond His reach. In Christ, new life awaits. It's the most beautiful story ever told.



Denise J. Hughes, General Editor

How to Read the Bible

God has revealed Himself in His Word and in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. While written by human authors, every word on the page is breathed out by God, so we read the Bible to know God better and to learn from Him how to flourish in our everyday lives. Reading the Bible can be challenging, though, and sometimes overwhelming. But it can also be rewarding and awe-inspiring. More importantly, immersing ourselves in Scripture is the way we become more like Jesus as part of getting to know Him more.

How Do We Read the Bible?

Thankfully, some simple steps can help us access the language of the Bible, and because the Holy Spirit dwells within believers, we can trust the Holy Spirit will empower us to understand the beauty of Scripture.

Set Yourself Up for Success

- Make a commitment to read God's Word daily.
- Prayerfully select a reading plan. (You can find several reading plans starting on p. 1826.)
- Set aside a consistent time each day to meet with God in His Word.
- Designate a place where you will read the Bible.
- Gather any materials you might use—like a journal and pen.
- Diminish any distractions—such as turning off a phone or reducing background noise.

Read

- Pray and ask God to reveal more of Himself to you through His Word.
- Approach the text with a joyful expectation that God will speak to you through His Word.
- Look over the introduction to the individual book.
- Read quietly. Read aloud. Take in a whole chapter. Savor an individual verse.
- Go your own pace and give yourself grace.

Reflect

- Identify the genre: historical narrative, law, poetry, prophecy, or letter (to name a few).
- Consider the context: Who wrote it? To whom was it written? When was it written?
- Discern the author's objective: What was the author's main purpose?
- Underline any passages that stand out to you.
- Write any questions you have in the margins of your Bible or in a journal.

Respond

- Notice how a specific principle in the passage is applied to the situation in the passage.
- Ponder possible parallels in your own life.
- Contemplate appropriate responses, perhaps a course of action or a change of belief.
- Write your thoughts about the passage in a journal.
- Invite the Lord to show you how He wants you to respond to His Word.

May we always remember—with deep, heartfelt gratitude—that because of Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross we can approach the throne of grace with boldness (Heb 4:16). And when we spend time in God's Word, our time is never wasted (Is 55:11). He is faithful to draw near to us whenever we draw near to Him (Jms 4:8). It's a promise.

For more devotions on how to read God's Word, see pages 828, 1245, and 1307.

God's Story of Redemption

The English word for Bible comes from the Latin word *bibliotheca*, which means “library.” The Bible is a “library” of 66 books, but they’re unlike any other book in history. The authors who wrote them were inspired by the Holy Spirit. These 66 books of the Bible—written by dozens of authors over approximately fifteen-hundred years—tell one cohesive, overarching story. It’s God’s story of how He orchestrated time and events to redeem His people. So before we dive into a certain book or a particular passage, it helps to understand how every part of the Bible comes together to tell God’s Story of Redemption.

The main character in the Bible is God, who exists eternally in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Before God created the heavens and the earth, He already had a plan in place. In fact, He already had you and I in mind.

For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him (Eph 1:4).

Creation (Genesis 1–2)

God literally spoke the universe into existence. By His very words, He creates and gives life.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light (Gn 1:1,3).

He created us so we could have fellowship together, and the very first man and woman—Adam and Eve—enjoyed His presence in the garden of Eden.

Separation (Genesis 3)

A relationship, though, isn’t a real relationship unless both parties willingly choose to be together, so God gave humanity a free will. He risked rejection by His own creation so that we might know Him. In the garden of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve everything they needed, with one command—not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gn 2:16-17). They could eat anything else in the garden, but not the fruit of this one tree. In this, God required obedience, but it was still humanity’s choice. When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, sin entered the world, separating sinful people from a holy God.

So the LORD God sent [Adam] away from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove the man out and stationed the cherubim and the flaming, whirling sword east of the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life (Gn 3:23-24).

Now, as a result of sin, all people are born into brokenness. We live our lives seeking to be whole again, but wholeness and restoration can only be found in our Creator.

Expectation (Genesis 4–Malachi)

Nothing, however, is a surprise to God. Before Adam and Eve drew their first breath, God knew that sin would separate humanity from His holy presence, so He set into motion a plan to reconcile His people back to Himself. This way of reconciliation would be secured through His Son, Jesus, and the people waited with expectant hope for a Savior to come. The rest of the Old Testament is filled with stories and prophecies and so much more, with all of it pointing to Jesus as the coming Redeemer (Jn 5:39).

For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever (Is 9:6-7).

Salvation (Matthew–John)

The four Gospel accounts offer four testimonies of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. With His own body, Jesus paid the price for all sin.

For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16).

Through God's ministry of reconciliation, those who accept His gift of grace now have access, once again, to God's presence and will live for eternity with Him.

Transformation (Acts–Jude)

Christ will come again one day, but while we wait for His return we're to grow and become more like Him.

We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit (2Co 3:18).

Through God's Word, we learn more about who God is, and His Spirit—indwelling all believers—empowers us to be transformed into His likeness (Php 3:21).

Consummation (Revelation)

While the book of Revelation is apocalyptic in nature, it describes the second coming of Christ. When Jesus returns, He'll come as the King of all kings, and a magnificent wedding banquet will take place. Throughout Scripture, Christ is depicted as the bridegroom and the church His bride. In this metaphor, we see the picture of marriage. We are His beloved—His betrothed.

Then I heard something like the voice of a vast multitude, like the sound of cascading waters, and like the rumbling of loud thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah, because our Lord God, the Almighty, reigns! Let us be glad, rejoice, and give him glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has prepared herself (Rv 19:6-7).

Friend, you are His beloved. He treasures you, so much so, that He gave His life for you. There is no sin—no secret, no past, no shame—that He cannot forgive and redeem. God's story of redemption isn't a fanciful tale; it's truth. It's also an invitation. The God of the universe fashioned you in His image, and He longs to transform your brokenness and create something whole and beautiful.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Rm 10:13).

Features



Themes

Throughout the *(in)courage Devotional Bible* you'll find ten themes. These themes provide a picture of the consistency of the message of Scripture. Each is marked with a specific color and design. Each theme corresponds with a reading plan, devotions, women of courage, and two beautifully designed Scripture verses.



Reading Plans

Each theme has a specific reading plan that corresponds with Bible passages and devotions. The reading plans range from five to seven weeks, with each day of the plan containing Scripture and a devotional reading. The reading plans provide a complete look at the theme throughout Scripture.



Reflective Devotions

Throughout the *(in)courage Devotional Bible* you'll find 52 reflective devotions. These devotions are designed to begin each week of Scripture reading and are the anchors of the reading plans. Each reflective devotion includes reflection questions and space for journaling.

Devotions

Throughout the Bible there are 260 devotional pieces full of personal stories and connection. These devotions are designed to help us connect with the story of Scripture and further understand how God works in our lives individually.

Meet Eve

A WOMAN OF
Second Chances
GENESIS 3

Eve desired wisdom, and she believed the serpent when he said that God was holding out on her. She broke God's law and did the one thing He asked her not to do. Eve learned the hard way that God wasn't the one who lied. It was the serpent who deceived her. But God didn't leave her in her brokenness. The first mistake in history also led to the greatest second chance. While there were consequences for her actions, God promised to redeem her and make her the mother of all the living. He also promised that her offspring would one day crush the serpent and destroy his hold over man. God was faithful to fulfill His promise, too, bringing about redemption through the Second Adam—Jesus Christ.

Women of Courage

Fifty women in the Bible are highlighted for different aspects of their character. Each woman's story reflects how God reached in and touched her life. These women's stories serve as an encouragement to us all, and they're connected with one of the ten themes.

Book Introductions

Each book of the Bible has an introduction which includes historical background, the message of the book, and why the book is important and applicable today.

THE BOOK OF

1 Thessalonians

UNDERSTANDING THE AUTHOR'S HEART Paul's trip to Thessalonica was our first clue to an ager by prisoners who opposed Paul's teaching. After three Sabbath, Paul and his companions, Timothy and Silas, needed to leave town. But their brief time in Thessalonica yielded the fruit of a deep faith. Timothy soon returned to check on the new converts and later reported to Paul how much the believers there were holding true to the faith, but they did have a question: What would happen to their loved ones who passed away before Christ's second return? This letter is Paul's response to their question, plus several other issues.

CONNECTING WITH GOD'S STORY First Thessalonians deals explicitly with "the day of the Lord"—Christ's second return. In fact, Paul returns to this theme in every chapter, clarifying some important matters that are increasingly helpful for us today. In addition to his discussion on the end times, Paul emphasizes the importance of living in a manner that glorifies God, and his encouragement to those 1st-century believers is as relevant for us today.

CONNECTING WITH OUR STORY While the Thessalonians believers endured persecution, Paul ministered them—and also us—of the genuine hope we find in Christ. We can look to Christ as the reason for the hope we have, regardless of our circumstances.

As you read 1 Thessalonians, you'll also find directions on these themes:

— Emerging Leadership

— Friendship on Purpose

— Intentional Gratitude

HE HAS
SENT ME TO
heal THE
BROKENHEARTED...
TO GIVE THEM A
Crown of
beauty
INSTEAD OF
ashes.

ISAIAH 61:1-3

Theme Verses

Each theme has one Old Testament and one New Testament verse which embody the heart of the theme. These verses have been artistically designed to present the beauty and truth of God's Word and aid in memorization.

Journaling Space

Each page of Scripture contains lined journaling space for personal reflection and notes.



Devotional Theme Guide



Beautiful Brokenness

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1826

The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. You will not despise a broken and humbled heart, God. PSALM 51:17

Scripture is full of stories of broken people. But it is also full of stories of how God has redeemed them—their stories, their families, and their futures—by His grace. While the stories may seem wrought with brokenness and despair, God turns that brokenness into beauty, reflecting the power of the grace. God chooses to use broken people every day, and their brokenness leads them to fully depend on Him.



Better Together

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1827

For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink. 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-13

God designed men and women to live in community with one another and share their lives together. Throughout the Bible, there are stories of people living in community who are better because they live and work and serve the Lord together. The stories of these men and women in the Bible who were better together are wonderful examples for the church today of how we can love and support one another and always point each other toward Christ.



Daily Grace

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1828

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day." EXODUS 16:4

God provided manna for His people when they were living in the desert. Each day He provided enough for that day. In the same way. He provided enough manna each day for the Israelites, He also provided grace every day for His people throughout Scripture. He continues to provide the grace we need every single day and in exactly the right portion. Here you'll find encouragement that God is always working to meet your needs and draw you into His love with His ever-flowing grace.



Everyday Leadership

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1829

Remember your leaders who have spoken God's word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith. HEBREWS 13:7

God is always faithful to provide wisdom and guidance for His people through the men and women He appoints as leaders. But God also calls leaders who may not be exactly what the world would consider a leader. Everyday leadership showcases stories of men and women who step out of their comfort zones to lead others, pointing them to the truth. Their leadership impacted more lives than they would ever know, and their stories give us confidence that God can and will use our lives to lead others and point them to Christ.



Friendship on Purpose

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1830

No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. JOHN 15:13

The ultimate example of friendship is in Jesus Christ. He gave His life to save His friends. He cared for His friends, challenged His friends, encouraged His friends, and enjoyed His friends. While Christ is the ultimate example of friendship, Scripture is full of many other beautiful examples of purposeful friendship that encourages, builds, cares for, and gives life. May we see these examples and wholeheartedly follow in friendship on purpose.

Hope in the Hard

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1831

This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. **ROMANS 5:5**

No matter the circumstance, God's Word is full of stories of hope. In the face of countless trials and tribulations, His people have hope that reflects their deep faith in the Father. Though circumstances are hard—sometimes even impossible—God's people choose to have hope and rely on Him for their every need. Their steadfastness is often the encouragement we need to face our own hard and find hope in our Savior.

