



*From the*  
**Beginning**

*The Gospel from the Ground Up*

PAUL & PAM HAINLINE

# From the Beginning

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**From the Beginning: The Gospel from the Ground Up**

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First Edition

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## To the Seeker

Two thousand years ago, a Roman governor stood face to face with Jesus of Nazareth and asked a question that people are still asking today:

*“What is truth?”* — **John 18:38**

He never waited for the answer. He turned and walked away — without realizing that the Truth was standing right in front of him.

We live in a world that has largely done the same thing. Everyone is talking about truth, but few agree on what it means. Some will tell you, “This is my truth.” Others will say, “That is your truth.” As if truth were something each person gets to define for themselves — as if it bends to fit whatever we want it to be.

But truth is not subjective. It doesn’t change based on who is speaking. It doesn’t shift with the culture or the century. And it is not ours to invent.

Jesus settled this. He said:

*“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” — John 14:6*

Truth is not an idea. Truth is a Person. And everything that Person said and did is recorded in a single book — the Bible.

That book is unlike anything else ever written. It was composed over a period of roughly fifteen hundred years, by more than forty different people — kings and shepherds, fishermen and physicians, prophets and prisoners — writing across centuries, across continents, in three different languages. And yet from the first page to the last, they tell one story. One beautiful, intertwined, unbroken story — of a God who created you, who loves you, and who is actively seeking you because He wants a relationship with you.

That is what you were made for. And if you’ve been looking for it — even if you didn’t know that’s what you were looking for — then this book is for you.

Not because of anything we’ve written. But because of the Book we’ll point you to.

It has the answers. It has always had the answers.

Let’s open it together.

— *Paul & Pam*

PART ONE

# The Foundation

*Who is God, and why do you matter?*

## CHAPTER ONE

# Not an Accident

Let's start at the very beginning. Not with religion. Not with church. Not with rules or rituals or anything anyone has ever told you about God. Let's start with a single question:

*Why is there something instead of nothing?*

Look around you. The world exists. You exist. The air you're breathing, the ground beneath your feet, the stars you see at night — none of this had to be here. But it is. And that fact alone demands an explanation.

The very first words of the Bible don't argue for God's existence. They don't try to prove it or defend it. They simply state it as fact:

“*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*”

— Genesis 1:1

That's it. No disclaimer. No debate. The Bible opens with a declaration: God is real, and everything that exists came from Him. If you're reading this and you're not sure about that yet, that's okay. Stay with me. Let the evidence build.

## The Fingerprints of Design

Here's something worth thinking about. When you look at a building, you don't wonder whether it designed itself. When you pick up a phone, you don't assume it assembled by accident. Design implies a designer. Order implies intelligence. Purpose implies intention.

The world around you is staggeringly complex. The human eye processes light in ways no camera has ever matched. Your DNA contains a biological instruction manual so detailed that if you printed it out, it would fill enough books to stack from the floor to the ceiling — and every cell in your body carries a copy. The Earth sits at precisely the right distance from the sun to sustain life. A fraction closer, and we burn. A fraction farther, and we freeze.

Accident? Or design?

Scripture speaks directly to this:

*“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”*

— Romans 1:20

Paul wrote those words nearly two thousand years ago, and the argument hasn't changed. Creation itself testifies. The evidence isn't hidden — it's everywhere. The heavens declare it:

*“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their  
expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day  
pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.”*

— Psalm 19:1–2

Every sunrise. Every star. Every perfectly calibrated law of physics. They’re not silent — they’re speaking. The question isn’t whether the evidence is there. The question is whether we’re willing to hear what it’s saying.

## **Not Random — Intentional**

But here’s where it gets personal. God didn’t just create the universe and walk away. He didn’t wind the clock and leave it running. Creation wasn’t a science experiment. It was intentional, and it was personal.

Genesis tells us that God created with specificity and care. Light. Sky. Land. Seas. Plants. Animals. Each one deliberately made, each one declared “good.” But when He came to the final act of creation, something changed. He didn’t just speak it into existence. He did something different:

*“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image,  
according to Our likeness.’”*

— Genesis 1:26

Everything else was spoken into being. But when it came to you — to humanity — God said, “Let *Us* make.” This wasn’t

an assembly line. This was craftsmanship. You were not mass-produced. You were *made*.

“*God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*”

— Genesis 1:27

Stop and let that sink in. Of everything God made — the galaxies, the oceans, the mountains, the animals — only one part of creation was made in His image. You. That isn't a small thing. That is the most important thing you will ever learn about yourself.

But before we go further with what that means, we need to understand something about the God whose image you bear. Because if you picture God as a physical being — a man in the sky, a body on a throne — you will misunderstand everything that follows.

God is not physical. He is not made of flesh and bone. Jesus said it plainly:

“*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*”

— John 4:24

God is spirit. That is His nature. Not a spirit among many — *spirit* by His very essence. He is not limited to a location. He is not confined to a form. He is not visible the way you and I are visible. Paul described Him this way:

*“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.”*

— 1 Timothy 1:17

Eternal. Immortal. Invisible. Not because He is hiding — because that is what He *is*.

So when Scripture says you were made in His image, it is not talking about your face, your hands, or your height. The image of God is not physical — because God is not physical. Whatever it means to bear His image, it has to be something deeper than a body. And it is. That’s what the next chapter is all about.

## **You Were Known Before You Were Born**

It goes even further than that. God didn’t just create humanity in general and hope for the best. He knows you. Personally. Individually. And He knew you before you ever took your first breath.

When God called the prophet Jeremiah, He said something that tells us everything we need to know about how personally invested God is in each human life:

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.”*

— Jeremiah 1:5

God didn't discover Jeremiah after he was born. He knew him beforehand. He had a purpose for him before he even existed. And while Jeremiah was a prophet with a specific calling, the principle behind this is staggering: God is not distant. He is not detached. He is intimately aware of every life He creates.

David understood this deeply. In one of the most personal passages in all of Scripture, he wrote:

*“For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.”*

— Psalm 139:13–16

Read that again slowly. *You were woven. You were skillfully wrought.* Your days were written in God’s book before a single one of them happened. This is not the language of accident. This is the language of a Creator who is deeply, personally invested in what He has made.

*Fearfully and wonderfully made.* That phrase is worth sitting with. The Hebrew word translated “fearfully” carries the idea of awe and reverence. The word “wonderfully” means to be distinct, set apart. You are not a copy. You are not a mistake.

You are not an accident of biology. You are a deliberate, one-of-a-kind creation made by a God who doesn't do anything carelessly.

## A Plan, Not a Reaction

And here's something that might surprise you: God didn't just know you before you were born — He had a plan for what He was going to do for you before the world even existed.

*"...who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."*

— 2 Timothy 1:9

Before the foundation of the world, God had already determined how He would save the human race. Not *who* specifically would be saved — that depends on each person's response to Him, as we'll see later. But the *method*, the *plan*, the *means* of salvation was settled before the first star was lit. God wasn't caught off guard by anything that happened. He wasn't reacting. He was executing a plan that was in place from the very beginning.

Paul echoed this same truth when he wrote:

*"Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him."*

— Ephesians 1:4

He chose *us in Him* — meaning, He chose that those who are *in Christ* would be holy and blameless. The plan was established before creation. The invitation is open to everyone. How you get “in Christ” is something we’ll walk through together in the chapters ahead. For now, what matters is this: God’s plan to rescue you was not an afterthought. It was the thought *before* the thought.

## **So What Does This Mean for You?**

If you’ve grown up without anyone telling you these things — or if you were told but never really understood what they meant — here is the foundation everything else in this book is built on:

**You are not an accident.** The universe is not random. You are not the product of blind chance and meaningless processes. You were designed, formed, and known by a Creator who existed before anything else did.

**You have inherent worth.** Not because of your job, your education, your social status, or your bank account. Not because culture says so. You have worth because the God of the universe made you in His image and said you were worth making.

**Your life has purpose.** You are not drifting through a meaningless existence. God knew you before you were born, wrote your days in His book, and had a plan in place for your rescue before the world began.

That's the starting point. That's the foundation.

But if all of this is true — if God is real, if He made you with purpose, if He had a plan from the very beginning — then the obvious next question is: *What does it mean to be made in His image?* What exactly did He give you that makes you different from everything else He created?

That's where we're going next.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Made in His Image

In the last chapter, we laid the foundation: God is real, He created with purpose, and you are not an accident. You were designed, known before you were born, and part of a plan that was in place before the world began.

But we ended with a question: *What does it mean to be made in His image?*

That phrase — “the image of God” — gets used a lot, but most people have never stopped to really think about what it means. It’s not a throwaway line. It’s not a poetic flourish. It is the single most defining truth about what it means to be human, and everything else in this book depends on understanding it.

So let’s open it up.

### **More Than Dust**

Go back to the creation account. In Genesis 1, God spoke things into existence. “Let there be light” — and there was light. “Let the earth bring forth” — and it did. Word after word, command after command, the universe took shape.

But when God made man, the process changed. Genesis gives us a second, closer look at what happened:

*“Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”*

— Genesis 2:7

God *formed* him. The Hebrew word carries the image of a potter shaping clay — hands on, deliberate, careful. This was not a command spoken from a distance. This was intimate. Personal. God took dust from the ground and shaped it into something. And then He did something He is never described as doing for anything else in all of creation: He leaned in and breathed His own breath into that form.

And man came alive.

But what exactly did God breathe into him? Just air? Just biological life? The animals were alive too — they breathed, they moved, they ate. Whatever God gave man in that moment, it was something the animals never received. And the rest of Scripture tells us exactly what it was.

## **The Spirit That Makes You *You***

When God breathed into man, He gave him something no animal possesses — a spirit. A soul. The part of you that is not dust. The part that doesn't return to the ground when your body stops breathing.

Solomon, writing near the end of his life after observing everything under the sun, put it as plainly as anyone ever has:

*“Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.”*

— Ecclesiastes 12:7

Read that carefully. When you die, two things happen. The dust — your body — goes back to the ground. But the spirit returns to God *who gave it*. It came from Him. It goes back to Him. Your body is temporary. Your spirit is not.

That is what God breathed into man in Genesis 2:7. Not just the air in your lungs. He breathed a spirit into you — the eternal, immaterial part of you that makes you *you*. Your body is the house. Your spirit is the one living in it.

The prophet Zechariah confirms this, and the way he says it is striking:

*“Thus declares the Lord who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him.”*

— Zechariah 12:1

Look at what God takes credit for in that verse: stretching out the heavens, laying the foundation of the earth, and forming the spirit of man. Three acts. Three works of creation. God puts the forming of your spirit on the same level as creating the heavens and the earth. That is how significant your spirit is to Him. It is not an afterthought tacked on to a body. It is a

deliberate, divine creation — formed by the same God who hung the stars.

And Jesus Himself drew the distinction between body and soul in the clearest possible terms:

*“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”*

— Matthew 10:28

Men can kill your body. They cannot touch your soul. The soul survives what the body cannot. You are more than flesh and bone — and Jesus says so directly.

James understood this too. In making a point about faith, he stated something that reveals the very nature of human life:

*“For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”*

— James 2:26

The body without the spirit is dead. The spirit is what gives the body life. When the spirit departs, the body is just dust again — exactly what Solomon said. The spirit is the life of a person. It is what animates the dust. It is what God breathed in, and it is what returns to Him.

And Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, acknowledged the full composition of a human being:

*“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

— 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Spirit. Soul. Body. You are not just a body. You are not just a mind running on biology. You are a spiritual being housed in a physical body — and the spiritual part of you is the part that is eternal.

*This* is what sets you apart from every other living thing God made. The animals breathe. The animals move and eat and reproduce and die. But God never breathed His spirit into them. He never formed an eternal soul within them. Only you. Only humanity. When God said, “Let Us make man in Our image,” *this* is what He was talking about. The image of God is not your physical appearance. God is spirit (John 4:24). The image you bear is a spiritual one — an eternal soul placed inside a temporary body by a God who wanted you to be more than dust.

## **A Mind That Reflects His**

And because you carry that spirit, everything else about you is different from the rest of creation.

One of the first things God did after creating man was give him a job that no other creature could do:

*“Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field.”*

— Genesis 2:19–20

This may seem simple on the surface, but think about what it required. Naming isn't just labeling. It's observation. It's categorization. It's language — the ability to attach meaning to sound, to communicate something that exists in the mind. No animal does this. No animal has ever done this. Animals communicate — they signal danger, they call to mates, they mark territory. But they do not *name* things. They do not step outside themselves and observe the world and describe what they see.

You do. You reason. You analyze. You question. You're doing it right now, reading these words and weighing whether they're true. That ability — to think abstractly, to evaluate evidence, to follow an argument and either accept or reject it — is something no other creature on earth possesses.

And it doesn't stop at logic. Human beings write poetry. They compose music. They paint. They build. They calculate the distance to stars they will never touch and split atoms they cannot see. They tell stories about the past and imagine futures that haven't happened yet.

Where did that come from? If you are made in the image of a Creator, then your creativity is not an accident. Your ability to think, to reason, to imagine, to build — that is a reflection of the One who made you. You bear the image of a God who creates, and so you create. You bear the image of a God who thinks and plans, and so you think and plan. The mind you carry is not a random product of biology. It is the spirit of God at work within you — the fingerprint of the divine on a soul that was made to reflect Him.

## A Conscience That Speaks

Being made in God's image reaches into something even more personal — something you've felt your entire life, whether anyone ever explained it to you or not.

You know the difference between right and wrong.

Not because someone handed you a rulebook. Not because society voted on it. There is something *inside* you — a voice, a pull, an awareness — that tells you when something is wrong, even when no one is watching. You feel it when you see injustice. You feel it when you lie and the weight of it sits in your chest. You feel it when someone is wronged and something in you says, *That isn't right.*

Paul addressed this directly:

*“For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.”*

— Romans 2:14–15

People who have never read a single page of the Bible still have a moral compass. Not a perfect one — it can be dulled, distorted, even ignored — but it’s there. Paul says the work of the Law is *written in their hearts*. Their conscience bears witness.

Every civilization in the history of the world — no matter how isolated, no matter how different the culture — has had a sense of right and wrong. They haven’t always agreed on every detail, but the categories exist everywhere. Justice. Fairness. Loyalty. The wrongness of cruelty. The value of truthfulness. These aren’t social inventions. They are hardwired — written into the spirit that God placed within you. Your conscience is not a product of evolution. It is a reflection of His character stamped into the soul He gave you.

## **The Freedom to Choose**

And here is where it gets weighty.

God did not make robots. He did not create beings that were programmed to obey and incapable of doing otherwise.

He gave humanity something extraordinary and dangerous: the freedom to choose.

Look at what God did in the garden:

*“The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’”*

— Genesis 2:16–17

A command only means something if it can be disobeyed. A rule only matters if there’s a real choice involved. God didn’t put that tree in the garden as a trap. He put it there because love that is forced isn’t love. Obedience that has no alternative isn’t obedience. For the relationship between God and man to be *real*, it had to be *voluntary*.

That is the weight of being human. You are not a puppet. You are not a machine running a program. You have been given the ability to choose — to choose God or to turn away, to follow or to rebel, to trust or to doubt. That capacity is part of what makes you an image-bearer. God Himself is a choosing, willing, purposeful being — and He made you to be the same.

This freedom is a gift. But gifts can be misused. And as we’ll see in the next chapter, that is exactly what happened.

## Made for Relationship

There is one more thing God said during creation that deserves careful attention. After making man, after placing him in the garden, after giving him work to do and a command to follow, God looked at the man and said something He had never said about anything else He made:

*“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’”*

— Genesis 2:18

Up to this point, everything had been “good.” The light was good. The land was good. The animals were good. But a man alone? *Not good.*

God made Eve — not as an afterthought, but as the completion of something that was intentionally unfinished. Man was not designed to exist in isolation. He was made for relationship — for companionship, for partnership, for connection.

And this isn’t just about marriage, as important as that is. The principle runs deeper. Human beings are relational by design. You need people. You need to be known, to belong, to love and be loved. That need isn’t weakness — it’s design. God built it into you because He Himself is relational, and you bear His image.

But the most important relationship you were made for isn’t with another person. It’s with God Himself. Later in

Genesis, almost in passing, the text gives us a detail that reveals something staggering about what life was like before everything went wrong:

*“They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”*

— Genesis 3:8

Walking in the garden. In the cool of the day. The way the text describes it, this was not unusual. There is no surprise in the statement — no indication that God’s presence in the garden was a first-time event. This was normal. God walked with them. They knew His voice. They lived in direct, personal, unbroken relationship with their Creator.

That is what you were made for. Not religion at a distance. Not rules handed down from the sky. A relationship — real, personal, face to face — with the God who made you. And if you’ve ever felt a longing you couldn’t quite name, a restlessness that nothing in this world seems to satisfy, there’s a reason for that.

## **Eternity in Your Heart**

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, wrote something that captures this restlessness perfectly:

*“He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.”*

— Ecclesiastes 3:11

*He has set eternity in their heart.* Sit with that for a moment.

There is something in you that knows this life isn't all there is. You feel it at funerals, when the finality of death feels *wrong* — like it wasn't supposed to be this way. You feel it in moments of beauty so overwhelming that they ache — a sunset, a piece of music, the face of someone you love — and for a split second, you sense that there's something bigger behind it all. You feel it in the quiet hours when the noise stops and something in you whispers, *There has to be more than this.*

Every civilization in history has looked up and asked the big questions. *Where did we come from? Why are we here? What happens when we die? Is anyone out there?* No animal asks these questions. No animal gazes at the stars and wonders about meaning. But you do. Every human being does.

That isn't a glitch. It's not a quirk of an overactive brain. God *set* eternity in your heart. He put it there — in the spirit He breathed into you. You were designed to be aware of something beyond the physical, beyond the temporary, beyond what you can see and touch. You carry an awareness of the infinite because an infinite God placed an eternal spirit inside of you, and that spirit knows — even when your mind hasn't

caught up yet — that it was made for something that doesn't end.

## What Is Man?

David wrestled with all of this. One night, standing under the open sky, looking up at what God had made, he was overwhelmed:

*“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.”*

— Psalm 8:3–6

David looked up at the vastness of the universe and asked the question every honest person eventually asks: *Why would God care about me?* The heavens are immense. The stars are beyond counting. And yet God takes thought of man. He *cares* for him. He crowned him with glory and majesty and gave him dominion over the works of His hands.

That word — *crowned* — is worth pausing on. It's the language of royalty. Of honor. Of deliberate elevation. God didn't just make you and leave you at the bottom of the pile. He set you above the rest of creation. He gave you responsibil-

ity. He gave you authority. He gave you dignity — not because you earned it, but because that’s what it means to bear His image.

James understood this so well that he used it to make a point about something as practical as the way we speak to each other:

*“With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God.”*

— James 3:9

You cannot curse someone who bears the image of God without dishonoring the God whose image they bear. Every person you have ever met — every person you have ever dismissed, resented, looked down on, or written off — carries the likeness of God. That is the weight of what it means to be human.

## **This Is Who You Are**

So what does it mean to be made in God’s image? It means you are not what the world says you are.

The world will tell you that your worth comes from what you produce, what you earn, how you look, who follows you, or what group accepts you. It will measure you by numbers — your salary, your grades, your likes, your age, your status. And when those numbers aren’t high enough, it will tell you — directly or indirectly — that you don’t matter.

That is a lie.

You are more than a body. When God formed you from the dust, He breathed an eternal spirit into you — a soul that will outlast your bones, your skin, and every material thing you have ever touched. Your body will return to the ground. But the spirit God gave you will return to Him. You are an eternal being living in a temporary world, and nothing — no circumstance, no failure, no opinion of man — can change what God made you to be.

You have a mind that reflects His intelligence. You have a conscience that reflects His character. You have the freedom to choose because He is a God of freedom. You were made for relationship because He is a God of relationship. And He set eternity in your heart because He placed an eternal spirit inside of you — a spirit that knows, even when nothing else makes sense, that there is more to this life than what you can see.

That is who you are. Not because culture says so. Not because you've achieved enough to qualify. Because the God of the universe made you in His image, breathed His spirit into you, and crowned you with glory and majesty.

And He said it was *very* good:

“*God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.*”

— Genesis 1:31

Not just good. *Very* good. When God finished creating — when humanity was in place, when the image-bearers stood in the garden in unbroken relationship with their Creator, carrying within them the very spirit of the living God — He looked at everything and declared it very good.

That was the world as it was meant to be. That was humanity as we were meant to be.

But that's not the world we live in now, is it? Something clearly went wrong. The relationship that was supposed to be face to face was broken. The choice that was supposed to be a gift was misused. The world that was declared “very good” is now filled with pain, death, and separation.

What happened?

That's where we're going next.

## CHAPTER THREE

# What Went Wrong

At the end of the last chapter, we stood in the garden. Everything was as it was meant to be. God had created a world and called it very good. He had made man and woman in His image — spiritual beings carrying eternal souls, crowned with glory, walking in unbroken relationship with their Creator. They knew His voice. He walked with them in the cool of the day. There was no shame, no fear, no death, no separation.

That is not the world you live in.

Something happened. Something broke. And if you've ever looked at the world around you — the suffering, the cruelty, the injustice, the grief, the quiet ache of things not being the way they should be — and wondered *why*, this chapter is where the answer begins.

### **The One Rule**

Go back to what God said when He placed man in the garden. We saw this in the last chapter, but now it becomes the hinge on which everything turns:

*“The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’”*

— Genesis 2:16–17

One rule. In an entire garden full of provision — every tree, every fruit, everything they could ever want — God gave one boundary. One “no” in a world full of “yes.” And He told them plainly what would happen if they crossed it: *you will surely die.*

This wasn’t arbitrary. This wasn’t God setting them up to fail. As we discussed in the last chapter, this was the necessary condition for the relationship to be real. Love requires choice. And choice requires the genuine possibility of choosing wrong.

They had everything. They lacked nothing. And the command was not difficult — it was a single tree in an entire garden. But the choice was real. And someone came along who wanted to make sure they made the wrong one.

## **The Lie**

Genesis 3 introduces a new voice:

*“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, “You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?”’”*

— Genesis 3:1

You may have noticed something: a serpent is speaking. In the last chapter, we said that language — the ability to reason, to communicate abstract thought — is something no animal possesses. So what is happening here?

Genesis doesn’t explain it in this moment. It simply tells the story. But later in Scripture, the picture becomes clear. The book of Revelation identifies this serpent directly:

*“The serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.”*

— Revelation 12:9

The serpent was not acting on its own. It was being used by a being the Bible calls Satan — the devil — the one Jesus later called “the father of lies” because “there is no truth in him” (John 8:44). The serpent was the instrument. Satan was the one behind the words. Scripture does not give us every detail about who Satan is or where he came from, and we won’t pretend to fill in what God chose not to reveal. But what Scripture does make clear is this: the voice in the garden was not that of an animal thinking and reasoning on its own. Something far more dangerous was at work.

And notice the strategy. The serpent didn't start with a direct contradiction. He started with a question — and not even an honest one. God had said they could eat from *every* tree except one. The serpent twisted it: “Did God really say you can't eat from *any* tree?” He took God's generosity and re-framed it as restriction. He took one boundary and made it sound like a prison.

Eve corrected him:

*“From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’”*

— Genesis 3:2–3

She knew the rule. She could state it. But now the serpent had her engaged — and he moved to the next step:

*“The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”*

— Genesis 3:4–5

There it is. The first lie ever told. And look at what it did. It accomplished three things in two sentences. First, it directly contradicted God: “You will *not* die.” Second, it questioned God's motive: God isn't protecting you — He's keeping

something from you. Third, it offered a counterfeit promise: you can be like God.

That pattern has never changed. Every temptation that has ever existed follows the same script: question what God said, doubt why He said it, and believe that you know better than He does.

## The Choice

And then came the moment:

*“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”*

— Genesis 3:6

She saw. She desired. She took. She ate. And she gave it to her husband, and he ate too.

No one forced them. No one held them down. The serpent didn't shove the fruit into their mouths. They *chose*. That is the weight of the freedom we talked about in the last chapter. The same capacity that made love possible also made rebellion possible. And they used it to rebel.

James, centuries later, described this same process — the way temptation works in every human heart:

*“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”*

— James 1:14–15

Desire. Sin. Death. That is the sequence. It was the sequence in the garden, and it has been the sequence ever since. No one sins by accident. No one is forced into it. Each person is carried away by their own desire — and when that desire is acted on, the result is always the same.

## **The Moment Everything Changed**

What happened next tells you everything about what sin does:

*“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.”*

— Genesis 3:7

Their eyes were opened — but not in the way the serpent promised. They didn’t become like God. They became ashamed. For the first time in their existence, they looked at themselves and felt exposed. Something inside them had shifted. The innocence was gone. And their first instinct was to cover themselves — to hide what they were.

And then came the most devastating verse in the chapter:

*“They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”*

— Genesis 3:8

In Chapter 2, we looked at this verse from the other side — the beauty of God walking with them, the intimacy of that relationship. Now look at what sin did to it. The same God whose voice they once welcomed, they now ran from. The same presence that was their greatest comfort became the thing they feared most.

They hid.

That is what sin does. It doesn't just break a rule — it breaks a relationship. It takes the connection between God and man and fills it with fear, shame, and distance. They didn't stop believing God existed. They didn't forget who He was. They were *afraid* of Him — and they hid among the trees of the very garden He had made for them.

## **The Consequences**

God came looking for them. Not because He didn't know where they were — but because that's who God is. Even after they ran, He pursued:

*“Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him,  
‘Where are you?’”*

— Genesis 3:9

That question wasn’t for God’s benefit. It was for theirs. God was giving them the opportunity to come forward, to confess, to be honest. And Adam’s answer revealed exactly what had happened inside him:

*“He said, ‘I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.’”*

— Genesis 3:10

Afraid. Naked. Hiding. Three words that had never described a human being before that moment. And when God pressed further — “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree?” — Adam did what human beings have been doing ever since: he blamed someone else.