Imperfect Hospitality

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1832

Love your neighbor. **LEVITICUS 19:18**

Biblical hospitality is never meant to be perfect. It is meant to engage, encourage, and build up others while simultaneously inviting them to share their stories and their lives. The stories of hospitality found throughout Scripture remind us to focus on our guests and sharing God's incredible love and grace with them. Regardless of the condition of our space, if our hearts are focused on encouraging others, our hospitality will honor God.

Intentional Gratitude

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1833

Give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. **1 THESSALONIANS 5:18**

God loves our gratitude. He loves it when His people stop and thank Him for what He has done. There are many examples throughout the Bible where God's people stop and celebrate what God has done. These stories serve as reminders of the importance of stopping and intentionally showing gratitude to the Lord for His provision and victory.

Second Chances

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1834

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 JOHN 1:9

While the entire story of Scripture is God's second chance for humanity, the Bible is full of individual examples of how He graciously poured out His love for His people and redeemed their lives. His heart for redemption is displayed through the way He continually reached into broken lives and gave His children another chance to follow Him. His patience and grace are unmerited and unmatched. He grants second chances to His people, not because they are deserving, but because He is merciful.

The Scared Brave

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1835

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment. **2 TIMOTHY 1:7**

"Do not fear" is found 365 times in the Bible, once for each day of the year. God's desire for His people is not for them to live in fear, but to live in the confidence He is always with them and that with Him, they have nothing to fear. God is faithful to His children, and in their choice to be brave, His power is beautifully displayed. Scripture provides examples of men and women who faced impossible situations but chose to be brave and follow God's leading in their lives.

Introduction to the Christian Standard Bible®

The Bible is God's revelation to humanity. It is our only source for completely reliable information about God, what happens when we die, and where history is headed. The Bible reveals these things because it is God's inspired Word, inerrant in the original manuscripts. Bible translation brings God's Word from the ancient languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic) into today's world. In dependence on God's Spirit to accomplish this sacred task, the CSB Translation Oversight Committee and Holman Bible Publishers present the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

Textual Base of the CSB

The textual base for the New Testament (NT) is the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th edition, and the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*, 5th corrected edition. The text for the Old Testament (OT) is the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 4th edition. Where there are significant differences among Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek manuscripts, the translators follow what they believe is the original reading and indicate the main alternative(s) in footnotes.

Goals of This Translation

- Provide English-speaking people worldwide with an accurate translation in contemporary English.
- Provide an accurate translation for personal study, sermon preparation, private devotions, and memorization.
- Provide a text that is clear and understandable, suitable for public reading, and shareable so that all may access its life-giving message.
- Affirm the authority of Scripture and champion its absolute truth against skeptical viewpoints.

Translation Philosophy of the CSB

Most discussions of Bible translations speak of two opposite approaches: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. However, Bible translations cannot be neatly sorted into these categories. Optimal equivalence capitalizes on the strengths of both approaches.

Optimal equivalence balances contemporary English readability with linguistic precision to the original languages. In the many places throughout the Bible where a word-for-word rendering is understandable, a literal translation is used. When a word-for-word rendering might obscure the meaning for a modern audience, a more dynamic translation is used. This process assures that both the words and the thoughts contained in the original text are conveyed accurately for today's readers. The Christian Standard Bible places equal value on fidelity to the original and readability for a modern audience, resulting in a translation that achieves both goals.

History of the CSB

Holman Bible Publishers assembled an interdenominational team of one hundred scholars, editors, stylists, and proofreaders, all of whom were committed to biblical inerrancy. Working from the original languages, the translation team edited and polished the manuscript, which was first published as the Holman Christian Standard Bible in 2004.

A standing committee maintained the translation, while also seeking ways to improve both readability and accuracy. As with the original translation, the committee that prepared this revision, renamed the Christian Standard Bible, is international and interdenominational, comprising evangelical scholars who honor the inspiration and authority of God's written Word.

Footnotes

Footnotes are used to show readers how the original biblical language has been understood in the CSB.

1. Old Testament (OT) Textual Footnotes

OT textual notes show important differences among Hebrew (Hb) manuscripts and ancient OT versions, such as the Septuagint and the Vulgate. See the list of abbreviations that follows for a list of other ancient versions used.

Some OT textual notes (like NT textual notes) give only an alternate textual reading. However, other OT textual notes also give the support for the reading chosen by the editors as well as for the alternate textual reading. For example, the CSB text of Psalm 12:7 reads,

⁷ You, LORD, will guard us;^a
you will protect us^b from this generation forever.

The textual footnotes for this verse read,

^a12:7 Some Hb mss, LXX, Jer; other Hb mss read *them* ^b12:7 Some Hb mss, LXX; other Hb mss read *him*

The textual note in this example means that there are two different readings found in the Hebrew manuscripts: some manuscripts read *us* and others read *him*. The CSB translators chose the reading *us*, which is also found in the Septuagint (LXX), and placed the other Hebrew reading *him* in the footnote.

Two other kinds of OT textual notes are

Alt Hb tradition reads _____	a variation given by scribes in the Hebrew manuscript tradition (known as <i>Kethiv/Qere</i> and <i>Tiqqune Sopherim</i> readings)
Hb uncertain	when it is unclear what the original Hebrew text was

2. New Testament (NT) Textual Footnotes

NT textual notes indicate significant differences among Greek manuscripts (mss) and are normally indicated in one of three ways:

Other mss read _____
Other mss add _____
Other mss omit _____

In the NT, some textual footnotes that use the word “add” or “omit” also have square brackets before and after the corresponding verses in the biblical text. Examples of this use of square brackets are Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11.

3. Other Kinds of Footnotes

Lit _____	a more literal rendering in English of the Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek text
Or _____	an alternate or less likely English translation of the same Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek text
=	an abbreviation for “it means” or “it is equivalent to”
Hb, Aramaic, Gk	the actual Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek word is given using equivalent English letters
Hb obscure	the existing Hebrew text is especially difficult to translate

emend(ed) to _____

the original Hebrew text is so difficult to translate that competent scholars have conjectured or inferred a restoration of the original text based on the context, probable root meanings of the words, and uses in comparative languages

In some editions of the CSB, additional footnotes clarify the meaning of certain biblical texts or explain biblical history, persons, customs, places, activities, and measurements. Cross references are given for parallel passages or passages with similar wording, and in the NT, for passages quoted from the OT.

Abbreviations in CSB Bibles

AD	In the year of our Lord
BC	before Christ
c.	century
ca	circa
chap(s).	chapter(s)
cp.	compare
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
e.g.	for example
Eng	English
etc.	et cetera
Gk	Greek
Hb	Hebrew
i.e.	that is
Lat	Latin
lit	literal(ly)
LXX	Septuagint—an ancient translation of the Old Testament into Greek
MT	Masoretic Text
NT	New Testament
ms(s)	manuscript(s)
OT	Old Testament
pl.	plural
Ps(s)	Psalms(s)
Sam	Samaritan Pentateuch
sg.	singular
Sym	Symmachus
Syr	Syriac
Tg	Targum
Theod	Theodotian
v./vv.	verse, verses
Vg	Vulgate—an ancient translation of the Bible into Latin
vol(s).	volume(s)

Introduction to Bible Serif

Bible Serif was elegantly crafted to reinforce the Christian Standard Bible's optimal blend of accuracy and readability. It is an ideal typeface for Bible reading or deep study.

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DEUTERONOMY 28

your enemies. You will march out against them from one direction but flee from them in seven directions. You will be an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.²⁶ Your corpses will be food for all the birds of the sky and the wild animals of the earth, with no one to scare them away.

²⁷ "The LORD will afflict you with the boils of Egypt, tumors, a festering rash, and scabies, from which you cannot be cured.²⁸ The LORD will afflict you with madness, blindness, and mental confusion,²⁹ so that at noon you will grope as a blind person gropes in the dark. You will not be successful in anything you do. You will only be oppressed and robbed continually, and no one will help you.³⁰ You will become engaged to a woman, but another man will rape her. You will build a house but not live in it. You will plant a vineyard but not enjoy its fruit.³¹ Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will not eat any of it. Your donkey will be taken away from you and not returned to you. Your flock will be given to your enemies, and no one will help you.³² Your sons and daughters will be given to another people, while your eyes grow weary looking for them every day. But you will be powerless to do anything.³³ A people you don't know will eat your land's produce and everything you have labored for. You will only be oppressed and crushed continually.³⁴ You will be driven mad by what you see.³⁵ The LORD will afflict you with painful and incurable boils on your knees and thighs — from the sole of your foot to the top of your head.

³⁶ "The LORD will bring you and your king that you have appointed to a nation neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you will worship other gods, of wood and stone.³⁷ You will become an object of horror, scorn, and ridicule among all the peoples where the LORD will drive you.

³⁸ "You will sow much seed in the field but harvest little, because locusts will devour it.

³⁹ You will plant and cultivate vineyards but not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will eat them.⁴⁰ You will have olive trees throughout your territory but not moisten your skin with oil, because your olives will drop off.⁴¹ You will father sons and daughters, but they will not remain yours, because they will be taken prisoner.⁴² Buzzing insects will take possession of all your trees and your land's produce.⁴³ The resident alien among you will rise higher and higher above you, while you sink lower and lower.⁴⁴ He will lend to you, but you won't lend to him. He will be the head, and you will be the tail.

⁴⁵ "All these curses will come, pursue, and overtake you until you are destroyed, since you did not obey the LORD your God and keep the commands and statutes he gave you.

⁴⁶ These curses will be a sign and a wonder against you and your descendants forever.

⁴⁷ Because you didn't serve the LORD your God with joy and a cheerful heart, even though you had an abundance of everything,⁴⁸ you will serve your enemies the LORD will send against you, in famine, thirst, nakedness, and a lack of everything. He will place an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.

⁴⁹ The LORD will bring a nation from far away, from the ends of the earth, to swoop down on you like an eagle, a nation whose language you won't understand,⁵⁰ a ruthless nation,⁵¹ showing no respect for the old and not sparing the young.⁵¹ They will eat the offspring of your livestock and your land's produce until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine, fresh oil, young of your herds, or newborn of your flocks until they cause you to perish.⁵² They will besiege you within all your city gates until your high and fortified walls, that you trust in, come down throughout your land. They will besiege you

^a28:32 Lit day, and not for power your hand ^b28:50 Lit a nation strong of face

the
Old Testament





THE BOOK OF *Genesis*

UNDERSTANDING THE AUTHOR'S HEART The book of Genesis was written by Moses, a key leader among the Hebrews. He likely penned Genesis during “the desert years,” between 1446 BC—1406 BC. Moses wanted us to know where we came from and why we’re here. So the first words of Genesis depict God creating the universe. With a word, God spoke the earth into being. He also created the first man and woman, but because of their eventual disobedience, humankind became separated from God. We’ve been living with the consequences ever since.

CONNECTING WITH GOD'S STORY The word *Genesis* means *beginning*, and that’s the story of this book. Genesis tells the beginning—of this world and humanity, of beauty and brokenness, of you and me. It also shows us where we can find hope and healing. In Genesis, we enter into God’s story. Humanity connects with a divine narrative that has a clear arc and plotline throughout the entire Bible. Genesis sets the scene, introduces the characters, and explodes with a love story between God and the human beings He creates. The evil that threatens them and God’s plan for salvation are all put into motion in the first few chapters.

CONNECTING WITH OUR STORY Through Genesis we understand the origin of our own brokenness. We also see the seed of hope as God promises to provide a way for restoration. Genesis is the starting point, not only for all of life, but also for our own journey. Through the stories that unfold, we trace the fingerprints of God, moving on behalf of His people.