*“The man said, ‘The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.’”*

— Genesis 3:12

He didn’t just blame Eve. Read it again — “The woman *whom You gave* to be with me.” He blamed God. The gift of companionship that God had provided, Adam now held up as the reason for his failure. And Eve, when asked, blamed the serpent: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Genesis 3:13).

No one took responsibility. No one said, “I was wrong.” And the consequences came for all three.

To the serpent, God pronounced a curse — and embedded within it a promise we’ll come back to in the next chapter. To the woman, He said there would be pain in childbirth and struggle in her closest relationships. And to the man:

*“Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”*

— Genesis 3:17–19

*You are dust, and to dust you shall return.* The body that God had formed from the ground would go back to the ground. Physical death — the thing that had never existed in God’s “very good” creation — had entered the world.

## **Driven Out**

And then came the final blow:

*“Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.”*

— Genesis 3:23–24

Sent out. Driven out. The garden — the place of unbroken fellowship with God, the place where He walked with them in the cool of the day — was closed. A flaming sword guarded the entrance. There was no going back.

The relationship that was supposed to be face to face was now separated by sin. The God who had breathed His own spirit into them, who had formed them with His own hands, who had crowned them with glory and majesty — that God was now on the other side of a barrier that man had built with his own choice.

## **Death Entered**

What happened in the garden didn’t stay in the garden. The consequences of that choice rippled outward through all of human history. Paul explained it this way:

*“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”*

— Romans 5:12

Through one man, sin entered the world. And death came with it. But notice the last phrase carefully: “because *all* sinned.” Death spread to all men — not because they inherited Adam’s guilt, but because every person who has ever lived has made the same choice Adam made. Every one of us has stood before our own tree, heard our own serpent, and chosen to eat.

No one is condemned for Adam’s sin. You are not guilty of something you didn’t do. But you live in the world that Adam’s sin broke open, and you have added your own sins to the pile. Every human being has. Without exception:

*“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

— Romans 3:23

All. Not most. Not the particularly bad ones. All. Every person who has ever reached the point of knowing right from wrong — the point where that conscience we talked about in the last chapter begins to speak — has chosen, at least once, to ignore it. And once is enough. One sin is enough to create the separation.

The prophet Isaiah described that separation in terms that leave no room for misunderstanding:

*“But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.”*

— Isaiah 59:2

Your sins have made a separation. Your sins have hidden His face. The same relational break that happened in the garden — the hiding, the distance, the loss of face-to-face fellowship — happens to every person who sins. And every person does.

## The Wages

And the cost is exactly what God said it would be:

*“For the wages of sin is death.”*

— Romans 6:23a

Wages. That’s a payroll word. It means what you’ve earned. What is owed to you. Sin earns death — not as an arbitrary punishment, but as the natural, inevitable consequence of separation from the source of life.

Remember what we established in the last chapter: you have an eternal spirit. Your body will return to dust, but your spirit will return to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Death in Scripture is not annihilation — it is separation. Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body. But spiritual death — the death God warned about in the garden — is the separation of the spirit from God. And that is the death that

should terrify you, because that separation, if it is not resolved, does not end.

Jesus spoke of this in the starkest terms:

*“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”*

— Matthew 10:28

The body can be killed by men. The soul cannot. But God is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. The eternal spirit that God gave you — the very thing that makes you an image-bearer, the thing that sets you apart from everything else in creation — that spirit will exist forever. The question is *where*. And sin, left unresolved, answers that question in the worst possible way.

## **Why the World Is the Way It Is**

If you’ve ever wondered why the world is so broken — why there is suffering, why there is cruelty, why people hurt each other, why disease and disaster and death seem woven into the fabric of existence — this is the answer. It wasn’t supposed to be this way. God didn’t create a broken world. He created a very good one. And we broke it.

The thorns and thistles God spoke of in Genesis 3 aren’t just about farming. They represent a world that is no longer functioning the way it was designed to. Relationships fracture.

Bodies fail. People lie, steal, kill, and betray. Children suffer for the choices of their parents. Nations go to war. And underneath all of it — every headline, every heartbreak, every funeral — is the same root cause: sin entered the world, and death came with it.

This is not what God wanted. This is what sin produced. And if you've ever felt in your gut that the world is not the way it's supposed to be — you're right. It isn't. You were made for the garden, and you're living east of Eden.

## **The Gap You Cannot Cross**

And here is the hardest truth of all: you cannot fix this on your own.

You cannot be good enough to undo what sin has done. You cannot earn your way back into the garden. You cannot build a bridge across the separation between you and God through self-improvement, religious effort, or moral achievement. Isaiah's words are absolute: your sins have made a separation. And no amount of human effort can unmake it.

This is where every human religion apart from the gospel makes its mistake. Every system that says “do enough good and you'll be fine” misunderstands the problem. The problem isn't that you haven't done enough good. The problem is that you've sinned — even once — and that sin has created a gap between you and a holy God that you have no power to close.

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

— Romans 6:23

Paul didn't stop at the wages. He gave the whole verse. The wages of sin is death — but there is a gift. A free gift. Eternal life. And it comes through someone specific: Christ Jesus our Lord.

You can't fix this. But God can. And the remarkable thing — the thing that should make you pause — is that He already planned to. Before the foundation of the world, before the first sin was committed, before Adam ever reached for that fruit, God had a plan. And that plan didn't begin with the New Testament. It began with a promise spoken in the very same chapter where everything fell apart.

That promise — and the long thread that runs from it through the rest of Scripture — is where we're going next.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# The Long Promise

Go back to the end of Chapter Three for a moment. The garden is closed. The flaming sword is turning. The man and the woman are standing on the outside of everything they were made for, and there is no way back in.

If this were just a story about human failure, it would end there. The experiment failed. The creatures broke the one rule. God walks away, starts over, or simply lets the whole thing unravel.

But that's not what happened.

God didn't walk away. He never has. And buried inside the very chapter where everything fell apart — hidden within a curse spoken to a serpent — God planted the first hint of what He was going to do about it.

### **A Promise Hidden in a Curse**

After the man and the woman chose to disobey, God addressed each of the parties involved — the serpent, the woman, the man. And when He turned to the serpent, He said something that would echo through the rest of human history:

*“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”*

— Genesis 3:15

On the surface, this sounds like God is simply cursing a snake. But look closer. God says the woman will have a *seed* — a descendant — and that this descendant will crush the serpent’s head. The serpent will wound Him, but the wound will be to the heel. The serpent’s wound will be to the head — and a wound to the head is fatal.

This is the first promise of rescue in the entire Bible. And it tells us something remarkable: before God even finished pronouncing the consequences of sin, He was already announcing the solution.

Remember what we established in Chapter One — that God had a plan in place before the foundation of the world (2 Timothy 1:9, Ephesians 1:4). This is that plan beginning to surface. Not fully visible yet. Not named. Not detailed. Just a seed — the promise that Someone was coming who would crush the enemy that had just deceived the human race.

And that promise was only the beginning.

## **A Blessing for All Nations**

Generations passed. The story of Genesis moves from the garden to a world that grows increasingly violent and broken

— exactly what you’d expect in a world where sin has taken root. But God had not abandoned His plan. He was narrowing the line.

In Genesis 12, God chose a man named Abram — later renamed Abraham — and made him a promise that would shape the rest of Scripture:

*“And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”*

— Genesis 12:2–3

*All the families of the earth.* Not just Abraham’s family. Not just one nation. All families. All peoples. God was telling Abraham that through his descendants — through his *seed* — something would come that would bless the entire human race.

That word *seed* should sound familiar. It’s the same word God used in Genesis 3:15. The seed of the woman. Now, the seed of Abraham. The thread is being pulled.

But God wasn’t finished with Abraham. Years later, He put Abraham’s faith to its most severe test. God told Abraham to take his son Isaac — the son he had waited decades for, the son through whom the promise was supposed to be fulfilled — and offer him as a sacrifice on a mountain in the land of Moriah (Genesis 22:1–2).

Think about what that must have felt like. This was the son of promise. The one through whom all the nations were supposed to be blessed. And God said, “Offer him up.”

Abraham obeyed. He took Isaac. He built the altar. He bound his son. He raised the knife. And at the last moment, God stopped him — and provided a ram caught in a thicket as a substitute (Genesis 22:10–13).

A father willing to offer his only son. A substitute provided at the last moment. On a mountain. If that picture doesn’t stir something in you by the end of this book, read this chapter again.

And after Abraham’s obedience, God repeated and expanded the promise:

*“...indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”*

— Genesis 22:17–18

*In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.* The promise made in the garden was now tied to a specific family. The seed would come through Abraham.

But Abraham had many descendants. Which line?

## The Line Narrows

Abraham's son Isaac had two sons — Esau and Jacob. The promise passed through Jacob (Genesis 28:13–14). Jacob had twelve sons, and from those twelve sons came the twelve tribes of Israel.

And then, near the end of Jacob's life, he gathered his sons and spoke over each of them. When he came to his son Judah, he said something extraordinary:

*“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”*

— Genesis 49:10

A scepter is the staff of a king. Jacob was saying that the royal line — the line of the coming ruler — would come through Judah. And this ruler wouldn't just govern one nation. To Him would belong *the obedience of the peoples*. All peoples.

The thread tightens. The seed of the woman. The seed of Abraham. Now, the line of Judah. With every generation, God was narrowing the focus, pulling the thread tighter, making the identity of the Coming One more and more specific.

## A Throne That Stands Forever

Centuries later, a man from the tribe of Judah rose to become the greatest king Israel ever had. His name was David — a

shepherd boy who killed a giant, a warrior who united a nation, and a man the Bible calls “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22).

And to David, God made a promise that took the thread and stretched it into eternity:

*“When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”*

— 2 Samuel 7:12–13

A kingdom that lasts forever. A throne that never ends. No earthly king has ever held a throne forever — because every earthly king dies. So whatever God was promising David, it pointed beyond anything David’s immediate son could fulfill. This was a promise about someone else. Someone whose kingdom would have no end.

God continued:

*“I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me... Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.”*

— 2 Samuel 7:14, 16

*I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me.* This Coming One would not just sit on David’s throne — He would be called the Son of God.

Now the picture is sharpening. The seed of the woman. The seed of Abraham. From the tribe of Judah. From the house of David. A king whose throne lasts forever. The Son of God.

And then the prophets began to speak.

## The Prophets Paint the Picture

For hundreds of years after David, God sent prophets to Israel — men who spoke God’s words to the people. And woven throughout their messages was a growing, increasingly detailed portrait of the One who was coming.

### *Where He Would Be Born*

The prophet Micah, writing roughly seven hundred years before the event, named the exact town:

*“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.”*

— Micah 5:2

Bethlehem — a tiny, insignificant village. Not Jerusalem, the capital. Not any of the great cities. Bethlehem. And this ruler’s origins were “from the days of eternity.” He was not just a man who would be born — He was Someone who had existed long before His birth.

## *How He Would Come*

The prophet Isaiah, also writing centuries before it happened, described something no one could have predicted:

*“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”*

— Isaiah 7:14

A virgin will bear a son. That is not a normal birth. That is a sign — something that could only happen by the direct intervention of God. And His name would be *Immanuel*, which means “God with us.”

Isaiah said more:

*“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore.”*

— Isaiah 9:6–7

Read those titles. *Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God. Eternal Father. Prince of Peace.* This child would not be an ordinary king. He would be called Mighty God. He would reign on the

throne of David — the same throne God promised would last forever. And His kingdom would have no end.

The picture is getting very specific now. Born in Bethlehem. Born of a virgin. Called Immanuel — God with us. Called Mighty God. Sitting on David’s throne forever.

But there was still one part of the picture that no one expected.

## The One Nobody Expected

Everything we’ve seen so far describes a king. A ruler. A conqueror. Someone who would crush the serpent’s head and reign on a throne forever. If you were a Jew reading these prophecies, you would be looking for a military hero — someone who would overthrow the enemies of Israel and establish a visible, powerful kingdom.

But Isaiah saw something else. In one of the most remarkable passages in all of Scripture — written more than seven hundred years before it happened — the prophet described the Coming One in terms that shocked everyone who read them:

*“He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”*

— Isaiah 53:3

Despised? Forsaken? A man of *sorrows*? This was not the conquering king they were expecting.

It got worse:

*“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.”*

— Isaiah 53:4–5

*Pierced through for our transgressions. Crushed for our iniquities.* This was not someone suffering for His own sins. This was someone suffering for *ours*. The punishment that should have fallen on us fell on Him instead. And by His wounds — His scourging — *we* are healed.

Isaiah continued with a verse that captures the entire problem and the entire solution in a single breath:

*“All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”*

— Isaiah 53:6

There it is. *All of us* have gone astray — that’s what Chapter Three was about. *Each of us has turned to his own way* — every person choosing sin, just as Adam and Eve did. But the Lord

caused the iniquity — the guilt, the weight, the debt — of *all of us* to fall on *Him*.

The gap that no human effort could bridge? God was going to bridge it Himself — through this One who would carry the sins of the world on His own body.

And Isaiah described what would happen to Him:

*“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth.”*

— Isaiah 53:7

Like a lamb led to slaughter. Silent. Willing. Not fighting back, not defending Himself, not calling down judgment on those who condemned Him. He went willingly.

*“By oppression and judgment He was taken away... He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due.”*

— Isaiah 53:8

*Cut off out of the land of the living.* He would die. The Coming One — the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the lion of Judah, the son of David, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace — would die. Not for His own sins. For *ours*.

*“His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.”*

— Isaiah 53:9

Buried with the wicked, yet with a rich man in His death. No violence. No deceit. A perfect life, ending in a criminal’s execution. And then, the most astonishing part:

*“But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering...”*

— Isaiah 53:10

The Lord was *pleased* to crush Him. Not because God enjoys suffering — but because this was the plan. This was what was determined before the foundation of the world. This was the rescue mission. The Coming One would offer Himself as a guilt offering — the sacrifice that pays for the sins of others.

And what would happen after that?

*“...He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.”*

— Isaiah 53:10

After being cut off from the land of the living — after dying — He would *prolong His days*. He would see what came from His sacrifice. He would live again.

*“As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.”*

— Isaiah 53:11

*He will justify the many.* He will bear their iniquities. The Righteous One suffering for the unrighteous. The sinless One carrying the sins of those who could never pay the debt themselves.

This is what the prophets saw. Seven hundred years before it happened, Isaiah described a suffering servant who would be pierced, crushed, led to slaughter, killed, and buried — and then live again. A man who had done nothing wrong, dying for people who had done everything wrong. Carrying their sins so they wouldn't have to carry them forever.

## **The Thread**

Step back and look at what God did over the course of more than a thousand years of recorded Scripture.

In the garden, He promised a seed who would crush the serpent. To Abraham, He promised a blessing for all nations through his descendant. Through Jacob, He narrowed the line to the tribe of Judah. To David, He promised a throne that would last forever and a descendant who would be called the Son of God. Through the prophets, He specified the birth-

place, the manner of birth, the nature of His reign, and the shocking truth that this King would first come as a sacrifice — bearing the sins of the world on Himself before rising again.

Each prophecy added detail. Each generation pulled the thread tighter. What began as a whisper in a garden grew into a roar through the prophets — a portrait so specific, so detailed, so impossible to manufacture, that when the time finally came, there would be no mistaking who He was.

And then the prophets went silent.

## **The Silence**

After the last of the Old Testament prophets spoke, roughly four hundred years passed with no new word from God. Four centuries. Generation after generation born, lived, and died without a prophet, without a new promise, without a fresh voice from heaven.

But the promises were still there. Written down. Preserved. Read in synagogues across the known world. The people remembered. They waited. Some gave up waiting. Some twisted the promises into something they were never meant to be — expecting a political liberator, a military conqueror, a king who would crush Rome the way David had crushed the Philistines.

But the prophets had been clear. The Coming One would not arrive the way anyone expected. He would come as a baby in Bethlehem. He would come through a virgin. He would

come to suffer, to bleed, to die, to bear the sins of the world.

And then He would rise.

Four hundred years of silence. And then —

A child was born.

That's where we're going next.

PART TWO

# The Turning Point

*Who is Jesus, and what did He do?*

## CHAPTER FIVE

# The Man Who Changed Everything

Four hundred years of silence. No prophet. No new word from heaven. Generation after generation reading the old promises, holding on, wondering when — or if — God was going to act.

And then, in a town so small it barely made the maps, to a young woman who had never been with a man, a child was born. He was laid in a feeding trough because there was no room anywhere else. No palace. No announcement to the powerful. Just a baby, born in Bethlehem, exactly where the prophet said He would be (Micah 5:2).

His name was Jesus.

And with His arrival, every promise God had ever made began to come true.

## The Word Made Flesh

To understand who Jesus is, we need to go back — not just to the prophets, but to the very beginning. The Gospel of John opens with words that should sound familiar:

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”*

— John 1:1–3

“In the beginning.” That’s the same phrase that opens the entire Bible — “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). John is deliberately echoing that opening. And what he’s saying is staggering: the Word was there at the beginning. The Word was with God. The Word *was* God. And everything that exists was made through Him.

This is not a metaphor. This is not poetry for poetry’s sake. John is making a claim about the nature of reality — that the One he’s about to introduce was not a created being. He was the Creator.

And then John says this:

*“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

— John 1:14

The Word became flesh. God — the same God who spoke the universe into existence, the same God who is spirit (John 4:24), the same God who is invisible (1 Timothy 1:17) — took on a human body and walked among the people He had made.

That is who Jesus claimed to be. Not a good teacher. Not a moral philosopher. Not a prophet pointing to someone greater. He claimed to be God in the flesh.

And He said so plainly.

## What He Said About Himself

There are people who will tell you that Jesus never claimed to be God — that His followers made that up later. But the Gospel accounts don't support that. Jesus made claims about Himself that leave no room for that interpretation.

One day, in a confrontation with the religious leaders, Jesus said something that nearly got Him killed on the spot:

*“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.’”*

— John 8:58

The reaction tells you everything you need to know about what they understood Him to be saying:

*“Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him.”*

— John 8:59

Why stones? Because under the Law of Moses, the penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning. And what had Jesus said? “I am.” Not “I was.” Not “I existed before Abraham.” *I am* — present tense, eternal existence. And everyone in that room knew exactly what He was claiming. “I AM” is the name God

gave Himself when Moses asked who was sending him to Egypt:

*“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.””*

— Exodus 3:14

Jesus was claiming the name of God as His own. The people standing there understood it perfectly. That’s why they picked up stones.

On another occasion, He said it even more directly:

*“I and the Father are one.”*

— John 10:30

Again, the response was immediate:

*“The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.”*

— John 10:31

And when Jesus asked them which of His good works they were stoning Him for, they answered:

*“For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.”*

— John 10:33

They heard Him clearly. He was making Himself out to be God. And He never corrected them. He never said, “No, you

misunderstood Me.” He never backed away from the claim. He stood on it.

When one of His own disciples, Philip, asked Him to show them the Father, Jesus answered:

*“Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”*

— John 14:9

He who has seen Me has seen the Father. There is no way to soften that. Jesus was telling Philip — and everyone who would ever read these words — that to look at Him was to look at God.

And when the disciple Thomas, after the resurrection, finally saw the risen Jesus and fell to his knees, he said:

*“My Lord and my God!”*

— John 20:28

Jesus didn’t rebuke him. He didn’t correct him. He accepted the title. Because it was true.

## **His Authority Over Everything**

But claims are just words unless there’s something to back them up. Anyone can say anything. What made Jesus different was that He demonstrated authority over every part of the

created order — as if He were the One who made it. Which, if John 1 is true, He was.

### *Authority Over Nature*

One evening, Jesus and His disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee when a violent storm hit — the kind that terrified experienced fishermen. The waves were breaking over the boat, filling it with water. And Jesus was asleep.

His disciples woke Him in a panic. And this is what happened:

*“And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Hush, be still.’ And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.”*

— Mark 4:39

He spoke to the storm, and the storm obeyed. Just like that. And the disciples — men who had been following Him, listening to Him teach, watching Him work — said to each other:

*“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”*

— Mark 4:41

That is exactly the right question. Who has authority over the wind and the sea? The One who made them.

### *Authority Over Disease*

Everywhere Jesus went, the sick came to Him — and He healed them. Not through medicine. Not through gradual recovery. Instantly, completely, and publicly.

A man born blind from birth — never seen a single day of his life — was given sight (John 9:1–7). A woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, who had spent everything she had on doctors and only gotten worse, was healed the moment she touched the edge of His garment (Mark 5:25–34). Lepers were cleansed. The paralyzed walked. The deaf heard.

And these were not done in secret. They were done in front of crowds, in front of critics, in front of people who were actively looking for a reason to discredit Him. No one denied that the miracles happened — not even His enemies. The religious leaders who wanted Him dead never once said, “He didn’t really do it.” They said He did it by the wrong power (Matthew 12:24). Even in their accusation, they confirmed the miracles were real.

### *Authority Over Death*

Three times in the Gospel accounts, Jesus raised someone from the dead.

The most dramatic was a man named Lazarus. Lazarus had been dead for four days. His body was already in the tomb. His sister Martha warned Jesus that there would be a stench —

decomposition had already begun (John 11:39). And Jesus stood outside that tomb and said:

“*Lazarus, come forth.*”

— John 11:43

And Lazarus walked out.

Someone once noted that it’s a good thing Jesus called Lazarus by name — because if He had simply said “Come forth” without specifying, every grave in the cemetery might have emptied.

That may be said with a smile, but it carries a truth. Jesus had authority over death itself. He spoke, and the dead obeyed. That is not something a good teacher can do. That is not something a prophet can do. That is something only the Author of life can do.

### *Authority Over Sin*

This may be the most important one. Early in His ministry, four men brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus by lowering him through a hole they had cut in the roof of a house. And when Jesus saw him, He said something no one expected:

“*Son, your sins are forgiven.*”

— Mark 2:5

The religious leaders sitting in the room were immediately outraged — and their reasoning was exactly right:

*“Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?”*

— Mark 2:7

They were correct. Only God can forgive sins. A man can forgive someone who has wronged *him* — but sins against God? Only God has the authority to forgive those. And Jesus was claiming that authority.

But Jesus didn't just claim it. He proved it:

*“But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ — He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.’”*

— Mark 2:10–11

And the man got up and walked out. The healing was the proof. Jesus was saying, in effect, “You can't see whether I have the authority to forgive sins — that's invisible. But you *can* see whether I have the authority to heal a paralyzed man. So I'll do the one you can see to prove I have the power to do the one you can't.”

The visible miracle validated the invisible authority. And the invisible authority — the power to forgive sins — is the one that matters most, because that is the authority that bridges the gap between sinful man and a holy God.

## A Life Without Sin

The claims alone would be remarkable enough. But what makes them impossible to dismiss is the life that accompanied them. Jesus didn't just claim to be God — He lived a life that was perfectly consistent with that claim.

The writer of Hebrews described Him this way:

*“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”*

— Hebrews 4:15

Tempted in all things as we are — yet without sin. He faced every kind of temptation that any human being faces, and He never gave in. Not once. Not in a single thought, word, or action.

Peter, who walked with Jesus for three years — who saw Him tired, hungry, angry, grieving, pressed by crowds, betrayed by friends — wrote:

*“He committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth.”*

— 1 Peter 2:22

No sin. No deceit. And this wasn't Peter writing from a distance — this was a man who had been there, who had seen Jesus under every kind of pressure. Isaiah had prophesied this very thing centuries earlier — “He had done no violence, nor

was there any deceit in His mouth” (Isaiah 53:9). Peter was confirming what he had witnessed with his own eyes.

And Paul wrote:

*“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

— 2 Corinthians 5:21

He *knew* no sin. He didn’t just avoid sin — He had no acquaintance with it. His life was completely, entirely, perfectly clean. And that matters more than you might realize right now. It matters because a sacrifice has to be without blemish. A substitute who carries your debt has to be free of His own. The spotless life of Jesus was not an accident — it was a requirement. And He met it fully.

## The Question

In the middle of His ministry, Jesus turned to His disciples and asked them a question that every person who has ever heard His name must eventually answer:

*“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”*

— Matthew 16:15–16

*Who do you say that I am?*

That question is not just for Peter. It's for you. And the answer you give determines everything that follows.

Here is what the evidence demands you consider: Jesus claimed to be God. He claimed the divine name. He accepted worship. He said that to see Him was to see the Father. And He backed up those claims with authority over nature, disease, death, and sin — authority that belongs only to the Creator. He lived a life that even His enemies could not find fault in. He fulfilled prophecies written centuries before His birth — prophecies about His birthplace, His lineage, His nature, and His mission — prophecies that no human being could have engineered.

There are only a few possibilities. Either He was who He said He was, or He was a liar who deceived millions, or He was a madman who sincerely believed something that wasn't true.

But liars don't teach the most profound moral instruction the world has ever heard. And madmen don't live lives of perfect consistency, calm authority, and selfless sacrifice. The life doesn't fit the alternatives. It only fits one conclusion.

He was who He said He was.

He was the seed of the woman, promised in the garden. The blessing to all nations, promised to Abraham. The lion of the tribe of Judah. The heir to David's throne. The Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. Immanuel — God with us.

## But He Didn't Come to Stay

And here is the part that makes the story unlike anything you've ever heard. He didn't come to establish an earthly kingdom. He didn't come to overthrow Rome. He didn't come to rule from a golden throne in Jerusalem. The prophets had made that clear, even though most people missed it.

He came to die.

Isaiah had said it — “He was pierced through for our transgressions” (Isaiah 53:5). “He was cut off out of the land of the living” (Isaiah 53:8). “He would render Himself as a guilt offering” (Isaiah 53:10). The suffering servant. The lamb led to slaughter. The One on whom the Lord would cause the iniquity of us all to fall.

Jesus Himself said it plainly:

*“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

— Mark 10:45

A ransom. A price paid to set someone free. That is why He came. Not to teach — though He taught like no one before or since. Not to heal — though He healed everyone who came to Him. He came to give His life. To pay a debt that the entire human race owed and could never pay on its own.