As you read Genesis, you’ll also find devotions on these themes:

- *Beautiful Brokenness*
- *Better Together*
- *Everyday Leadership*
- *Hope in the Hard*
- *Imperfect Hospitality*
- *Intentional Gratitude*
- *Second Chances*
- *The Scared Brave*

THE CREATION

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.^a

² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." There was an evening, and there was a morning: one day.

⁶ Then God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters, separating water from water."⁷ So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸ God called the expanse "sky."⁸ Evening came and then morning: the second day.

⁹ Then God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land "earth," and the gathering of the water he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, "Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds." And it was so. ¹² The earth produced vegetation: seed-bearing plants according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ Evening came and then morning: the third day.

¹⁴ Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night. They will serve as signs for seasons^c and for days and years. ¹⁵ They will be lights in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule over the day and the lesser light to rule over the night—as well as the stars.

¹⁷ God placed them in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth, ¹⁸ to rule the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ Evening came and then morning: the fourth day.

²⁰ Then God said, "Let the water swarm with^d living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky."²¹ So God created the large sea-creatures^e and every living creature that moves and swarms in the water, according to their kinds. He also created every winged creature according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them: "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the waters of the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth."²³ Evening came and then morning: the fifth day.

²⁴ Then God said, "Let the earth produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that crawl, and the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. ²⁵ So God made the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that crawl on the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man^f in^g our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth," and the creatures that crawl^h on the earth."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image; he created him inⁱ the image of God; he created them male and female.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls^j on the earth."²⁹ God also said, "Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This will be food for you,

^a1:1 Or created the universe ^b1:8 Or "heavens." ^c1:14 Or for the appointed times ^d1:20 Lit with swarms of ^e1:21 Or created sea monsters ^f1:26 Or human beings; Hb 'adam, also in v. 27 ^g1:26 Or as ^h1:26 Syr reads sky, and over every animal of the land ⁱ1:26 Or scurry ^j1:27 Or man as his own image; he created him as ^k1:28 Or and all scurrying animals

³⁰ for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth—everything having the breath of life in it—I have given^a every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed. Evening came and then morning: the sixth day.

2 So the heavens and the earth and everything in them were completed. ² On the seventh^b day God had completed his work that he had done, and he rested^c on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it he rested from all his work of creation.^d

MAN AND WOMAN IN THE GARDEN

⁴ These are the records of the heavens and the earth, concerning their creation. At the time^e that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵ no shrub of the field had yet grown on the land,^f and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not made it rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground. ⁶ But mist would come up from the earth and water all the ground. ⁷ Then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being.

⁸ The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he placed the man he had formed. ⁹ The LORD God caused to grow out of the ground every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden, as well as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river went^g out from Eden to water the garden. From there it divided and became the source of four rivers.^h ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon, which flows through the entire land of Havilah,ⁱ where there is gold. ¹² Gold

from that land is pure;^j bdellium^k and onyx^l are also there. ¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon, which flows through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris, which runs east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.” ¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him.” ¹⁹ The LORD God formed out of the ground every wild animal and every bird of the sky, and brought each to the man to see what he would call it. And whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all the livestock, to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal; but for the man^m no helper was found corresponding to him. ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to come over the man, and he slept. God took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place. ²² Then the LORD God made the rib he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ And the man said:

This one, at last, is bone of my bone
and flesh of my flesh;
this one will be called “woman,”
for she was taken from man.

²⁴ This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.

THE TEMPTATION AND THE FALL

3 Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God

^a1:30 I have given added for clarity ^b2:2 Sam, LXX, Syr read sixth ^c2:2 Or ceased, also in v. 3 ^d2:3 Lit work that God created to make ^e2:4 Lit creation on the day ^f2:5 Or earth ^g2:10 Or goes ^h2:10 Lit became four heads ⁱ2:11 Or of the Havilah ^j2:12 Lit good ^k2:12 A yellowish, transparent gum resin ^l2:12 Identity of this precious stone uncertain ^m2:20 Or for Adam

The Fall

GENESIS 3

The lady made it sound so simple. All I had to do was fill out a short application to be approved for a credit card with a reasonable limit for a beginner. It sounded so easy. Not only would I have a financial backup in the case of an emergency, I would also have the opportunity to build my personal credit history. As I signed my name across the dotted line, I remember feeling a bit of concern. My parents had warned me about the perils of consumer debt and had encouraged me to talk to them about major financial decisions. But I was an adult now. I figured that as a freshman in college, it was the right time for me to start making some decisions of my own.

A few weeks later the shiny new credit card arrived in the mail. My intentions were only to look at it. It was nice to know I owned a piece of plastic with my name on it that gave me more purchasing power than I had on my own. And for a while, that's exactly all I did—look.

However, the day inevitably arrived when some clothing I wanted cost more than the cash that I had to pay for it, and I remembered the shiny plastic card that I carried around in my purse. I convinced myself that this one purchase wouldn't harm anything, so I reached inside of my wallet to grab that card and put it to use. Initially, nothing terrible happened. But I'd crossed a boundary line that had been put in place for my protection and I knew it. And it wasn't long before the consequences of that one lone signature started to show up. The balance on the card increased over time, and the unintended consequences of burdensome debt resulted.

Like the warning my parents had given me, God gives us warnings and instructions for our own good. In the beginning, God created the world and everything in it and called it good. Yet only three chapters in, the first man and woman make a decision that forever changed things for every person that would come after them. Adam and Eve didn't take God at His Word. They engaged in conversations, thoughts, and, eventually, actions that moved them away from the original plan God had for them.

In Genesis 2:16-18, God gave clear instructions not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In Genesis 3, we see what happens when we don't take seriously the guidelines and boundaries that God gives us.

One day, Satan showed up in the form of a serpent and did to Eve what he has continued to do to all people throughout history. He deceived her. He started by questioning God's Word and omitting God's goodness (v. 1). God granted them freedom to eat from all trees in the garden with the exception of one. Satan focused Eve's attention on what she couldn't have instead of everything God had given her.

Not only did Satan recount God's Word incorrectly, Eve did too. She added to what God said (v. 3). Then after Eve's attempt to offer a rebuttal to Satan's false claim, Satan flat out called God a liar (v. 4) and told Eve that there would be no consequences, when God had clearly said otherwise.

Eve fell for it. She chose to go with what made sense to her in the moment and ignore the warning God had given her and her husband. She invited her husband to participate in disobeying God. As a result, their perfect life in the Garden of Eden came to an end as a consequence of their sin.

The good news is that God still pursued a relationship with them. First, He went looking for Adam and Eve. He sought them out even when they were hiding from Him in guilt and shame (vv. 8-9). God invited them to face their sin and be honest about what they had done (v. 11). He cursed Satan and provided a solution for victory over him through the birth of Christ Jesus (v. 15). While Adam and Eve still had to face the consequences of their choices, God covered them (v. 21). He showed them tough love by protecting them from doing more damage than they'd already done (vv. 22-24).

Most of us have experienced, either firsthand or by watching others, what can happen when we don't follow God's direction. We call the sin of Adam and Eve "The Fall" but the truth is we all fall. Like Eve, many of us focus more on what we can't have and show a lack of gratitude for what God has provided. When we don't embrace the truth of God's Word, there will be consequences. Some consequences are immediate and obvious. Others appear over time and subtly erode God's plan for our lives. In either case, one consequence is always the same—sin separates us from fellowship with God.

But even when we fall, and we all fall (Rm 3:23), there is good news. First, the same God that showed mercy, grace, and redemptive love in Genesis is the God who offers us the same gift today and every day. Like He covered Adam and Eve, He is willing to cover us with His saving, redeeming blood.

Second, we have the opportunity each and every day to choose to obey God's Word. Believing what God has said is our powerful defense against the deception of the enemy and the pitfalls and consequences that may follow.

Eventually, the consequence of my decision to buy things on credit became so overwhelming that, despite the shame and guilt I felt, I talked to my parents about it. They were disappointed in my choices but also expressed their commitment to guide me to a better financial place. The good news was they were willing to cover me with love and wisdom as I moved forward. They did, however, require me to cut up the card.

God always provides a way for us to regain fellowship with Him. God offers forgiveness and a solution to the consequences that we face because of the victory we have in Jesus Christ. God desires to cover us. It is not His desire that any of us should perish spiritually or experientially. While sometimes that involves showing us tough love, His love is always aimed at our ultimate good.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Have you faced consequences for your disobedience to God?
- How did God correct you?
- How did you experience God's protection and compassion through His correction?

Second Chances

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1834

Author Index, page 1844

Meet *Eve*

A WOMAN OF
Second Chances
GENESIS 3

Eve desired wisdom, and she believed the serpent when he said that God was holding out on her. She broke God's law and did the one thing He asked her not to do. Eve learned the hard way that God wasn't the one who lied. It was the serpent who deceived her. But God didn't leave her in her brokenness. The first mistake in history also led to the greatest second chance. While there were consequences for her actions, God promised to redeem her and make her the mother of all the living. He also promised that her offspring would one day crush the serpent and destroy his hold over humanity. God was faithful to fulfill His promise, too, bringing about redemption through the Second Adam—Jesus Christ.

really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden?'"

²The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. ³But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, 'You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴ "No! You will not die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "In fact, God knows that when^a you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God,^b knowing good and evil." ⁶ The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

SIN'S CONSEQUENCES

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze^c and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ So the LORD God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”

¹⁰ And he said, "I heard you^d in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."

¹¹Then he asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

¹²The man replied, "The woman you gave to be with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate."

¹³So the LORD God asked the woman, "What is this you have done?"

And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent:
Because you have done this,

^A3:5 Lit on the day ^B3:5 Or gods, or divine beings ^C3:8 Lit at the wind of the day ^D3:10 Lit the sound of you

you are cursed more than any livestock
and more than any wild animal.
You will move on your belly
and eat dust all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put hostility between you
and the woman,
and between your offspring
and her offspring.
He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.

¹⁶ He said to the woman:
I will intensify your labor pains;
you will bear children with painful
effort.
Your desire will be for your husband,
yet he will rule over you.

¹⁷ And he said to the man, "Because you
listened to your wife and ate from the tree
about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat
from it':

The ground is cursed because of you.
You will eat from it by means of
painful labor^a
all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles
for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ You will eat bread^b by the sweat
of your brow
until you return to the ground,
since you were taken from it.
For you are dust,
and you will return to dust."

²⁰ The man named his wife Eve^c because
she was the mother of all the living. ²¹ The
LORD God made clothing from skins for the
man and his wife, and he clothed them.

²² The LORD God said, "Since the man has
become like one of us, knowing good and
evil, he must not reach out, take from the tree

of life, eat, and live forever." ²³ So the LORD
God sent him away from the garden of Eden
to work the ground from which he was tak-
en. ²⁴ He drove the man out and stationed the
cherubim and the flaming, whirling sword
east of the garden of Eden to guard the way
to the tree of life.

CAIN MURDERS ABEL

4 The man was intimate with his wife Eve,
and she conceived and gave birth to
Cain. She said, "I have had a male child with
the LORD's help."^d ² She also gave birth to his
brother Abel. Now Abel became a shepherd
of flocks, but Cain worked the ground. ³ In
the course of time Cain presented some of
the land's produce as an offering to the LORD.
⁴ And Abel also presented an offering—
some of the firstborn of his flock and their fat
portions. The LORD had regard for Abel and
his offering, ⁵ but he did not have regard for
Cain and his offering. Cain was furious, and
he looked despondent.^e

⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you
furious? And why do you look despondent?"

⁷ If you do what is right, won't you be accept-
ed? But if you do not do what is right, sin is
crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but
you must rule over it."

⁸ Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go
out to the field."^g And while they were in
the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and
killed him.

⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is
your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my broth-
er's guardian?"