The gap that Chapter Three described — the separation between sinful man and a holy God — was about to be bridged. Not by human effort. Not by religious performance.

By the blood of the only One who had never sinned, offered willingly for those who had.

That's what happened next. And it changed everything.

## CHAPTER SIX

# The Death That Paid the Debt

He knew it was coming.

That's the part that will stay with you once you understand it. Jesus didn't stumble into the cross. He wasn't trapped by circumstances. He wasn't outmaneuvered by His enemies. He walked toward it — deliberately, knowingly, with full understanding of what it would cost Him.

He had told His disciples repeatedly what was going to happen:

*“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.”*

— Matthew 20:18–19

No ambiguity. No vague prediction. He named the city. He named the method. He named the timeline. And He went anyway.

## The Night Everything Changed

On the night before He died, Jesus shared a final meal with His disciples. And during that meal, He did something they wouldn't fully understand until later:

*“And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.’”*

— Matthew 26:27–28

*My blood of the covenant. Poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.* He was telling them, in plain language, that His death was not a tragedy. It was a transaction. His blood would be poured out — and it would purchase forgiveness.

After the meal, Jesus went to a garden called Gethsemane to pray. And here is where we see something that reveals just how real this cost was — even for the Son of God:

*“And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.’”*

— Matthew 26:39

*Let this cup pass from Me.* Jesus was not eager for what was coming. The weight of it drove Him to His face on the ground. Luke's account tells us that His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:44). He felt the full

weight of what was about to happen — and He chose to go through with it anyway.

*Not as I will, but as You will.* That is the prayer of someone who has the power to walk away and doesn't. Jesus had told Peter that He could call on twelve legions of angels to rescue Him if He wanted (Matthew 26:53). He had the power to stop everything. He chose not to use it — because this was the plan. This was the purpose. This was why He had come.

That same night, He was betrayed by one of His own disciples, arrested by an armed mob, dragged before the religious authorities, and subjected to a trial that violated nearly every principle of justice their own law demanded. By morning, He had been beaten, mocked, blindfolded, spat on, and handed over to the Roman governor with a demand for execution.

Pilate — the Roman governor who held the authority of life and death — examined Jesus and found no guilt in Him. He said so explicitly: “I find no guilt in this man” (Luke 23:4). He tried to release Him. But the crowd, stirred up by the religious leaders, demanded crucifixion. And Pilate, a politician more concerned with keeping the peace than doing what was right, handed Jesus over to be killed.

An innocent man, condemned by guilty men. A sinless life, sentenced to a sinner's death. And every bit of it was part of the plan God had set in place before the world began.

## The Cross

Crucifixion was not simply an execution. It was the most brutal form of death the Roman Empire had devised — designed to maximize pain, humiliation, and the amount of time it took to die. Victims were nailed through the wrists and feet to a wooden cross, then lifted up and left to hang until their bodies could no longer sustain the effort of breathing. Death came slowly, usually by suffocation, as the muscles gave out and the lungs could no longer expand.

This is what they did to Jesus.

They nailed Him to a cross between two criminals. They divided His clothing among themselves. They hung a sign above His head — “Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews” (John 19:19) — intended as mockery. And while He hung there, bleeding, suffocating, dying, people stood at the foot of the cross and taunted Him.

And then something happened that no one expected.

*“Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.”*

— Matthew 27:45

From noon until three in the afternoon — the brightest hours of the day — darkness covered the land. This was not an eclipse. This was not weather. This was creation itself responding to what was happening on that cross.

And in the middle of that darkness, Jesus cried out with words that have haunted readers for two thousand years:

*“About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’”*

— Matthew 27:46

*Why have You forsaken Me?*

In that moment, something was happening that goes beyond physical suffering. The Son — who had been with the Father from eternity, who had never been separated from Him for a single instant — was experiencing separation from God. The very thing we described in Chapter Three — the spiritual death that sin produces, the severing of relationship between man and God — was falling on Jesus. Not because of His sin. He had none. But because of ours.

Isaiah had told us this would happen: “The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him” (Isaiah 53:6). Paul would later write that God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:21). At that moment on the cross, the weight of every sin ever committed by every person who would ever live was placed on the shoulders of the only One who had never sinned.

And the Father turned away.

That is the cost. That is what it took. The eternal fellowship between Father and Son — unbroken from before time began — was ruptured so that the broken fellowship

between God and humanity could be restored. He endured the separation so that you would not have to endure it forever.

## Why Blood?

This may be the question you're asking right now. Why did it have to be this way? Why couldn't God simply announce that everyone was forgiven? Why a death? Why blood?

Scripture answers that question directly:

*“And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”*

— Hebrews 9:22

Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. This is not arbitrary. This goes back to what we established in Chapter Three — the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sin carries a death penalty. Not because God is cruel, but because sin is that serious. It is a violation of the holiness of the God who made you. And holiness and sin cannot coexist any more than light and darkness can occupy the same space.

Someone has to die. Either the sinner pays his own debt — and that means eternal separation from God — or someone else pays it for him. But that someone else would have to be without sin of his own, because a guilty substitute cannot pay another person's debt. He'd have his own to deal with.

Do you see now why Chapter Five spent so much time on the sinless life of Jesus? Why it mattered that He was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15)? Why Peter emphasized that “He committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:22)?

Because a sacrifice has to be without blemish. And Jesus was the only sacrifice that qualified.

This is also why the picture of Abraham and Isaac from Chapter Four matters so much. A father willing to offer his only son. A substitute provided at the last moment. On a mountain. Abraham’s story was a preview — a shadow of what God Himself would do when the time came. Except when God offered *His* Son, there was no ram in the thicket. There was no last-minute substitute. Jesus *was* the substitute. And He went willingly to the altar.

## What Happened on That Cross

The physical suffering was real and it was terrible. But what happened spiritually on that cross is what saves you.

Peter, who had watched it all happen, later wrote:

*“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”*

— 1 Peter 2:24

*He Himself bore our sins.* Not symbolically. Not figuratively. He carried them. The guilt, the weight, the penalty — all of it was transferred to Him. And the purpose was clear: so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. His death makes our new life possible.

Paul described the same event in terms that would have meant everything to a world drowning in debt:

*“When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”*

— Colossians 2:13–14

A certificate of debt. In the ancient world, when someone owed a debt, a written record was kept — a document that listed everything owed. It hung over your head until the debt was paid. And when it was paid, the certificate was canceled — literally crossed out, struck through, rendered void.

Paul says that’s what Jesus did on the cross. Every sin you have ever committed — every lie, every selfish act, every moment of rebellion against the God who made you — was written on a certificate of debt. And Jesus took that certificate, nailed it to the cross, and paid it in full with His own blood.

*Having canceled out the certificate of debt.* It's not hanging over your head anymore. It's not waiting to be settled later. It was settled on that cross.

## The Veil

And then, at the moment Jesus died, something happened in the temple that proved it:

*“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.”*

— Matthew 27:50–51

The veil. To understand what this means, you need to know what the veil was.

In the Jewish temple, there was an innermost room called the Most Holy Place — the place where the presence of God dwelt. No one could enter it except the high priest, and he could only enter once a year, on the Day of Atonement, carrying the blood of a sacrifice. Separating that room from the rest of the temple was a massive curtain — the veil. It was the physical barrier between God and man. It said, in effect, “You cannot come in here. The way is not open.”

And at the moment Jesus died, that veil was torn in two. Not from the bottom up — as if human hands had ripped it.

*From top to bottom.* God tore it. From His side down. The barrier was removed. The way was opened.

The writer of Hebrews explained what this meant:

*“Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh...”*

— Hebrews 10:19–20

A new and living way. Through the veil — through His flesh. The body that was broken on the cross became the door. The blood that was shed became the key. The barrier between sinful man and a holy God — the barrier that had stood since Genesis 3 — was torn open by the death of Jesus Christ.

The gap from Chapter Three? It was bridged. Not by human effort. Not by religious achievement. By the body and blood of the only One who could pay the price.

## **“It Is Finished”**

Just before He died, Jesus spoke three words that carry more weight than almost anything else ever said:

*“Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.”*

— John 19:30

*It is finished.* In Greek, this is a single word — *tetelestai*. And it was a word that would have been immediately recognizable in the ancient world. It was the word stamped on a bill of sale when the full price had been paid. It was the word written across a criminal's certificate of debt when the sentence had been served.

Paid in full.

Jesus was not saying, "I'm done" — as if He had simply reached the end of His endurance. He was declaring that the work was complete. The debt was paid. The sacrifice was offered. The plan that God had put in place before the foundation of the world — the plan we traced in Chapter One, the promise we followed in Chapter Four — was finished. Every prophecy fulfilled. Every requirement met. Every sin accounted for.

*Tetelestai*. Paid in full.

## **The Father's Love**

In all of this, do not miss what it reveals about God.

The story we've been telling from the very beginning of this book is a story about a God who doesn't walk away. He didn't walk away when Adam and Eve sinned. He didn't walk away during the long centuries of human rebellion. And He didn't walk away when the cost of rescue turned out to be His own Son.

Paul wrote what may be the clearest summary of God’s love in all of Scripture:

*“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*

— Romans 5:8

*While we were yet sinners.* Not after we cleaned ourselves up. Not after we earned it. Not after we proved we deserved it. While we were still in our sin — still guilty, still separated, still on the wrong side of the gap — God sent His Son to die for us.

That is not the act of a distant, impersonal force. That is the act of a Father who loves the people He made and will stop at nothing to bring them home.

And Paul drove the point deeper:

*“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*

— Romans 5:6–8

*While we were still helpless.* You couldn’t save yourself. That was the whole point of Chapter Three — the gap you cannot cross. And at the right time — God’s time, the time He had planned from before the foundation of the world — Christ died for the ungodly. Not for the worthy. For the ungodly.

Remember what we said about Abraham on Mount Moriah? A father willing to offer his only son? Abraham's hand was stopped. God's was not. God actually went through with it. He gave His only Son — not because we deserved it, but because He loved us. And that love is not something you earn. It is something you receive.

## The Gift

In Chapter Three, we looked at the first half of one of the most important verses in all of Scripture: “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). The wages — what sin earns, what it pays, what it produces — is death. Separation from God. That is the problem.

But that verse doesn't end there. It continues:

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

— Romans 6:23

The wages of sin is death. But the *gift* of God is eternal life.

A wage is something you earn. A gift is something you receive. You earned death — every person has, because every person has sinned (Romans 3:23). But God is offering you something you did not earn and could never deserve: eternal life. And that gift is found in one place — *in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

The cross is where that gift was purchased. The blood of Jesus is the price that was paid. And the offer is extended to you — not because you're good enough, but because He is.

## **So What Now?**

Jesus is dead. His body is taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb. A stone is rolled over the entrance. Roman guards are posted. The disciples scatter, terrified, confused, grief-stricken. Everything they had believed about Him — everything He had claimed, everything He had demonstrated — seems to be over.

The most important man who ever lived is lying in a borrowed grave.

And if that's where the story ends, then none of this matters. Paul himself said so: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14). If Jesus stayed dead, He was just another man who made extraordinary claims and died without delivering on them.

But the story doesn't end there.

Three days later, the tomb was empty.

That's where we're going next.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# The Empty Tomb

It was over.

That's what they believed. Every one of them. The men who had left everything to follow Him — their boats, their businesses, their families — had watched Him die on a Roman cross. They had seen the nails. They had heard Him cry out. They had watched His body go limp, watched a soldier thrust a spear into His side to make certain, watched the blood and water pour out (John 19:34).

A wealthy man named Joseph of Arimathea had asked Pilate for the body. He and another man, Nicodemus — the same Nicodemus who had come to Jesus by night (John 3) — wrapped the body in linen cloths with burial spices, laid it in a new tomb cut out of rock, and rolled a large stone across the entrance (John 19:38–42).

The religious leaders, who had engineered the whole thing, went to Pilate and asked for a guard to be posted at the tomb. Their reason? Jesus had said He would rise after three days, and they didn't want the disciples stealing the body and claiming it happened (Matthew 27:62–66). So the tomb was

sealed. Roman soldiers — trained, armed, on duty under penalty of death — stood watch.

And the disciples? They were hiding. John tells us they had locked themselves behind closed doors “for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). These were not men preparing for a resurrection. These were men in shock. Men in grief. Men who had believed they were following the Messiah — and had just watched Him die like a criminal.

The hours passed. The silence was deafening. It was the longest wait in the history of the world.

And then came the first day of the week.

## The Dawn

*“Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave.”*

— Matthew 28:1

They came to grieve. They came with burial spices to finish preparing the body — because the Sabbath had forced them to leave the work incomplete. They came expecting a sealed tomb, a heavy stone, and the cold reality of death. They came expecting nothing.

They did not find what they expected.

*“And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.”*

— Matthew 28:2–4

Look at the contrast. Roman soldiers — the most disciplined military force the ancient world had ever seen — shook and fell like dead men at the sight of a single angel. These were not men who frightened easily. These were men trained to stand their ground against charging armies. And they collapsed. They could not even stand in the presence of what came down from heaven that morning.

And the angel — having just rendered an entire guard unit powerless — sat down on the stone and spoke to the women. Not with a shout. Not with a command. With reassurance:

*“The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.’”*

— Matthew 28:5–6

*He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said.*

Ten words that changed the world. The tomb was open — not to let Jesus out, but to let the witnesses in. The stone wasn't rolled away because Jesus needed someone to open the door. The One who had walked on water, calmed storms with

a word, and called Lazarus out of a grave after four days of decomposition did not need help getting out of a tomb. The stone was moved so that everyone could see with their own eyes: the body was gone. He was not there.

*Just as He said.* He had told them this would happen. More than once. He had told them in plain language — “on the third day He will be raised up” (Matthew 20:19). They hadn’t understood it then. They understood it now.

## Mary

The Gospel of John gives us something that Matthew’s account does not — a scene so intimate, so human, that it has stayed with readers for two thousand years.

Mary Magdalene had come to the tomb early, while it was still dark (John 20:1). When she saw the stone removed, she ran to tell Peter and John. They came, saw the empty tomb, saw the linen wrappings lying there — and went home (John 20:10).

But Mary stayed.

*“But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.’”*

— John 20:11–13

She thought someone had taken the body. That was the only explanation her grief-stricken mind could reach for. Not a resurrection. Not a miracle. Just the final indignity — they had taken Him, and she didn’t even know where.

And then she turned around.

*“When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, ‘Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.’”*

— John 20:14–15

She was looking straight at Him and didn’t recognize Him. Her eyes were blurred with tears. Her mind was locked on death. She was so consumed by her grief that even when the answer to her grief was standing right in front of her, she couldn’t see it.

And then He spoke her name.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means, Teacher).”

— John 20:16

One word. Her name. And she knew.

There is something in the way a person says your name that cannot be replicated. Mary had heard Jesus say her name before — many times. And when He said it again, standing alive in front of her in that garden on that morning, everything she had believed was lost came rushing back in a single syllable.

*Rabboni.* Teacher. My teacher. You’re here. You’re alive.

This is not the language of legend. This is not how you write a myth. A myth would have Jesus appear in glory before His enemies, descending from the clouds to vindicate Himself in front of the people who had killed Him. Instead, the risen Lord’s first appearance was to a weeping woman in a garden — a woman who thought He was the gardener. That is not the scene a human author would invent. That is the scene that actually happened.

## The Witnesses

If the resurrection were a lie, it would be the most extraordinary lie ever told — because everything about the way it was reported works against the people who reported it.

Start with the women. In the first-century world, a woman’s testimony was not considered legally valid. If you

were inventing a story and wanted people to believe it, you would never choose women as your first witnesses. No one trying to fabricate a credible story in that culture would have done it that way. But the Gospel writers didn't invent the witnesses — they recorded them. The women were first because the women were actually first. The accounts report what happened, not what would have been convenient.

Then there were the disciples themselves. On the evening of that first day, Jesus appeared to them while they were hiding behind locked doors:

*“So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”*

— John 20:19

He showed them His hands and His side — the marks of the nails and the spear. This was not a ghost. This was not a vision. This was a body — the same body that had been crucified — now alive, now standing in front of them, now bearing the proof of what had been done to Him.

But one of the twelve wasn't there that night. Thomas. And when the others told him what they had seen, Thomas said what any honest skeptic would say:

*“Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”*

— John 20:25

Eight days later, Jesus appeared again. And this time Thomas was there:

*“Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”*

— John 20:27–28

We saw those words in Chapter Five — Thomas’s confession: “My Lord and my God.” Now you know the moment when he said them. He said them while looking at the nail marks. He said them while standing in front of a man he had watched die. He said them because the evidence left him no other option.

And Thomas was only one of many.

Paul, writing to the Corinthians roughly twenty-five years after the resurrection, gave what may be the most important summary of eyewitness testimony in all of Scripture:

*“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.”*

— 1 Corinthians 15:3–8

Read that list carefully. He appeared to Peter. To the twelve. To more than five hundred people at a single time — and Paul adds that most of them were still alive when he wrote this. That detail matters enormously. Paul was not recording ancient history. He was pointing to living witnesses. He was saying, in effect, “If you don’t believe me, go ask them. They’re still here. They saw Him.”

Then James — the brother of Jesus, who had not believed during Jesus’ earthly ministry (John 7:5). What would it take to convince you that your own brother was God? James saw the risen Christ and became a leader in the early church. Then all the apostles. And finally Paul himself — a man who had been actively persecuting Christians before the risen Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus.

These were not people who wanted to believe. Peter had denied Jesus three times. Thomas refused to believe without

physical proof. James hadn't believed at all. Paul had been trying to destroy the church. Every one of them was changed — not by an idea, not by a philosophy, not by wishful thinking — but by an encounter with a person they had seen dead and now saw alive.

## The Transformation

And here is the detail that skeptics have never been able to explain.

Within weeks of the resurrection, the disciples — the same men who had been hiding behind locked doors — were standing in the streets of Jerusalem, publicly declaring that Jesus had risen from the dead. Not in some distant city where no one could check. In Jerusalem. The city where He had been crucified. The city where the tomb was. The city where anyone who wanted to disprove the claim could have simply produced the body.

No one produced the body. No one ever has.

Peter — the man who had denied Jesus three times to a servant girl by a fire — stood before the very rulers who had engineered the crucifixion and said:

*“This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.”*

— Acts 2:32

*We are all witnesses.* Not “we believe this happened.” Not “we have faith that it’s true.” *We saw Him.* This was not theology. This was testimony.

And they did not stop. Not when they were threatened. Not when they were arrested. Not when they were beaten. Not when they were killed. One by one, the apostles gave their lives for this claim. People will die for something they believe to be true — that happens all the time. But people do not die for something they know to be a lie. If the resurrection was a fabrication, the disciples knew it. And yet every one of them went to his death rather than deny what he had seen.

That is not the behavior of liars. That is the behavior of men who had seen something so real, so undeniable, so world-shaking that no threat could make them unsay it.

## **What the Resurrection Proves**

The empty tomb is not just a remarkable event. It is the event that validates everything else.

### *It Proves He Was Who He Said He Was*

In Chapter Five, we walked through the claims Jesus made about Himself — that He was God in the flesh, that He and the Father were one, that to see Him was to see the Father. Those are extraordinary claims. And the resurrection is the extraordinary proof.

Paul wrote:

*“...who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

— Romans 1:4

*Declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection.* The resurrection is God’s stamp of approval on every word Jesus ever spoke. Every claim. Every promise. Every teaching. If God raised Him from the dead, then God was saying, “This is My Son. Everything He told you is true.”

### *It Proves the Payment Was Accepted*

In Chapter Six, we saw what happened on the cross — the certificate of debt nailed there, the price paid in full, *tetelestai*. But how do you know the payment was accepted? How do you know the sacrifice was sufficient?

The resurrection is the receipt.

*“He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.”*

— Romans 4:25

He was delivered to the cross because of our sins. He was raised because our justification — our being declared righteous — was accomplished. The resurrection is God’s declaration that the debt has been fully satisfied. If Jesus had stayed in the tomb,

it would have meant the sacrifice was not enough. But He didn't stay in the tomb. He walked out of it. And that means the payment was accepted, the penalty was satisfied, and the way is open.

### *It Proves Death Has Been Conquered*

Remember what we said in Chapter Three — that the wages of sin is death, and that death entered the world through sin (Romans 5:12). Remember what we said in Chapter Two — that death is the separation of the spirit from the body. Death has held the human race in its grip since the garden of Eden. Every person born has lived under its shadow.

And on that Sunday morning, Jesus broke its grip.

*“But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”*

— Acts 2:24

*Impossible.* Death could not hold Him. The grave could not keep Him. The One who had authority over death when He stood outside Lazarus's tomb — the One who said “Lazarus, come forth” and the dead man walked out — now exercised that same authority over His own death. The spirit that had departed His body on the cross was reunited with it. The separation was reversed. Death itself was defeated by the Author of life.

And here is what that means for you: because He conquered death, death no longer has the final word. Paul would later write:

*“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”*

— 1 Corinthians 15:20–22

*The first fruits.* In the ancient world, the first fruits were the first portion of the harvest — and they were the guarantee that the rest of the harvest was coming. Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection. He is the proof that death is not the end. And those who are *in Christ* — we will come back to what that means — will share in what He has won.

### *It Proves the Prophets Were Right*

In Chapter Four, we traced the thread of promise from Genesis to Isaiah — the long line of prophecies that pointed to the coming Messiah. And one of them was buried in a passage so full of suffering that it’s easy to miss:

*“But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.”*

— Isaiah 53:10

Read that again. Isaiah said the suffering servant would render Himself as a guilt offering — and then *He will prolong His days*. He would die as an offering, and then He would live again. Seven hundred years before it happened, the prophet said that the Messiah would die and continue living. The resurrection is the fulfillment of that promise.

And when Paul stood in Athens — speaking to an audience that knew nothing about the God of Israel, nothing about the prophets, nothing about the promises — he brought his entire argument to a single point:

*“...because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”*

— Acts 17:31

*Having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.* The resurrection is not a matter of religious preference. It is not a comforting story for people who need hope. It is God’s proof — furnished to everyone, available to anyone willing to examine it — that Jesus is exactly who He claimed to be, that

the cross accomplished exactly what God intended, and that every human being will one day stand before Him.

## The Fact That Demands a Response

Let's put it all together.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then the cross was just another execution. The claims He made about Himself were false. The promises He made about eternal life were empty. The prophets were wrong. And the apostles — every last one of them — were either liars or fools. Paul himself said exactly this:

*“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.”*

— 1 Corinthians 15:17

If He's still in the grave, you're still in your sins. The debt is unpaid. The gap from Chapter Three is still open. The certificate of debt from Chapter Six is still hanging over your head. And there is no hope — for anyone, anywhere, ever.

But if He did rise — and the evidence says He did — then everything changes.

It means God is real, and He has acted in history. It means the cross was not a tragedy but a transaction — the payment of a debt you could never pay yourself. It means death is not the end. It means the separation between you and God that we described in Chapter Three has been bridged — by the body

and blood of the only One who could bridge it. It means the promise that was whispered in Genesis 3:15, the thread that was traced through Abraham and David and Isaiah, the plan that was set in place before the foundation of the world — all of it was real. All of it was true. And all of it was for you.

The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive. And that fact — that single, stubborn, world-altering fact — demands something from you.

Not just that you believe it. Even the demons believe, and they shudder (James 2:19). Not just that you admire it. Not just that you feel moved by it. The resurrection demands a response.

The crowd at Pentecost heard this very message — that the Jesus they had crucified was both Lord and Christ, that God had raised Him from the dead — and when the weight of it hit them, they asked the most important question any human being can ask:

*“What shall we do?”*

That question — and its answer — is where we’re going next.

PART THREE

# The Response

*What does God ask you to do?*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# So What Do I Do Now?

We ended the last chapter with a question — the same question that was asked two thousand years ago, on the very day the church began.

It was the day of Pentecost. Fifty days after the resurrection. The apostles were in Jerusalem, and the Holy Spirit had come upon them just as Jesus had promised. Peter stood up in front of a massive crowd of devout Jews who had gathered from all over the known world, and he preached. He told them about Jesus — who He was, what He had done, and what God had accomplished through His death and resurrection. He told them that the same Jesus they had handed over to be crucified had been raised from the dead, and that God had made Him both Lord and Christ.

And when the crowd heard it — when the weight of it landed — Luke tells us what happened:

*“Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’”*

— Acts 2:37

*Pierced to the heart.* They understood. They saw the story — creation, promise, fulfillment, sacrifice, resurrection — and they realized it was true. And the only response that made sense was the one they gave: *What shall we do?*

If you've been reading this book from the beginning — if you've walked through the evidence, the promises, the cross, and the empty tomb — that may be exactly where you are right now. You've heard the story. You believe it's true. And now you want to know: what does God ask me to do about it?

The answer is not complicated. It is not hidden. It is not something you need a theologian to decode. Jesus told His apostles what to teach, and they taught it. Every conversion recorded in the New Testament follows the same pattern. And that pattern is what we're going to walk through now.

## Hear the Word

Before anything else can happen, a person has to hear the message. That may seem obvious, but Scripture makes the point explicitly:

“*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*”

— Romans 10:17

Faith doesn't appear out of nowhere. It doesn't come from a feeling, a family tradition, or a vague sense that there must be

something out there. Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ — the gospel message, the story of what God has done.

That is what this book has been. From the very first page, we have been telling you the story — not our opinions, not our traditions, but the story that Scripture tells. And that story is what faith is built on.

Every conversion in the book of Acts begins with someone hearing the gospel preached. The crowd at Pentecost heard Peter. The Ethiopian eunuch heard Philip. Cornelius heard Peter. Lydia heard Paul. The Philippian jailer heard Paul and Silas. No one responded to a message they hadn't heard. The word came first — always.

## **Believe**

Once a person has heard the message, the next step is to believe it. Not just to acknowledge it. Not just to agree that it's probably true. To believe it — to trust it with your life.