¹⁰ Then he said, "What have you done?
Your brother's blood cries out to me from the
ground! ¹¹ So now you are cursed, alienated
from the ground that opened its mouth to
receive your brother's blood you have shed.^h

¹² If you work the ground, it will never again

^a3:17 Lit it through pain ^b3:19 Or food ^c3:20 Lit Living, or Life ^d4:1 Lit the LORD ^e4:5 Lit and his face fell

^f4:6 Lit why has your face fallen ^g4:8 Sam, LXX, Syr, Vg; MT omits "Let's go out to the field." ^h4:11 Lit blood from your hand

give you its yield. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

¹³ But Cain answered the LORD, "My punishment^a is too great to bear! ¹⁴ Since you are banishing me today from the face of the earth, and I must hide from your presence and become a restless wanderer on the earth, whoever finds me will kill me."

¹⁵ Then the LORD replied to him, "In that case,^b whoever kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over."^c And he placed a mark on Cain so that whoever found him would not kill him. ¹⁶ Then Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

THE LINE OF CAIN

¹⁷ Cain was intimate with his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch. Then Cain became the builder of a city, and he named the city Enoch after his son. ¹⁸ Irad was born to Enoch, Irad fathered Mehujael, Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. ¹⁹ Lamech took two wives for himself, one named Adah and the other named Zillah. ²⁰ Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of the nomadic herdsmen.^d ²¹ His brother was named Jubal; he was the father of all who play the lyre and the flute. ²² Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. Tubal-cain's sister was Naamah.

²³ Lamech said to his wives:
Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
wives of Lamech, pay attention
to my words.
For I killed a man
for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.
²⁴ If Cain is to be avenged
seven times over,
then for Lamech it will be
seventy-seven times!

²⁵ Adam was intimate with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, for she said, "God has given^e me another child^f in place of Abel, since Cain killed him."

²⁶ A son was born to Seth also, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD.

THE LINE OF SETH

5 This is the document containing the family^g records of Adam.^h On the day that God created man, he made him in the likeness of God; ² he created them male and female. When they were created, he blessed them and called them mankind.ⁱ

³ Adam was 130 years old when he fathered a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth. ⁴ Adam lived 800 years after he fathered Seth, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ⁵ So Adam's life lasted 930 years; then he died.

⁶ Seth was 105 years old when he fathered Enosh. ⁷ Seth lived 807 years after he fathered Enosh, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ⁸ So Seth's life lasted 912 years; then he died.

⁹ Enosh was 90 years old when he fathered Kenan. ¹⁰ Enosh lived 815 years after he fathered Kenan, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ¹¹ So Enosh's life lasted 905 years; then he died.

¹² Kenan was 70 years old when he fathered Mahalalel. ¹³ Kenan lived 840 years after he fathered Mahalalel, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ¹⁴ So Kenan's life lasted 910 years; then he died.

¹⁵ Mahalalel was 65 years old when he fathered Jared. ¹⁶ Mahalalel lived 830 years after he fathered Jared, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ¹⁷ So Mahalalel's life lasted 895 years; then he died.

¹⁸ Jared was 162 years old when he fathered Enoch. ¹⁹ Jared lived 800 years after he

^a4:13 Or sin ^b4:15 LXX, Syr, Vg read "Not so!" ^c4:15 Or suffer severely ^d4:20 Lit the dweller of tent and livestock
^e4:25 The Hb word for given sounds like the name "Seth." ^f4:25 Lit seed ^g5:1 Lit written family ^h5:1 Or mankind
ⁱ5:1 Or Adam, human beings ^j5:2 Hb 'adam

fathered Enoch, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ²⁰So Jared's life lasted 962 years; then he died.

²¹Enoch was 65 years old when he fathered Methuselah. ²²And after he fathered Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and fathered other sons and daughters. ²³So Enoch's life lasted 365 years. ²⁴Enoch walked with God; then he was not there because God took him.

²⁵Methuselah was 187 years old when he fathered Lamech. ²⁶Methuselah lived 782 years after he fathered Lamech, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ²⁷So Methuselah's life lasted 969 years; then he died.

²⁸Lamech was 182 years old when he fathered a son. ²⁹And he named him Noah,^A saying, "This one will bring us relief from the agonizing labor of our hands, caused by the ground the LORD has cursed." ³⁰Lamech lived 595 years after he fathered Noah, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ³¹So Lamech's life lasted 777 years; then he died.

³²Noah was 500 years old, and he fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

SONS OF GOD AND DAUGHTERS OF MANKIND

6 When mankind began to multiply on the earth and daughters were born to them, ²the sons of God saw that the daughters of mankind were beautiful, and they took any they chose as wives^B for themselves. ³And the LORD said, "My Spirit will not remain^C with^D mankind forever, because they are corrupt.^E Their days will be 120 years." ⁴The Nephilim^F were on the earth both in those days and afterward, when the sons of God came to the daughters of mankind, who bore children to them. They were the powerful men of old, the famous men.

JUDGMENT DECREED

⁵When the LORD saw that human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time, ⁶the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and he was deeply grieved.^G ⁷Then the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I created, off the face of the earth, together with the animals, creatures that crawl, and birds of the sky—for I regret that I made them." ⁸Noah, however, found favor with the LORD.

GOD WARNS NOAH

⁹These are the family records of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among his contemporaries; Noah walked with God.

¹⁰And Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with wickedness.^H ¹²God saw how corrupt the earth was, for every creature had corrupted its way on the earth. ¹³Then God said to Noah, "I have decided to put an end to every creature, for the earth is filled with wickedness because of them; therefore I am going to destroy them along with the earth.

¹⁴"Make yourself an ark of gopher^I wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it with pitch inside and outside. ¹⁵This is how you are to make it: The ark will be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high.^J ¹⁶You are to make a roof,^K finishing the sides of the ark to within eighteen inches^L of the roof. You are to put a door in the side of the ark. Make it with lower, middle, and upper decks.

¹⁷"Understand that I am bringing a flood—floodwaters on the earth to destroy every creature under heaven with the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. ¹⁸But I will establish my covenant with you, and

^A5:29 In Hb, the name Noah sounds like "bring us relief." ^B6:2 Or women ^C6:3 Or strive ^D6:3 Or in ^E6:3 Lit flesh ^F6:4 Possibly means "fallen ones"; traditionally, "giants"; Nm 13:31-33 ^G6:6 Lit was grieved to his heart ^H6:11 Or injustice, also in v. 13 ^I6:14 Unknown species of tree; perhaps pine or cypress ^J6:15 Or 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high ^K6:16 Or window, or hatch; Hb uncertain ^L6:16 Lit to a cubit

Sight Unseen

GENESIS 6-7

Exactly one year ago we purchased a fixer-upper with sixteen acres in Tennessee, sight unseen. It was the riskiest thing my husband and I have ever done. I'm sure our family and friends had to bite their tongues not to openly admonish us, but we felt led by God that we were to move and that the house and land was ours. We named the property Hesus Hill because the Hebrew word *hesed* is a description of God's tremendous, loyal, and steadfast love for us. It reminds us that through thick and thin He is always there. Oh how we needed that reminder as we struggled in so many areas to fix up the house.

God's instructions to Noah must have seemed insane. *It will rain and all the things with breath in their lungs will die, except for you and your family (Gn 6:13). Remember, the people had never seen rain before (Gn 1:6-7, 2:5-6). Oh, and build a boat, Noah, to these exact specifications (Gn 6:14).* That must have seemed crazy to all the people he knew, but Noah obeyed, and the Lord was faithful to give Him the details he needed and to provide every step of the way. The animals came to him, but Noah and his family still had to go out and collect the food (Gn 6:21, 7:8-9).

The ark instructions came in detail, but they had to work to build it (Gn 6:14-16). I'm sure at some point it crossed Noah's mind: *How am I going to shut this door?* But when the time came and they were all loaded up, "the LORD shut him in" (Gn 7:16). There was no navigation system or rudder for that giant boat, and yet God protected them. He steered them from harm and kept them from crashing into mountains.

Noah is such a beautiful example of walking by faith. Up to that point there had never been rain. There was no rudder, and yet, he believed and obeyed. He walked onto that finished ark knowing God would deliver them, and He did. About a year later, at the end of that incredible faith journey, when the land was finally dry, the first thing righteous Noah did was offer up a beautiful sacrifice honoring the Lord (Gn 8:20). God made a covenant with mankind that He would never flood the earth again, complete with a rainbow as a sign (Gn 9:9-17).

Ultimately, Noah's faith and obedience gave us all a second chance. I'm wondering when we will finally grasp that when God whispers in our spirit to go or to do, that His "rudder" will take into account every obstacle, that His perfect plan is in motion, that we need only be available, and most of all, that His *hesed* love will ever be present, carrying us to dry land.

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you will enter the ark with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. ¹⁹ You are also to bring into the ark two of all the living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰ Two of everything — from the birds according to their kinds, from the livestock according to their kinds, and from the animals that crawl on the ground according to their kinds — will come to you so that you can keep them alive. ²¹ Take with you every kind of food that is eaten; gather it as food for you and for them." ²² And Noah did this. He did everything that God had commanded him.

ENTERING THE ARK

7 Then the LORD said to Noah, “Enter the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation. ² You are to take with you seven pairs, a male and its female, of all the clean animals, and two of the animals that are not clean, a male and its female, ³ and seven pairs, male and female, of the birds of the sky — in order to keep offspring alive throughout the earth. ⁴ Seven days from now I will make it rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and every living thing I have made I will wipe off the face of the earth.” ⁵ And Noah did everything that the LORD commanded him.

⁶Noah was six hundred years old when the flood came and water covered the earth. ⁷So Noah, his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives entered the ark because of the floodwaters. ⁸From the clean animals, unclean animals, birds, and every creature that crawls on the ground, ⁹two of each, male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, just as God had commanded him. ¹⁰Seven days later the floodwaters came on the earth.

THE FLOOD

¹¹ In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the sources of the vast watery depths burst open, the floodgates of the sky were opened, ¹² and the rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. ¹³ On that same day Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, entered the ark, along with Noah's wife and his three sons' wives. ¹⁴ They entered it with all the wildlife according to their kinds, all livestock according to their kinds, all the creatures that crawl on the earth according to their kinds, every flying creature — all the birds and every winged creature — according to their kinds. ¹⁵ Two of every creature that has the breath of life in it came to Noah and entered the ark. ¹⁶ Those that entered, male and female of every creature, entered just as God had commanded him. Then the LORD shut him in.

¹⁷ The flood continued for forty days on the earth; the water increased and lifted up the ark so that it rose above the earth. ¹⁸ The water surged and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. ¹⁹ Then the water surged even higher on the earth, and all the high mountains under the whole sky were covered. ²⁰ The mountains were covered as the water surged above them more than twenty feet. ^a ²¹ Every creature perished — those that crawl on the earth, birds, livestock, wildlife, and those that swarm^b on the earth, as well as all mankind. ²² Everything with the breath of the spirit of life in its nostrils — everything on dry land died. ²³ He wiped out every living thing that was on the face of the earth, from mankind to livestock, to creatures that crawl, to the birds of the sky, and they were wiped off the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. ²⁴ And the water surged on the earth 150 days.

^A7:20 Lit *surged 15 cubits* ^B7:21 Lit *all the swarming swarms*

THE FLOOD RECEDES

8 God remembered Noah, as well as all the wildlife and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. God caused a wind¹ to pass over the earth, and the water began to subside. ²The sources of the watery depths and the floodgates of the sky were closed, and the rain from the sky stopped. ³The water steadily receded from the earth, and by the end of 150 days the water had decreased significantly. ⁴The ark came to rest in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat.

⁵ The water continued to recede until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were visible. ⁶ After forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made, ⁷ and he sent out a raven. It went back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. ⁸ Then he sent out a dove to see whether the water on the earth's surface had gone down, ⁹ but the dove found no resting place for its foot. It returned to him in the ark because water covered the surface of the whole earth. He reached out and brought it into the ark to himself. ¹⁰ So Noah waited seven more days and sent out the dove from the ark again. ¹¹ When the dove came to him at evening, there was a plucked olive leaf in its beak. So Noah knew that the water on the earth's surface had gone down. ¹² After he had waited another seven days, he sent out the dove, but it did not return to him again. ¹³ In the six hundred and first year,⁹ in the first month, on the first day of the month, the water that had covered the earth was dried up. Then Noah removed the ark's cover and saw that the surface of the ground was drying. ¹⁴ By the twenty-seventh day of the second month, the earth was dry.

THE LORD'S PROMISE

¹⁵ Then God spoke to Noah, ¹⁶ “Come out of the ark, you, your wife, your sons, and your sons’ wives with you. ¹⁷ Bring out all the living creatures^c that are with you — birds, livestock, those that crawl on the earth — and they will spread over the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” ¹⁸ So Noah, along with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives, came out. ¹⁹ All the animals, all the creatures that crawl, and all the flying creatures — everything that moves on the earth — came out of the ark by their families.

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD. He took some of every kind of clean animal and every kind of clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹ When the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, he said to himself, "I will never again curse the ground because of human beings, even though the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth onward. And I will never again strike down every living thing as I have done.

22 As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, and day and night
will not cease."

GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH

9 God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. ²The fear and terror of you will be in every living creature on the earth, every bird of the sky, every creature that crawls on the ground, and all the fish of the sea. They are placed under your authority. ³Every creature that lives and moves will be food for you; as I gave the green plants, I have given you everything. ⁴However, you must not eat meat with its lifeblood in it. ⁵And I will require a penalty for your lifeblood;^e I will require it from any animal and from any human; if someone murders

^A8:1 Or *spirit*; Gn 1:2 ^B8:13 = of Noah's life ^C8:17 Lit *creatures of all flesh* ^D9:2 Lit *are given in your hand*

^E9:5 Lit And your blood belonging to your life I will seek

a fellow human, I will require that person's life.^a

⁶ Whoever sheds human blood,
by humans his blood will be shed,
for God made humans in his image.

⁷ But you, be fruitful and multiply; spread out
over the earth and multiply on it."

⁸ Then God said to Noah and his sons with
him, ⁹ "Understand that I am establishing my
covenant with you and your descendants af-
ter you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that
is with you — birds, livestock, and all wildlife
of the earth that are with you — all the ani-
mals of the earth that came out of the ark.

¹¹ I establish my covenant with you that nev-
er again will every creature be wiped out by
floodwaters; there will never again be a flood
to destroy the earth."

¹² And God said, "This is the sign of the
covenant I am making between me and you
and every living creature with you, a cov-
enant for all future generations: ¹³ I have
placed my bow in the clouds, and it will be
a sign of the covenant between me and the
earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I form clouds over the
earth and the bow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I
will remember my covenant between me
and you and all the living creatures:^b water
will never again become a flood to destroy
every creature. ¹⁶ The bow will be in the
clouds, and I will look at it and remember
the permanent covenant between God and
all the living creatures^c on earth." ¹⁷ God said
to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that
I have established between me and every
creature on earth."

PROPHECIES ABOUT NOAH'S FAMILY

¹⁸ Noah's sons who came out of the ark were
Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father
of Canaan. ¹⁹ These three were Noah's sons,
and from them the whole earth was popu-
lated.

²⁰ Noah, as a man of the soil, began by
planting^d a vineyard. ²¹ He drank some of the
wine, became drunk, and uncovered himself
inside his tent. ²² Ham, the father of Canaan,
saw his father naked and told his two broth-
ers outside. ²³ Then Shem and Japheth took a
cloak and placed it over both their shoulders,
and walking backward, they covered their
father's nakedness. Their faces were turned
away, and they did not see their father naked.

²⁴ When Noah awoke from his drinking
and learned what his youngest son had done
to him, ²⁵ he said:

Canaan is cursed.

He will be the lowest of slaves
to his brothers.

²⁶ He also said:

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem;
Let Canaan be^e Shem's slave.

²⁷ Let God extend Japheth;^f
let Japheth dwell in the tents of Shem;
let Canaan be Shem's slave.

²⁸ Now Noah lived 350 years after the flood.

²⁹ So Noah's life lasted 950 years; then he died.

THE TABLE OF NATIONS

10 These are the family records of Noah's
sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. They
also had sons after the flood.

² Japheth's sons: Gomer, Magog, Madai,
Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. ³ Gomer's
sons: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.
⁴ And Javan's sons: Elishah, Tarshish, Kit-
tim, and Dodanim.^g ⁵ From these descen-
dants, the peoples of the coasts and islands
spread out into their lands according to
their clans in their nations, each with its
own language.

⁶ Ham's sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Ca-
naan. ⁷ Cush's sons: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah,
Raamah, and Sabteca. And Raamah's sons:
Sheba and Dedan.

^a9:5 Lit any human; from the hand of a man his brother I will seek the life of the human. ^b9:15 Lit and creatures of all
flesh ^c9:16 Lit creatures of all flesh ^d9:20 Or Noah began to be a farmer and planted ^e9:26 As a wish or prayer;
others interpret the verbs in vv. 26-27 as prophecy: Canaan will be . . . ^f9:27 In Hb, the name Japheth sounds like
the word "extend." ^g10:4 Some Hb mss, Sam, LXX read Rodanim; 1Ch 1:7

⁸Cush fathered Nimrod, who began to be powerful in the land. ⁹He was a powerful hunter in the sight of the LORD. That is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a powerful hunter in the sight of the LORD." ¹⁰His kingdom started with Babylon, Erech, ^AAccad, ^Band Calneh, ^Cin the land of Shinar. ^D¹¹From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, ¹²and Resen, between Nineveh and the great city Calah.

¹³Mizraim ^Efathered the people of Lud, Anam, Lehab, Naphtuh, ¹⁴Pathrus, Casluh (the Philistines came from them), and Caphthor.

¹⁵Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn and Heth, ¹⁶as well as the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, ¹⁷the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, ¹⁸the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the Canaanite clans scattered. ¹⁹The Canaanite border went from Sidon going toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and going toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim as far as Lasha.

²⁰These are Ham's sons by their clans, according to their languages, in their lands and their nations.

²¹And Shem, Japheth's older brother, also had sons. Shem was the father of all the sons of Eber. ²²Shem's sons were Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram.

²³Aram's sons: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.

²⁴Arpachshad fathered ^FShelah, and Shelah fathered Eber. ²⁵Eber had two sons. One was named Peleg, ^Gfor during his days the earth was divided; his brother was named Joktan. ²⁶And Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, ²⁷Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²⁸Obal, Abimael, Sheba, ²⁹Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were Joktan's sons. ³⁰Their settlements extended from Mesha to Sephar, the eastern hill country.

³¹These are Shem's sons by their clans, according to their languages, in their lands and their nations.

³²These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their family records, in their nations. The nations on earth spread out from these after the flood.

THE TOWER OF BABYLON

11 The whole earth had the same language and vocabulary. ²As people ^Imigrated from the east, ^Jthey found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³They said to each other, "Come, let us make oven-fired bricks." (They used brick for stone and asphalt for mortar.) ⁴And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky. Let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered throughout the earth."

⁵Then the LORD came down to look over the city and the tower that the humans ^Kwere building. ⁶The LORD said, "If they have begun to do this as one people all having the same language, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷Come, let's go down there and confuse their language so that they will not understand one another's speech." ⁸So from there the LORD scattered them throughout the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹Therefore it is called Babylon, ^{L,M}for there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth, and from there the LORD scattered them throughout the earth.

FROM SHEM TO ABRAM

¹⁰These are the family records of Shem. Shem lived 100 years and fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood. ¹¹After he fathered Arpachshad, Shem lived 500 years and fathered other sons and daughters. ¹²Arpachshad lived 35 years ^Nand fathered Shelah. ¹³After he fathered Shelah, Arpachshad lived 403 years and fathered other sons and daughters. ¹⁴Shelah lived 30 years and fathered Eber. ¹⁵After he fathered Eber, Shelah lived 403

^A10:10 Or Uruk ^B10:10 Or Akkad ^C10:10 Or and all of them ^D10:10 Or in Babylonia ^E10:13 = Egypt

^F10:24 LXX reads fathered Cainan, and Cainan fathered; Gn 11:12-13; Lk 3:35-36 ^G10:25 = Division ^H11:1 Lit one lip and the same words ^I11:2 Lit they ^J11:2 Or migrated eastward ^K11:5 Or the descendants of Adam ^L11:9 Hb Babel ^M11:9 In Hb, the name for "Babylon," babel sounds like the word for "confuse," balal. ^N11:12-13 LXX reads years and fathered Cainan. ¹³After he fathered Cainan, Arpachshad lived 430 years and fathered other sons and daughters, and he died. Cainan lived 130 years and fathered Shelah. After he fathered Shelah, Cainan lived 330 years and fathered other sons and daughters, and he died; Gn 10:24; Lk 3:35-36



the
New Testament

THE BOOK OF *Matthew*

UNDERSTANDING THE AUTHOR'S HEART Although the author does not identify himself in the text, the early church remained steadfast in its affirmation of Matthew as the author. Matthew was a tax collector, called by Jesus to become one of the twelve disciples. His words are an eyewitness testimony to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Matthew wrote with a Jewish audience in mind as he made repeated references to the Old Testament—identifying Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

CONNECTING WITH GOD'S STORY Matthew's Gospel account opens with a genealogy that connects the two testaments, with Jesus as the central figure. He then alternates narratives with Jesus's discourse to paint a clear portrait of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. Without a doubt, Matthew's contribution to the biblical canon is a definitive case for Jesus as the promised Savior.

CONNECTING WITH OUR STORY A journey through the Gospel of Matthew reassures every heart that God is faithful to keep His promises. He had a plan for redemption in motion since before the beginning of time, and we can place our trust in Him because He is always true to His word.

As you read Matthew, you'll also find devotions on these themes:

- *Beautiful Brokenness*
- *Better Together*
- *Daily Grace*
- *Everyday Leadership*
- *Friendship on Purpose*
- *Imperfect Hospitality*
- *Intentional Gratitude*
- *Second Chances*



²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her ²⁵but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son.^a And he named him Jesus.

WISE MEN VISIT THE KING

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, ²saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him."^a

³When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Christ would be born.

⁵"In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet:

⁶ **And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least
among the rulers of Judah:
Because out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.**"^c

⁷Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him."^d

⁹After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was.

¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him.^e Then they opened their treasures and presented

Meet Tamar

A WOMAN OF
Second Chances
MATTHEW 1

Tamar became the wife of
Judah's son, Er. When he died,
custom required that she be given
as a wife to the next oldest son,
Onan. However, he was a wicked
man, so the Lord put him to death.
Judah then promised to give
Tamar to his youngest son, Shelah,
but he did not follow through on
his promise. So Tamar disguised
herself as a prostitute and became
pregnant by Judah. After being
neglected for so long, Tamar came
to live with Judah. Her son Perez
became an ancestor of King David,
and eventually Christ. The Lord
allowed Tamar to be one of four
women named in the genealogy
of Jesus Christ and forever
remembered as a woman with a
beautiful story of redemption.

^a1:25 Other mss read to her firstborn son ^b2:2 Or to pay him homage ^c2:6 Mc 5:2 ^d2:8 Or and pay him homage

^e2:11 Or they paid him homage

What God Can Do with the Unlikely

MATTHEW 1

I remember the first time I felt like I needed to hide from Jesus. I was at a Christian retreat my freshman year of college. I was hungry for God and wanted to know more of who He is. I believed that, as I was surrounded by His people at the retreat, I would learn more about Him. The Bible was newly alive to me, and with each phrase I was blown away at how it spoke to me and how I could understand it. I wanted more.

I tuned in as the speaker gave his talk, hanging on every word, until he said something that shook me. The speaker asked, "What would you do if Jesus walked into the room right now?"