Jesus Himself made this the starting point of the response:

*“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”*

— Mark 16:16

Belief is the foundation. Without it, nothing else matters. The writer of Hebrews put it this way:

*“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”*

— Hebrews 11:6

You must believe that God exists. You must believe that He rewards those who seek Him. And you must believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be — because He said so Himself:

*“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”*

— John 8:24

But belief, as essential as it is, is not the end of the response. It is the beginning. At the end of Chapter Seven, we noted that even the demons believe and shudder (James 2:19). They know exactly who God is. They know Jesus is the Son of God. And their belief saves them nothing — because it produces no obedience.

The kind of belief that saves is the kind that acts. It hears what God says, trusts that He means it, and responds accordingly. That is the faith the rest of this chapter is built on.

## **Repent**

After the crowd at Pentecost asked “What shall we do?” — after belief was already present, because they had just been pierced to the heart by the message — Peter gave them the next step:

*“Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”*

— Acts 2:38

*Repent.* The word means to change your mind in a way that changes your direction. It is not simply feeling sorry for what you’ve done — though genuine sorrow is often part of it. Paul explained the difference to the Corinthians:

*“For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.”*

— 2 Corinthians 7:10

Worldly sorrow is regret. You feel bad about what happened — maybe because of the consequences, maybe because you got caught, maybe because you hurt someone you care about. But godly sorrow goes deeper. It produces repentance — a genuine turning. A decision to stop walking away from God and start walking toward Him.

This is not optional. God doesn’t treat it as a suggestion. When Paul stood in Athens and told a pagan audience about the God who made the world, he closed his message with these words:

*“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent.”*

— Acts 17:30

*All people everywhere.* Not some people. Not the especially sinful. Everyone. Because everyone has sinned (Romans 3:23), and everyone needs to turn.

Repentance is the moment you stop making excuses and start being honest — with God and with yourself. It is the decision to leave the old life behind and move toward the One who made you, the One who died for you, and the One who rose for you.

## Confess

There is something that belief and repentance lead to naturally — and that is a willingness to say out loud what you believe. Scripture calls this confession.

Paul wrote:

*“...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”*

— Romans 10:9–10

Confess with your mouth. Believe in your heart. These are not two separate paths to salvation — they are two parts of one response. What you believe on the inside, you declare on the outside. You say it. You own it. You stand behind it.

And Jesus made clear that this matters:

*“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.”*

— Matthew 10:32–33

If you confess Him before men, He will confess you before the Father. If you deny Him, He will deny you. Confession is not a ritual. It is the public declaration that you believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God — the same confession Peter made (Matthew 16:16) — and that you are placing your life in His hands.

## **Be Baptized**

And now we come to the part of the response that Scripture gives the most attention — and the part that ties together a thread we have been following since the very first chapter of this book.

## *What Jesus Commanded*

Before He ascended to the Father, Jesus gave His apostles their final instructions:

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

— Matthew 28:19–20

Make disciples. Baptize them. Teach them to observe everything I commanded. That is what Jesus told His apostles to do. And that is exactly what they did.

In Mark’s account of the same commission, Jesus put it even more directly:

*“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”*

— Mark 16:16

Believed and been baptized — saved. Jesus joined these two things together. He did not say “he who has believed shall be saved and may also consider being baptized at some point.” He placed belief and baptism together, and on the other side of both, He placed salvation.

## *What Baptism Is*

The English word “baptism” is not actually a translation. It is a transliteration — the Greek word *baptizo* was carried over into English with its spelling changed but its meaning left behind. The Greek word means to immerse, to submerge, to plunge beneath. Not to sprinkle. Not to pour. To put completely under.

And the way Scripture describes baptism confirms this. Paul wrote:

*“Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”*

— Romans 6:4

*Buried.* You do not bury someone by scattering a handful of dirt on their head. You bury someone by putting them completely under. Baptism is a burial in water and a resurrection out of it — the old life goes down, the new life comes up. That picture only works as full immersion.

When Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, the text says “they both went down into the water” and “came up out of the water” (Acts 8:38–39). When Jesus Himself was baptized by John, He “came up immediately from the water” (Matthew 3:16). He was in the water. He came up out of it.

## *What Baptism Does*

Here is where the thread comes together — the thread we have been following since Chapter One.

In Chapter One, we saw that God chose us “in Him” before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). In Chapter Six, we saw that the free gift of God is eternal life “in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Throughout this book, we have seen that every blessing, every promise, every hope is found *in Christ*.

But we have not yet answered the question: How does a person get *into* Christ?

Scripture answers that question — and it answers it clearly:

“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?”

— Romans 6:3

*Baptized into Christ Jesus*. That is how you get into Christ. Not by a feeling. Not by a prayer. Not by simply deciding it in your heart. You are baptized into Him.

Paul said the same thing to the Galatians:

“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

— Galatians 3:27

Baptized into Christ. Clothed with Christ. And this matters more than most people realize, because of what Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”*

— Ephesians 1:3

Every spiritual blessing is *in Christ*. Every one. Forgiveness — in Christ. Redemption — in Christ. Eternal life — in Christ. And the only two passages in all of Scripture that tell you how to get *into* Christ — Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27 — both say the same thing: you are baptized into Him.

This is what Peter told the crowd at Pentecost:

*“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

— Acts 2:38

*For the forgiveness of your sins.* Not as a symbol of forgiveness already received. For the forgiveness of sins. That is what the text says.

This is what Ananias told Saul of Tarsus — the man who would become the apostle Paul — after Saul had already seen the risen Lord, already believed, and already spent three days fasting and praying:

*“Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”*

— Acts 22:16

*Wash away your sins.* After believing. After fasting. After praying. Saul’s sins were still there — and they remained until he was baptized. If belief alone were enough, Saul would have been saved on the road to Damascus. If prayer alone were enough, Saul would have been saved during those three days. But he was not. He was told to be baptized and wash away his sins.

And Peter, writing decades after Pentecost, said it as plainly as it can be said:

*“Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you — not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience — through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*

— 1 Peter 3:21

*Baptism now saves you.* Peter even anticipated the objection — he clarified that he was not talking about the physical act of washing dirt from your body. He was talking about the appeal to God, the act of obedient faith, that takes place in baptism. And he said it saves you.

### *What the Early Church Did*

If the teaching leaves any question, the practice answers it. The book of Acts records conversion after conversion. And in every single one, baptism is present. There are no exceptions.

At Pentecost, three thousand believed and were baptized that same day (Acts 2:41). The Samaritans believed and were baptized (Acts 8:12). The Ethiopian eunuch — who had just heard Philip preach Jesus — saw water on the side of the road and immediately asked, “What prevents me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Think about that: Philip preached Jesus, and the eunuch’s response was to look for water. Preaching Jesus includes preaching baptism.

Cornelius and his household were baptized (Acts 10:48). Lydia and her household were baptized (Acts 16:15). The Philippian jailer asked “What must I do to be saved?” — and after hearing the word of the Lord, he and his household were baptized *that very hour of the night* (Acts 16:33). Not the next morning. Not the following week. That hour. In the middle of the night.

Why the urgency? Because baptism is not a ceremony to be scheduled at your convenience. It is the moment sins are washed away. And that cannot wait.

The Corinthians were believing and being baptized (Acts 18:8). The disciples at Ephesus were baptized (Acts 19:5). Every conversion. Every time. No exceptions.

## *Not a Work That Earns — A Faith That Obeys*

You may be wondering: doesn't this make baptism a "work"? And doesn't Scripture say we are saved by grace, not by works?

Scripture absolutely says that:

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."*

— Ephesians 2:8–9

And this is completely true. You cannot earn your salvation. No amount of good deeds, no record of religious performance, no stack of human achievement can pay the debt that Chapter Six described. The gift of God is eternal life — and a gift, by definition, is not earned.

But obedience has never been the same thing as earning. Consider Noah. God told him to build an ark. Noah built it. Was that a "work"? Did building the ark earn Noah's salvation? Or did God save him when he obeyed? The writer of Hebrews says, "By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household" (Hebrews 11:7). Noah's obedience was an act of faith — and God acted at the point of that obedience.

Consider the walls of Jericho. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days" (Hebrews 11:30). Israel marched. They shouted. And the walls fell. Did marching knock the walls down? Did shouting

collapse stone? No. God did it — but He did it at the point of their obedience.

Baptism works the same way. The water does not save you. Your obedience does not earn anything. But God has chosen to act at the point of baptism — to wash away sins, to transfer a person from darkness to light, to place a person *into Christ* — just as He saved Noah at the point of entering the ark, and brought down the walls at the point of the shout.

Obedience has never negated grace. It is the *response* to grace.

## **A Life, Not a Moment**

There is one more thing that needs to be said — and it is important enough that the next two chapters are devoted to it.

The response to the gospel is not a one-time event and then you're done. Belief, repentance, confession, and baptism are the beginning — not the end. They are the door you walk through, but there is an entire life on the other side of that door.

Jesus did not simply say “be baptized.” He said “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). There is a life to be lived. There is growth to pursue. There is a community to belong to. There is faithfulness to maintain.

The apostle Paul, near the end of his life, wrote:

*“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.”*

— 2 Timothy 4:7

He didn’t just start well. He finished. He kept the faith — all the way to the end.

And Jesus Himself said:

*“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*

— Revelation 2:10

*Until death.* This is a call to a lifetime, not a moment. The response you make to the gospel today is the beginning of a relationship that is meant to last — and meant to grow — for the rest of your life.

What that life looks like — where you go from here, what it means to be part of the body of Christ, and how you live out the faith you’ve confessed — that’s where we’re going next.

## CHAPTER NINE

# What Happens Next?

You've heard the story. You've believed it. You've responded to it — repenting, confessing, being buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life. Your sins have been washed away. You are in Christ, where every spiritual blessing resides.

Now what?

That's not a small question. In fact, it may be the most practical question in this entire book. Because the gospel doesn't end with your response. Your response is the beginning. The moment you came up out of that water, a new life started — and that life is not meant to be lived alone.

## **Whose Church Is It?**

Before we talk about what happens next for you, we need to talk about what Jesus built — because what He built and what most people picture when they hear the word “church” are not the same thing.

During His ministry, Jesus made a promise. After Peter confessed Him as “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus said:

“*I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*”

— Matthew 16:18

Two words in that sentence deserve your full attention: *My church*. Not Peter’s church. Not Paul’s church. Not any man’s church. *My church*. Jesus claimed ownership of it before it even existed. He said *He* would build it. And He said nothing would stop it.

And that is exactly what happened. On the day of Pentecost — the day Peter stood up and preached the first gospel sermon after the resurrection — the church began. Three thousand people heard the message, believed it, repented, and were baptized. And then Luke tells us what happened next:

“*And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*”

— Acts 2:47

*The Lord* was adding. Not a committee. Not a pastor. Not a membership vote. The Lord added them. When those people obeyed the gospel — when they heard, believed, repented, confessed, and were baptized — God Himself placed them into the church that Jesus said He would build.

This is important because it means the church doesn't belong to any man, any denomination, or any institution. It belongs to Christ. He bought it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He is the head of it (Ephesians 1:22). And every person who obeys the gospel is added to it by God — not enrolled in it by men.

## What the Church Is

So what is this thing Jesus built? The word itself helps us understand. The Greek word translated “church” is *ekklesia* — and it simply means “the called out.” It's not a building. It's not an organization. It's not a denomination. It's a group of people — people who have been called out of darkness and into light, called out of sin and into Christ, called out of the world and into the family of God.

Paul described it this way:

*“And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”*

— Ephesians 1:22–23

The church is His body. Christ is the head. And every baptized believer is a member of that body — not a spectator, not a customer, not a name on a roster. A living, functioning part of something that belongs to Jesus.

Paul made this even more vivid when he wrote to the Corinthians:

*“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”*

— 1 Corinthians 12:12–13

One body. Many members. Baptized into it by one Spirit. No one part is more important than another. No one part can say to the rest, “I don’t need you.” The body functions when every part does its work — and it suffers when even one part is missing.

That is the church. Not a building you drive to on a certain day of the week. Not an institution with a corporate structure and a brand. It is the living body of Christ, made up of every person who has been called out of the world and into Him. And when those people come together, something specific happens.

## **What the Church Does When It Gathers**

Luke gives us a snapshot of the earliest church — what they did, how they lived, what they devoted themselves to. It’s the

clearest picture we have of what the church looked like before centuries of human tradition reshaped it:

*“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”*

— Acts 2:42

Four things. The apostles’ teaching. Fellowship. The breaking of bread. Prayer. That’s what the first Christians built their lives around. And when you look at the rest of the New Testament, these categories expand into a clear picture of what God designed the assembly to be.

### *Hearing the Word*

The church gathers to hear the word of God taught. This was central from the very beginning. Paul told the young evangelist Timothy:

*“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”*

— 2 Timothy 4:2

And when Paul met with the church at Troas, the text tells us he was “talking with them” and “prolonged his message until midnight” (Acts 20:7, 9). The early church gathered to hear the Scriptures opened and explained. Not to be entertained. Not to hear a motivational speech. To hear the word of God —

because faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

This is what Acts 2:42 means by “the apostles’ teaching.” The church was built on the foundation of what the apostles taught — and the apostles taught what Jesus had commanded them to teach (Matthew 28:20). That teaching is preserved for us in the New Testament. And when the church gathers, the word is to be at the center.