The immediate thought that came to my mind was: *I would hide.*

If Jesus came into the room, I would hide. I would go and bend down behind one of the worn couches and make sure He couldn't see me. Because He wouldn't want to see me—He, being holy and good, and me, being filthy and having done awful things. I was not clean. I was dirty. A holy God shouldn't see a dirty girl.

Shame.

I shared my thoughts with my small group, thinking they were obvious and made sense, and someone from the group spoke life to me, "You wouldn't have to hide," she said. "Jesus knows everything you've done and everything you're going to do and He loves you anyway. If He were to come into this room, He would embrace you and put His hands on your face and call you 'daughter.'"

Daughter.

"But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name" (Jn 1:12).

I had no need to stay in my shame. I was His daughter whom He loved in spite of all the filth. I was His daughter because I believed in Him and because I trusted Him with my life. Isn't that the most extraordinary thing about God? He takes in the harlots, the outcasts, the dirty, the thieves, and the liars, and He makes them—He makes us—His sons and daughters. Then He makes us new: holy, righteous, perfect.

"For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified" (Heb 10:14).

God uses the unlikely to make His name known. Did you know there are only four women named in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1? Yep, only four women named: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Mary. Tamar played the harlot, deceived her father-in-law, and had his twin sons. Rahab was a harlot. Ruth was not only a foreigner, but one of the cursed Moabites (Dt 23:3). She even initiated a relationship with Boaz after being instructed to do so by her mother-in-law Naomi. And Mary was a young, pregnant, unmarried virgin.

These women were a part of bringing Jesus to earth, and they are named in the lineage of Christ. God wanted us to know their names. God wanted us to know that Tamar—even though she tricked her father-in-law into sleeping with her—was worthy of being named because she was righteous by faith. God wanted us to know that even a harlot, Rahab, was humble and faithful and, by His grace, had given birth to a son who would become King David's great-grandfather. God wanted us to know that Boaz had redeemed the young

widow who had become a follower of Israel's God, and that she had become the great-grandmother of King David. And God wanted us to know that what looks like scandal, a young, pregnant virgin, could be so faithful that our minds would be blown away.

Rahab became the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth and became the father of Obed, who became the father of Jesse, who became the father of King David. Rahab the harlot was the great-great-grandmother of the king after God's own heart. Rahab is in the line of Jesus.

So if a harlot can have faith and be used by God and receive the blessing of being named in the genealogy of Jesus, you, my friend, can be used by God too. No matter what.

The qualifications are these: Believe. Believe Jesus is who He says He is. Believe that when you turn to Him He makes you new, holy, and righteous. Believe that He will work all things together for His highest good. Believe that He loves you.

Jesus uses the unlikely. He used Tamar and Rahab and Ruth and Mary. He is using me and He is using you—all for His name and His glory.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Do you ever feel like you are unworthy of God's love?
- Which of these women's stories do you identify with the most?
- Have you seen God redeem pieces of your story, even if it feels like there is still a long way to go?

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him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.¹² And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

¹³ After they were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Get up! Take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to kill him."¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and escaped to Egypt.¹⁵ He stayed there until Herod's death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: **Out of Egypt I called my Son.**^A

THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He gave orders to massacre all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, in keeping with the time he had learned from the wise men.¹⁷ Then what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

¹⁸ **A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping,^B and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.**^C

THE RETURN TO NAZARETH

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,²⁰ saying, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, because those who intended to kill the child are dead."²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother, and entered the land of Israel.²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to

go there. And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the region of Galilee.²³ Then he went and settled in a town called Nazareth to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

THE HERALD OF THE CHRIST

3 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea² and saying, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!"³ For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said:
**A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight!**^D

⁴ Now John had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.⁵ Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him,⁶ and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

⁷ When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"⁸ Therefore produce fruit consistent with^E repentance.⁹ And don't presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones.¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ "I baptize you with^F water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove^G his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.¹² His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into

^A2:15 Hs 11:1 ^B2:18 Other mss read *Ramah, lamentation, and weeping,* ^C2:18 Jr 31:15 ^D3:3 Is 40:3 ^E3:8 Lit *fruit worthy of* ^F3:11 Or *in* ^G3:11 Or *to carry*

The Beauty of God's Word

MATTHEW 2

Years ago my husband started a Christmas tradition where he gives me a nativity set every year. He searches for sets that are made from different materials—whether porcelain, wood, pewter, or glass. When I set out the nativities, I place the wise men at some distance from the rest of the scene. It's one way I like to remember that they didn't arrive in time for Jesus's birth. After the angels sang and the shepherds came, the wise men traveled two more years before reaching the young King born in Bethlehem.

I often wonder if they were considered wise because they understood the significance of the new star in the sky, or if they were wise because of who they journeyed toward. Can we be as wise today? Can we stay the course when the road is long? Thankfully, we don't have to ride a camel across a desert to find Jesus. All we need to do is open our Bibles. He's right there, on every page.

Knowing how to study the Bible, however, isn't an instantaneous thing. We don't master it in a week or a month or even a year. Here are a few tips for diving into God's Word as you seek Him with all your heart:

- Prayerfully select a book of the Bible to study. Or simply begin right here in Matthew.
- Ask God to reveal Himself to you as you read His Word. (Pray the words of Psalm 119:18.)
- Read the introduction to the book of the Bible.
- Note who wrote it and the author's purpose for writing it.
- Read the entire book you've selected, all the way through, from start to finish.
- Write down any questions you have in the margins.
- Look up any words you're not familiar with.
- Underline any passages that stand out to you.
- Read the book again, but this time slower, savoring each passage.
- Look up any cross references or footnotes beneath the biblical text.
- Rewrite a passage in your journal or notebook.
- Talk to God about the passage you've read.
- Ask Him how He wants you to respond to it.

Some of your questions about the Bible will be answered with a first or second reading while other questions may take longer. Be willing to wait for the answers. Remember the wise men? They spent two years journeying toward Jesus. We won't need that long to understand the major parts of the Bible, but we do want to be committed for the long haul, trusting that a fuller understanding of the Bible will indeed come with time.

The beauty of God's Word is so wonderfully deep that we could spend a lifetime mining its depths and still find new gems each day. And every day is another step in the journey toward our true home with our Father.

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the barn. But the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out.”

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?”

¹⁵ Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John allowed him to be baptized.

¹⁶ When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him,^a and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ Then the tempter approached him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴ He answered, “It is written: **Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.**”^b

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written:

**He will give his angels orders
concerning you,
and they will support you
with their hands
so that you will not strike
your foot against a stone.”**^c

⁷ Jesus told him, “It is also written: **Do not test the Lord your God.**”^d

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ And he said to him, “I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me.”^e

¹⁰ Then Jesus told him, “Go away,^f Satan! For it is written: **Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.**”^g

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.

MINISTRY IN GALILEE

¹² When he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

¹⁴ This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ **Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
along the road by the sea,
beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles.**
¹⁶ **The people who live in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those living in the land of the
shadow of death,
a light has dawned.**^{h,i}

¹⁷ From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

THE FIRST DISCIPLES

¹⁸ As he was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter), and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ “Follow me,” he told them, “and I will make you fish for^j people.” ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father, preparing their nets, and he

^a3:16 Other mss omit *for him* ^b4:4 Dt 8:3 ^c4:6 Ps 91:11-12 ^d4:7 Dt 6:16 ^e4:9 Or *and pay me homage*

^f4:10 Other mss read “*Get behind me*” ^g4:10 Dt 6:13 ^h4:16 Lit *dawned on them* ⁱ4:15-16 Is 9:1-2 ^j4:19 Or *you fishers of*

The Temptation of Jesus

MATTHEW 4:1-11

Hunger does a number on me. It makes me grumpy, short-tempered, and all-around unwise. That is an absolute recipe for disaster that makes me weak. I call them my “in the desert with the devil” moments. They are daily moments where the enemy whispers to me and attempts to plant lies in my mind. These can be lies about my body, my success, my worthiness, or lies about my ability to parent, teach, create, or love. The devil wants to get me where I am weak, and he wants to make me question my relationship with God. I must follow Christ’s example of how to handle temptation.

In reading Matthew 4, we know Jesus faced hunger. Jesus strapped on His belt of truth (Eph 6:14) and wielded His sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17) to fight the devil as He was tempted. Jesus provided us with ways to counteract the schemes of the devil by giving us His Word. God has unending, unconditional love for us that is always reaching toward us.

Ladies, get ready for battle! Strap on your belt and wield your mighty sword.

The human in us wants to crumble, but God gives us Himself through the Holy Spirit which is living and active inside us. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to fight. When the devil whispers that we need to do more and we aren’t enough, we can shout, “I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well.” (Ps 139:14).

When the devil whispers that we should go ahead and indulge and enjoy, because we only live once, we can shout, “Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own” (1 Cor 6:19).

When Satan is whispering in our ear, how will we shut him down? We can write it down and set it as a reminder. We can make this a reality and not something we wish we can do. Today, we can battle temptation with the power that comes from the Holy Spirit. We don’t do it from a place of striving, but as a response. We make it a response of love for the grace that we have been offered in Christ Jesus.

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called them.²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

TEACHING, PREACHING, AND HEALING

²³ Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every^A disease and sickness^B among the people.

²⁴ Then the news about him spread throughout Syria. So they brought to him all those who were afflicted, those suffering from various diseases and intense pains, the demon-possessed, the epileptics, and the paralytics. And he healed them. ²⁵ Large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

5 When he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then^c he began to teach them, saying:

THE BEATITUDES

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
5 Blessed are the humble,
for they will inherit the earth.
6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst
for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.
10 Blessed are those who are
persecuted because
of righteousness,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

¹¹ "You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. ¹² Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

BELIEVERS ARE SALT AND LIGHT

¹³ **"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.**

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

CHRIST FULFILLS THE LAW

17 "Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter^e or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished. 19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

MURDER BEGINS IN THE HEART

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, **Do not murder**,^f and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. ²² But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother

^A4:23 Or every kind of ^B4:23 Or physical ailment ^C5:2 Lit Then opening his mouth ^D5:13 Or how can the earth be salted? ^E5:18 Or not one iota; iota is the smallest letter of the Gk alphabet. ^F5:21 Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17

Parenting and the Beatitudes

MATTHEW 5:3-12

Parenting isn't about feeling good all the time.

Make it that, and you'll have kids who run the house and don't understand the word "no." Some of my best parenting moments are when I feel the worst. For example, holding a screaming, flailing, five-year-old in mid-temper tantrum when really I want to put her in her room and go eat chocolate cake by myself, or taking a deep breath and explaining to my 3-year-old one more time that "I need" is not the way we start sentences to ask for something, or not reacting harshly when my toddler decides to gnaw at my shoulder.

Parenting is often saying no to my flesh and depending on the Holy Spirit's power. Because there is no way I can do this on my own. Nothing has brought me face-to-face with my "spiritual bankruptcy" faster than being a parent. More than anything, it draws me closer to God and how He sees us.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus shows us a flip-flop view of His kingdom versus the world's. He explains that the characteristics the world often despises are the ones He blesses. John MacArthur wrote, "The Beatitudes demonstrate that the way to heavenly blessedness is antithetical to the worldly path normally followed in pursuit of happiness."

How many times do we feel mournful? Poor in spirit? Persecuted by our coworkers, our children, or other parents? Jesus blesses that.

The Beatitudes embody all the qualities I want to have as a parent and as a friend: gentleness, peacefulness, mercy, purity of heart.

Until we see Christ, no one on earth is going to love us with the uninhibited crazy love of a toddler or preschooler. Let's pour back that love, praying for the Spirit to fill us with gentleness, peace, mercy, and purity of heart, and to not give up when we mourn or feel persecuted or want to hide in our rooms and throw stuff at the wall.

Because when we're poor in spirit, we're blessed (v. 3).

Press on, mothers—physical, spiritual, adoptive, foster—and aunts, grandmothers, and dear friends. By God's grace, we will not be destroyed but find ourselves closer to and more like Him.

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or sister^a will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults^b his brother or sister, will be subject to the court.^c Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be subject to hellfire.^d ²³ So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Reach a settlement quickly with your adversary while you're on the way with him to the court, or your adversary will hand you over to the judge, and the judge to^e the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will never get out of there until you have paid the last penny.^f

ADULTERY BEGINS IN THE HEART

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, **Do not commit adultery.**^g ²⁸ But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

DIVORCE PRACTICES CENSURED

³¹ "It was also said, **Whoever divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.**^h ³² But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

TELL THE TRUTH

³³ "Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors, **You must not break your**

oath, but you must keep your oaths to the Lord.ⁱ ³⁴ But I tell you, don't take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is God's throne;^j or by the earth, because it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ Do not swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. ³⁷ But let your 'yes' mean 'yes,' and your 'no' mean 'no.' Anything more than this is from the evil one.

GO THE SECOND MILE

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, **An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.**^k ³⁹ But I tell you, don't resist^l an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, **Love your neighbor**^m and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemiesⁿ and pray for those whoⁿ persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be^o children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary?^p Don't even the Gentiles^q do the same? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

HOW TO GIVE

6 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness^r in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with

^a5:22 Other mss add *without a cause* ^b5:22 Lit *Whoever says 'Raca'*; an Aramaic term of abuse that puts someone down, insulting one's intelligence ^c5:22 Lit *Sanhedrin* ^d5:22 Lit *the gehenna of fire* ^e5:25 Other mss read *judge will hand you over to* ^f5:26 Lit *quadrans*, the smallest and least valuable Roman coin, worth 1/64 of a daily wage ^g5:27 Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18 ^h5:31 Dt 24:1 ⁱ5:33 Lv 19:12; Nm 30:2; Dt 23:21 ^j5:38 Ex 21:24; Lv 24:20; Dt 19:21 ^k5:39 Or *don't set yourself against, or don't retaliate against* ^l5:43 Lv 19:18 ^m5:44 Other mss add *bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you,* ⁿ5:44 Other mss add *mistreat you and* ^o5:45 Or *may become, or may show yourselves to be* ^p5:47 Or *doing that is superior*; lit *doing more* ^q5:47 Other mss read *tax collectors* ^r6:1 Other mss read *charitable giving*

your Father in heaven. ² So whenever you give to the poor, don't sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. ³ But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^A

HOW TO PRAY

⁵ "Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^B ⁷ When you pray, don't babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they'll be heard for their many words. ⁸ Don't be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

⁹ "Therefore, you should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,
your name be honored as holy.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.^C

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us into^D temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.^E

¹⁴ "For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well.

¹⁵ But if you don't forgive others,^F your Father will not forgive your offenses.

HOW TO FAST

¹⁶ "Whenever you fast, don't be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they make their faces unattractive^G so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,¹⁸ so that your fasting isn't obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^B

GOD AND POSSESSIONS

¹⁹ "Don't store up for yourselves treasures^I on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness!

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

THE CURE FOR ANXIETY

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they? ²⁷ Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don't labor or spin thread.

^A6:4 Other mss read *will himself reward you openly* ^B6:6,18 Other mss add *openly* ^C6:11 Or *our necessary bread, or our bread for tomorrow* ^D6:13 Or *do not cause us to come into* ^E6:13 Or *from evil*; some later mss add *For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.* ^F6:15 Other mss add *their wrongdoing*

^G6:16 Or *unrecognizable, or disfigured* ^H6:19 Or *valuables* ^I6:27 Or *add a single cubit to his height*

Surrender and Seek

MATTHEW 6:25-34

It was everything I dreamed of and absolutely nothing I could have imagined. I opened my eyes, popped straight up in my bed, and sat quietly as the tears began to stream down my cheeks. I had everything I'd prayed for—healthy children, a wonderful husband, a house, great friends, and family. On that morning, however, I looked around my bedroom and felt completely overwhelmed by my own reality. I felt grateful yet lost, content but empty, and confused by this increasingly awkward array of emotions.

I was a mom of four young girls, and I was overcome by the responsibilities that accompanied raising them. From the car we drove, to the house we lived in, and the dinners I prepared, nothing felt right. I was convinced I was not enough.

I sat in bed alone, listening to my husband prepare breakfast. I could hear my six-year-old singing her new favorite song, my four-year-old crying over a lost sock, and my twin two-year-olds running around covered in finger paint. I wondered how I got there and whose life I was living. More than that, I questioned who was in control of it all.

Now, don't get me wrong. I loved my family and my life. I knew I needed to trust God with my life, but how? I knew He was always with me, but why did I feel lonely? I knew He was my joy, but why was I so sad?

Everything around me seemed to be spinning out of control. The physical, emotional, and financial burdens of motherhood had replaced the faith, trust, and joy I once knew were mine.

The longer I sat in tears, the more I could tell that something was changing. It was not my situation, but my focus and my perspective. With each tear that fell, I finally gave up. Unknowingly, I reached the end of my fight for control. My will, my power, my strength, and my efforts were not working. As a result, I gave God the freedom to be Lord of my life in reality, not just in word-service.

I surrendered to Jesus's words found in Matthew 6:25-34:

"Therefore I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they? Can any of you add one moment to his life-span by worrying? And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don't labor or spin thread. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't he do much more for you—you of little faith? So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

I stopped trying to escape, fix, and recreate the life He had placed before me, and I finally gave Christ the freedom to control and use my life in the here and now.

Maybe, like me, you know God's Word but you're trying to see His face through the worry. God does not aimlessly remind us of His ability to provide. Instead, He gives specific direction on how to rest in His provision.

Seek Him.

I wish I could tell you that everything changed after I wiped my tears and surrendered. It was the beginning of a new me, a "me" that God could use because I laid my anxieties at His feet and placed my hands in His. Now, years later, I still have my moments of worry. I find myself having to lay it all down again, but I also find that each time it gets a little easier.

Replacing personal worry with seeking His Kingdom is a daily surrender. Are you wondering how you ended up in this place—out of control and overwhelmed by your dreams, your emotions, your marriage, or your family? Today, remember that you can't have victory in your life while operating in your own sufficiency. Today, I encourage you to get desperate and "give up."

Surrender. Seek Him. Lay it down. And watch Christ pick you up.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Are there areas of your life that cause you constant anxiety or fear? What are they?
- In what ways have you seen God's hand of provision despite your worry or anxiety?
- How can you lay your anxieties before Him today and seek His Kingdom first?

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²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. ³⁰ If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't he do much more for you — you of little faith? ³¹ So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God^a and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. ³⁴ Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

DO NOT JUDGE

7 “Do not judge, so that you won’t be judged. ²For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use. ³Why do you look at the splinter in your brother’s eye but don’t notice the beam of wood in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ and look, there’s a beam of wood in your own eye? ⁵Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s eye. ⁶Don’t give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or they will trample them under their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces.

ASK, SEARCH, KNOCK

⁷ “Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door^a will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ Who among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks

for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him. ¹² Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

ENTERING THE KINGDOM

¹³ "Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. ¹⁴ How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it.

¹⁵ "Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. ¹⁶ You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ So you'll recognize them by their fruit.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ ²³ Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you. **Depart from me, you lawbreakers!**’” ^{C.B.}

THE TWO FOUNDATIONS

²⁴ “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.
²⁵ The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn’t collapse, because its foundation was on the

^A6:33 Other mss omit *of God* ^B7:7 Lit *and it* ^C7:23 Lit *you who work lawlessness* ^D7:23 Ps 6:8

rock.²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.²⁷ The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash."

²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching,²⁹ because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes.

A MAN CLEANSED

8 When he came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him.² Right away a man with leprosy^a came up and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

³ Reaching out his hand, Jesus touched him, saying, "I am willing; be made clean." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.⁴ Then Jesus told him, "See that you don't tell anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

A CENTURION'S FAITH

⁵ When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, pleading with him,⁶ "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible agony."

⁷ He said to him, "Am I to come and heal him?"^b

⁸ "Lord," the centurion replied, "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.⁹ For I too am a man under authority, having soldiers under my command.^c I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this!' and he does it."

¹⁰ Hearing this, Jesus was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you,

I have not found anyone in Israel with so great a faith.¹¹ I tell you that many will come from east and west to share the banquet^d with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.¹² But the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."¹³ Then Jesus told the centurion, "Go. As you have believed, let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that very moment.^e

HEALINGS AT CAPERNAUM

¹⁴ Jesus went into Peter's house and saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever.¹⁵ So he touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she got up and began to serve him.¹⁶ When evening came, they brought to him many who were demon-possessed. He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick,¹⁷ so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

**He himself took our weaknesses
and carried our diseases.^f**

THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

¹⁸ When Jesus saw a large crowd^g around him, he gave the order to go to the other side of the sea.¹⁹ A scribe approached him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

²⁰ Jesus told him, "Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

²¹ "Lord," another of his disciples said, "first let me go bury my father."

²² But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

WIND AND WAVES OBEY JESUS

²³ As he got into the boat, his disciples followed him.²⁴ Suddenly, a violent storm arose on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves—but Jesus kept sleeping.²⁵ So

^a8:2 Gk *lepros*; a term for various skin diseases, also in v. 3; see Lv 13–14 ^b8:7 Or "I will come and heal him."

^c8:9 Lit *under me* ^d8:11 Lit *recline at the table* ^e8:13 Or *that hour*; lit *very hour* ^f8:17 Is 53:4 ^g8:18 Other mss read *saw large crowds*

Go On and Ask

MATTHEW 7:11

A few years ago, I was walking with my friend and we were chatting about my childhood. I don't remember how it came up, but I told her we left the mission in Nepal and flew to Holland because I had been diagnosed with leukemia. Only somewhere between leaving Nepal and being treated for leukemia, my tests came back with unusual results and my blood counts had begun normalizing. While they didn't say I was healed, they all scratched their heads and wondered if I had been misdiagnosed the whole time because that doesn't happen.

"God healed you," she replied in her easy southern drawl.

The words slid off her tongue as if she had been put there to preach truth. I mumbled something about how I didn't know for sure because I don't have medical records from then and I was flustered over the fact that she named this miracle so easily as if you could pull down the heavens and claim your space among God's most blessed and cherished and loved.

Until that time I had never claimed that God healed me. I always explained it away in vague terms. I was diagnosed, they said I wasn't doing well and prepared my parents for the possible loss of their child, and then I was getting better and nothing had been done but prayer. I had never claimed that miracle. It seemed too grand an experience to accept on my behalf. I can claim God healed me from much of the shame I carried about being sexually abused and assaulted. I can claim God provided when He used tragic circumstances to bring me to know His love. I can claim God saw me when a peony bloomed next to my hospital bed. I can claim God was merciful when mental illness felt like the biggest burden of all.

I see God in the suffering, but do I recognize Him in the miraculous abundance? Over the years I've come to know my God will provide, but oh how I've feared the desires of my heart. I have learned to look for every blessing in the midst of suffering, squeezing out every ounce of gratitude when my body or my mind is broken.

I cock an eyebrow and sit back detached when people claim to know that God will give them the house, the child, the dream job, the miraculous healing. I believe God can and does do all those things, but He's not under obligation to me to make my dreams come true.

He is still good when the house burns to the ground, the child never comes, the job is tedious and demanding, or the body and mind diminish and fail.

I learned to say my God is good even when the pressure of growth hurt. I often pray wide, vague prayers that have more to do with my own heart and contentment than any move of God's hand upon my circumstances or desires. I don't ask for things often. It's as if I'm giving God a way out so He doesn't look bad. Sometimes I pray as if I don't know Him at all.

But God's Word says, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him" (Matthew 7:11).

During our time in Holland, they wheeled me under the glare of hospital lights and turned my limp and fragile body sideways as my father held me curled like a hollowed-out shell

while they performed a spinal tap. The pain was like nothing I had experienced, and I cried and looked up at him as his eyes flooded with tears and I struggled against his restraint. He told me years later it was one of the hardest things he's ever had to do because I was so little and didn't understand how my daddy could allow those people to hurt me. At one point I wailed, "Daddy, make them stop!" He wished a thousand times he could have lifted me up and taken me home right then and there, but it was for my own good, so he held me tight under the suffering.

I often still see God this way in my life. When I'm struggling against trials—with suffering, with questions—I see God as my father, weeping for my pain but holding me down to endure, for my good and His glory. Somewhere along the line I relented to that. And only that. I've lost sight of the fullness of God. So I'm learning to ask. I'm learning to pray like I believe His Word is true. He is a good, good Father.

God is that father, concerned about my good. But that day talking to my friend God was something new to me: A side that's always been there, but I've failed to recognize. He is the God of miraculous gifts. He is the God who healed me. He is the God who not only sees our desires but places them within us and longs to provide for them. He is the Father who doesn't shoo away his children's dreams and prayers and hopes. Instead His gifts show us how He loves us in every possible way.

Maybe you're a woman struggling under something hard and painful and you need to know God is with you through it all. Even this can be a gift. Or maybe you need to be reminded to look for the miracles, both ordinary and extravagant. Wherever you are, remember, God is good to us. Go on and ask.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- In what way do you tend to view God? How does this view shape how you believe He interacts with you?
- What desires can you lay before your good Father, believing that He already knows them all?
- How will you go forward today believing that He has your good in mind with everything He does?

Daily Grace

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the disciples came and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to die!"

²⁶ He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.

²⁷ The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him!"

DEMONS DRIVEN OUT BY JESUS

²⁸ When he had come to the other side, to the region of the Gadarenes,^a two demon-possessed men met him as they came out of the tombs. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. ²⁹ Suddenly they shouted, "What do you have to do with us,^b Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"

³⁰ A long way off from them, a large herd of pigs was feeding. ³¹ "If you drive us out," the demons begged him, "send us into the herd of pigs."

³² "Go!" he told them. So when they had come out, they entered the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the water. ³³ Then the men who tended them fled. They went into the city and reported everything, especially what had happened to those who were demon-possessed. ³⁴ At that, the whole town went out to meet Jesus. When they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

THE SON OF MAN FORGIVES AND HEALS

9 So he got into a boat, crossed over, and came to his own town. ² Just then some men^c brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, "Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven."

³ At this, some of the scribes said to themselves, "He's blaspheming!"

⁴ Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why are you thinking evil things in your hearts?^d ⁵ For which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? ⁶ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — then he told the paralytic, "Get up, take your stretcher, and go home." ⁷ So he got up and went home. ⁸ When the crowds saw this, they were awestruck^{e,f} and gave glory to God, who had given such authority to men.

THE CALL OF MATTHEW

⁹ As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the toll booth, and he said to him, "Follow me," and he got up and followed him.

¹⁰ While he was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹² Now when he heard this, he said, "It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: **I desire mercy and not sacrifice.**^g For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners."^h

A QUESTION ABOUT FASTING

¹⁴ Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"

¹⁵ Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guestsⁱ be sad while the groom is with them? The time^j will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. ¹⁶ No one patches an old garment with unshrunk cloth, because the patch pulls away from the garment and makes the tear worse. ¹⁷ And no one puts^k new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the skins burst, the wine

^a8:28 Other mss read *Gergesenes* ^b8:29 Other mss add *Jesus* ^c9:2 Lit *then they* ^d9:4 Or *minds* ^e9:8 Other mss read *amazed* ^f9:8 Lit *afraid* ^g9:13 Hs 6:6 ^h9:13 Other mss add *to repentance* ⁱ9:15 Lit *the sons of the bridal chamber* ^j9:15 Lit *days* ^k9:17 Lit *And they do not put*

spills out, and the skins are ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”

A GIRL RESTORED AND A WOMAN HEALED

¹⁸ As he was telling them these things, suddenly one of the leaders came and knelt down before him, saying, “My daughter just died,^a but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” ¹⁹ So Jesus and his disciples got up and followed him.

²⁰ Just then, a woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years approached from behind and touched the end of his robe, ²¹ for she said to herself, “If I can just touch his robe, I’ll be made well.”^b

²² Jesus turned and saw her. “Have courage, daughter,” he said. “Your faith has saved you.”^c And the woman was made well from that moment.^d

²³ When Jesus came to the leader’s house, he saw the flute players and a crowd lamenting loudly. ²⁴ “Leave,” he said, “because the girl is not dead but asleep.” And they laughed at him. ²⁵ After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. ²⁶ Then news of this spread throughout that whole area.

HEALING THE BLIND

²⁷ As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”

²⁸ When he entered the house, the blind men approached him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I can do this?”

They said to him, “Yes, Lord.”

²⁹ Then he touched their eyes, saying, “Let it be done for you according to your faith.”

³⁰ And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus warned them sternly, “Be sure that no one finds out.”^e ³¹ But they went out and spread the news about him throughout that whole area.

DRIVING OUT A DEMON

³² Just as they were going out, a demon-possessed man who was unable to speak was brought to him. ³³ When the demon had been driven out, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed, saying, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!”

³⁴ But the Pharisees said, “He drives out demons by the ruler of the demons.”

THE LORD OF THE HARVEST

³⁵ Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every^f disease and every sickness.^g ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few.

³⁸ Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.”

COMMISSIONING THE TWELVE

10 Summoning his twelve disciples, he gave them authority over unclean spirits, to drive them out and to heal every^f disease and sickness.^g ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: First, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;^h ⁴ Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

⁵ Jesus sent out these twelve after giving them instructions: “Don’t take the road that leads to the Gentiles, and don’t enter any Samaritan town. ⁶ Instead, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’

⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy,ⁱ drive out demons. Freely you

^a9:18 Lit *daughter has now come to the end* ^b9:21 Or *be saved* ^c9:22 Or *has made you well* ^d9:22 Lit *hour* ^e9:35; 10:1 Or *every kind of* ^f9:35 Other mss add *among the people* ^g9:35; 10:1 Or *physical ailment* ^h10:3 Other mss read *and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus* ⁱ10:4 Lit *the Cananaean* ^j10:8 Gk *leprosy*; a term for various skin diseases; see Lv 13–14

received, freely give. ⁹ Don't acquire gold, silver, or copper for your money-belts. ¹⁰ Don't take a traveling bag for the road, or an extra shirt, sandals, or a staff, for the worker is worthy of his food. ¹¹ When you enter any town or village, find out who is worthy, and stay there until you leave. ¹² Greet a household when you enter it, ¹³ and if the household is worthy, let your peace be on it; but if it is unworthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴ If anyone does not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

PERSECUTIONS PREDICTED

16 "Look, I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves. 17 Beware of them, because they will hand you over to local courts^s and flog you in their synagogues. 18 You will even be brought before governors and kings because of me, to bear witness to them and to the Gentiles. 19 But when they hand you over, don't worry about how or what you are to speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour, 20 because it isn't you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you.

²¹ “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. ²² You will be hated by everyone because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to another. For truly I tell you, you will not have gone through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. ²⁴ A disciple^a is not above his teacher, or a slave above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for a disciple to become like his teacher and a slave like his

master. If they called the head of the house 'Beelzebul,' how much more the members of his household!

FEAR GOD

26 “Therefore, don’t be afraid of them, since there is nothing covered that won’t be uncovered and nothing hidden that won’t be made known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. What you hear in a whisper, ^c proclaim on the housetops. 28 Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny?^d Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. ^e 30 But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. 31 So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

ACKNOWLEDGING CHRIST

³² "Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven. ³⁴ Don't assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I came to turn

a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against
her mother-in-law:

36 and a man's enemies will be
the members of his household.^F

³⁷ The one who loves a father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; the one who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Anyone who finds his life will lose it, and anyone who loses his life because of me will find it.

^A10:17 Or *sanhedrins* ^B10:24 Or *student* ^C10:27 Lit *in the ear* ^D10:29 Gk *assarion*, a small copper coin
^E10:29 Lit *ground apart from your Father* ^F10:35-36 Mc 7:6

Safety in Numbers

MATTHEW 10

I enjoy working on events and projects with a group of people. I am social and love to interact with others, but I also find safety in numbers. Planning an important event or tackling a huge project seems less scary when I have others along for the journey. I also find it much easier to step out of my comfort zone when I'm surrounded by people who are doing the same.

I'll never forget the day I rode a zipline for the first time. I was both terrified and excited. The fear was drowned out by other women who were also taking the same leap that day. I was right in the middle of the group, so I had the opportunity to see women conquer this challenge both before and after me. Their courage gave me boldness that the thrill of the short ride was worth it. Had we not gone out together, I'm not sure I would have attempted something I viewed as scary and impossible. I also would have really missed out on some lessons God wanted to teach me about letting go of control and trusting Him.

The mission Jesus had for His disciples in Matthew 10 was a big one. As I imagine the disciples listening to Jesus's plan, I picture their eyes widening, their palms sweating, their hearts pounding, and their minds racing. He was commissioning them to do something far outside their comfort zone. Healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead are not small matters. Jesus asked them to do life-changing work, but it would also stir up lots of attention and controversy. He even warned them of danger, hatred, and potential loss of every earthly thing they held dear through doing this kingdom work.

But Jesus wasn't asking them to do this alone. That made all the difference.

God would be with them through it all, and they also had each other. It is no coincidence that Jesus commissioned these twelve men together. I see this moment as twelve men being sent out into battle together. They would be taking on both spiritual and physical enemies as they followed this calling, but they could find strength and safety in each other when circumstances inevitably became too tough to bear alone.

In commissioning the twelve disciples together, Jesus showed us the power of community. He is our source of strength, but sometimes He gives us that strength through the people around us who support us. We don't have to take on the scary things in life alone. Look to the community He has given you and link arms to follow His lead together.

Better Together

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A CUP OF COLD WATER

40 “The one who welcomes you welcomes me, and the one who welcomes me welcomes him who sent me. 41 Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet^A will receive a prophet’s reward. And anyone who welcomes a righteous person because he’s righteous^B will receive a righteous person’s reward. 42 And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple,^C truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward.”

JOHN THE BAPTIST DOUBTS

11 When Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.² Now when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples³ and asked him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

⁴ Jesus replied to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy^c are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news, ⁶ and blessed is the one who isn't offended by me."

⁷ As these men were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothes? See, those who wear soft clothes are in royal palaces. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written:

See, I am sending my messenger
ahead of you:

he will prepare your way before you.¹⁵

¹¹ "Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has appeared,^F but the least in the kingdom of

heaven is greater than he. ¹²From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been suffering violence,^g and the violent have been seizing it by force. ¹³For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. ¹⁴And if you're willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵Let anyone who has ears^h listen.

AN UNRESPONSIVE GENERATION

¹⁶ “To what should I compare this generation? It’s like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to other children:

17 We played the flute for you,
but you didn't dance;
we sang a lament,
but you didn't mourn!¹

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."^κ

²⁰ Then he proceeded to denounce the towns where most of his miracles were done, because they did not repent: ²¹ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago. ²² But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today. ²⁴ But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

THE SON GIVES KNOWLEDGE AND REST

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have

^a10:41 Lit prophet in the name of a prophet ^b10:41 Lit person in the name of a righteous person ^c10:42 Lit little ones in the name of a disciple ^d11:5 Gk leprosy; a term for various skin diseases; see Lv 13–14 ^e11:10 Mal 3:1

^F11:11 Lit arisen ^G11:12 Or has been forcefully advancing ^H11:15 Other mss add to hear ^I11:17 Or beat your chests in grief ^J11:19 Or declared right ^K11:19 Other mss read children