### *Prayer*

The church prays together. This is so obvious it might seem unnecessary to say — but it matters. The early church did not treat prayer as a formality to open and close a meeting. Prayer was woven into the fabric of their life together.

When Peter and John were arrested and released by the authorities, they went back to the other believers and prayed:

“*And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord...*”

— Acts 4:24

*With one accord.* Together. United. This was the body of Christ functioning as one — bringing their fears, their needs, their thanksgiving before the God who had saved them. Paul instructed Timothy that the church should pray for all people, including kings and those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1–2). James told believers to pray for one another, especially the sick

(James 5:14–16). The church at prayer is the church at its most dependent on God — and that dependence is exactly where God wants them.

### *Singing*

When the church gathers, they sing. And the New Testament tells us both *what* they sing and *how* they sing and *why* they sing.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

*“Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.”*

— Ephesians 5:19

And to the Colossians:

*“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”*

— Colossians 3:16

Notice what these passages say — and what they don’t say. They tell us to sing. They tell us to make melody with our hearts. They tell us that singing serves two purposes: it is worship directed to God, and it is teaching directed to one another. When you sing words of Scripture and truth to the person sitting next to you, you are building them up. When

you sing praise to God from your heart, you are worshiping Him. The singing does both at the same time.

And notice *how* the melody is made. It is made with the heart. Every reference to music in the New Testament worship of the church points to the human voice — the instrument God created — lifted in praise and instruction. The early church sang together, voices joined, hearts engaged.

God made the voice. He made it capable of carrying melody, harmony, and meaning all at once. And He told the church to use it — speaking to one another, singing to Him, making melody in their hearts. That is what the New Testament authorizes, and that is what the church has always done when it has followed the pattern of Scripture.

### *The Lord's Supper*

Acts 2:42 mentions “the breaking of bread.” While that phrase can sometimes refer to a shared meal, the New Testament makes clear that the church observed a specific act of remembrance that Jesus Himself instituted — the Lord's Supper.

On the night before He was crucified, Jesus took bread and the fruit of the vine and gave them to His disciples:

*“And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.’”*

— Luke 22:19–20

*Do this in remembrance of Me.* This was not a suggestion. It was a command — and the early church took it seriously. Paul reminded the Corinthians of its significance:

*“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”*

— 1 Corinthians 11:26

Every time the church observes the Lord’s Supper, they are proclaiming something — the death of Jesus, the sacrifice that paid the debt. It is a proclamation that looks backward to the cross and forward to His return. The bread represents His body, broken for you. The cup represents His blood, poured out for the forgiveness of your sins. And when you take it, you are remembering — not as a ritual you go through without thinking, but as a deliberate act of faith, looking at the cross and saying, “I remember what You did for me.”

When did the early church do this? Luke tells us:

*“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them...”*

— Acts 20:7

The first day of the week. The day Jesus rose from the dead. The church gathered on that day, and they gathered to break bread — to observe the Lord’s Supper together. This was the pattern. This was the practice. And it connects everything we’ve been talking about: the resurrection that proved who Jesus was, and the death that paid the debt you owed.

### *Giving*

The church also gives. Not because God needs money — He made everything — but because giving is an act of worship, a demonstration of trust, and a practical means of supporting the work of the church.

Paul gave the Corinthians specific instruction about how this was to be done:

*“On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.”*

— 1 Corinthians 16:2

On the first day of every week. Each one. As he may prosper. This is not a tax. This is not a percentage demanded under threat. It is proportional — based on how God has blessed you — and it is regular, set aside when the church gathers.

And Paul described the spirit behind it:

*“Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

— 2 Corinthians 9:7

*As he has purposed in his heart.* You decide. Not a committee. Not a preacher. You look at what God has given you, you decide in your own heart what to give, and you give it cheerfully. That is New Testament giving — free, personal, joyful, and done as an act of worship.

## **Don’t Walk Away from the Assembly**

All of these things — the teaching, the prayer, the singing, the Lord’s Supper, the giving — happen when the church gathers. And the New Testament is clear that gathering is not optional.

The writer of Hebrews put it directly:

*“Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”*

— Hebrews 10:24–25

*Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some.* This was already a problem in the first century — people drifting away, finding reasons not to gather, letting the habit of

assembling slip. And the writer of Hebrews says: don't do that. Don't let it become a habit. The assembly is where you are built up, encouraged, strengthened, and reminded of who you are and whose you are. You need it. And the body needs you.

Remember the picture of the body from earlier in this chapter? Every member matters. When you're absent, something is missing. When you stop gathering, you aren't just hurting yourself — you're leaving a gap in the body that no one else can fill. The church is not a service you attend. It is a family you belong to. And families show up for each other.

## **The Work of the Church**

The church doesn't just gather — it works. And the New Testament gives us a clear picture of what that work looks like.

First, the church proclaims the gospel. Jesus told His followers to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19), and the early church took that seriously. Paul told the Philippians that they had been his partners in the gospel from the first day (Philippians 1:5). The church at Thessalonica was commended because “the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you” (1 Thessalonians 1:8). The gospel doesn't spread by accident. It spreads when the church — individually and collectively — carries the message to people who haven't heard it.

Second, the church builds up its own members. Paul told the Ephesians that God gave teachers and evangelists to the

church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). Christians need to grow. They need to learn. They need to be corrected when they’re wrong and encouraged when they’re struggling. That is the church’s responsibility — not just the preacher’s, but every member’s. Paul said it plainly: “encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Third, the church cares for those in need. When a famine struck, the church in Antioch sent relief to the brethren in Judea (Acts 11:29). Paul collected contributions from Gentile churches to help the saints in Jerusalem who were suffering (Romans 15:26). James wrote that pure religion includes visiting orphans and widows in their distress (James 1:27). The church takes care of its own — and extends compassion to a world that is hurting.

That is the work: spreading the gospel, building up the body, and caring for those in need. It is simple. It is clear. And it is the mission Jesus left His church to carry out until He returns.

## **You Are Not Alone**

Maybe the most important thing to understand about the church is this: it means you are not alone.

Before you obeyed the gospel, you may have felt like you were on your own — navigating life without direction,

carrying burdens without help, facing the hard questions without answers. But the moment God added you to the body of Christ, that changed. You became part of a family — not a perfect family, because the church is made up of imperfect people who are still growing. But a real family. A family that prays for you, studies with you, sings beside you, remembers the Lord’s death with you, and walks with you through whatever comes next.

Paul described what that looks like at its best:

“*So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*”

— Romans 12:5

*Members one of another.* You belong to them. They belong to you. Not because you signed a card. Because God placed you there. The same God who knew you before you were born, who planned your rescue before the foundation of the world, who sent His Son to die for you and raised Him from the dead — that God looked at you when you came up out of the water and said, “You’re part of My family now.”

And that family is where the life that follows takes shape.

You’ve been added to the church. You’ve seen what it is, what it does, and why it matters. But what does the day-to-day look like? What happens when you stumble? What happens when the road gets hard? What does it mean to live faithfully — not perfectly, but faithfully — for the rest of your life?

That's where we're going next.

## CHAPTER TEN

# The Life That Follows

So here you are.

You've heard the story from the very beginning — from a God who created you on purpose, who made you in His image, who knew you before you were born. You've seen what went wrong — how sin entered the world and separated humanity from the God who made them. You've traced the long thread of promise that God wove through centuries of history, pointing to Someone who was coming to fix what was broken. You've met that Someone — Jesus, the Word made flesh, who claimed to be God, lived a sinless life, and backed up every claim with authority over nature, disease, death, and sin. You've stood at the cross and watched Him pay a debt you could never pay. You've seen the empty tomb and understood what it proves. You've heard the question — “What shall we do?” — and you've responded. You've been added to the church, the body of Christ, the family of God.

Now comes the rest of your life.

And if you're being honest, that might be the part that scares you the most. Because you know yourself. You know

your weaknesses. You know the habits that are hard to break and the thoughts that are hard to control and the past that is hard to leave behind. And somewhere in the back of your mind, there's a voice asking: *What if I can't do this? What if I fail?*

Let me tell you something important right now, before we go any further: you will fail. Not because you're worse than anyone else. Because you're human. Every person who has ever followed Christ has stumbled along the way. The question is not whether you will fall. The question is what happens when you do.

## When You Stumble

The apostle John — the one who leaned against Jesus at the last supper, the one who stood at the foot of the cross, the one who outlived all the other apostles — wrote these words to Christians. Not to people who were thinking about becoming Christians. To people who already were:

*“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*

— 1 John 1:8

If you think you're going to live the rest of your life without sinning, you're deceiving yourself. John said so. He included himself in it — *we*. This is not a license to sin. It is an honest acknowledgment that you are still human, still imperfect, still

capable of falling short. And if the apostle John needed to say that, then you and I certainly need to hear it.

But he didn't stop there. The very next verse is one of the most important promises in all of Scripture for a Christian who has stumbled:

“*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

*If we confess our sins.* Not if we earn forgiveness. Not if we perform enough good deeds to outweigh the bad. If we confess. If we bring it to God honestly — no excuses, no hiding, no pretending — He is faithful. He is righteous. And He will forgive.

That word *faithful* matters. It means God doesn't change His mind about this. His willingness to forgive a confessing Christian is not based on His mood or on how badly you failed. It's based on His character. He is faithful. He promised to forgive, and He keeps His promises.

And notice the scope: *cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Not some. Not the small sins. Not the ones that are easy to forgive. All. There is no sin you can commit as a Christian that is beyond the reach of God's forgiveness — if you are willing to confess it and turn from it.

This is grace. Not the kind of grace that says sin doesn't matter. The kind of grace that says sin matters enormously — but God's love is bigger than your worst failure.

## Getting Back Up

The Christian life is sometimes described in Scripture as a walk. Paul told the Ephesians to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Ephesians 4:1). He told the Colossians to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” (Colossians 1:10). A walk is steady. A walk is directional. A walk implies progress — not perfection.

When a child is learning to walk, they fall. Constantly. And every parent in the world knows what to do when that happens: you don't disown the child. You don't walk away. You reach down, help them up, and encourage them to try again. That is what your Father does for you.

The writer of Proverbs captured this beautifully:

*“For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again,  
but the wicked stumble in time of calamity.”*

— Proverbs 24:16

The difference between the righteous and the wicked is not that the righteous never fall. It's that they get back up. Seven times — which in Hebrew expression means completely, fully, over and over — the righteous fall. And every time, they rise.

That is the life that follows. Not a life of never stumbling. A life of always getting back up.

And you don't get back up alone. That's why Chapter Nine mattered. That's why God placed you in a body of believers who pray for you, encourage you, and walk beside you. James wrote:

*“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”*

— James 5:16

You were not designed to carry your failures in silence. You were designed to bring them into the light — before God and before your brothers and sisters in Christ — and to find healing in the honesty.

## **The Tools He Gave You**

God did not save you and then leave you to figure out the rest on your own. He gave you everything you need to grow, to endure, and to become more like His Son. Peter wrote:

*“His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.”*

— 2 Peter 1:3

*Everything pertaining to life and godliness.* Not almost everything. Not most of what you need. Everything. And it comes through the knowledge of Him — through knowing God, understanding His word, and growing in your relationship with Him.

So how do you grow? The same way you started — by hearing and doing.

### *Scripture*

The Bible is no longer a book you've never opened. It's the book that told you who God is, what He did, and how to respond. And now it becomes the daily companion of your new life.

Paul told Timothy:

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*

— 2 Timothy 3:16–17

Teaching — it shows you what is true. Reproof — it shows you where you've gone wrong. Correction — it shows you how to get back on track. Training in righteousness — it shapes you into the person God is calling you to be. The Bible does all four. But it can only do them if you open it.

The psalmist understood this:

*“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”*

— Psalm 119:105

A lamp to your feet. Not a spotlight that illuminates the entire road ahead — a lamp that shows you the next step. That is how Scripture works in your life. You don’t need to understand everything at once. You need to open it, read it, and let it guide you one step at a time.

### *Prayer*

You’ve already seen the church praying together. But prayer is also the private conversation between you and the God who saved you. And He wants to hear from you.

Paul wrote:

*“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

— Philippians 4:6–7

In everything. Not just the big things. Not just the crises. Everything. When you are anxious — and you will be — bring it to God. When you are grateful — and you should be — bring it to God. When you don’t know what to do, when you’re hurting, when you’re celebrating, when you’re lost —

bring it to God. He is not too busy. He is not too distant. He is your Father, and He is listening.

And notice what Paul says happens when you pray: the peace of God guards your heart and mind. You may not always get the answer you want. But you will be held by the One who loves you — and that is enough.

### *Fellowship*

We talked about the church in Chapter Nine. But fellowship is not just something that happens in a church building on the first day of the week. Fellowship is the daily reality of walking alongside other believers — encouraging each other, correcting each other, bearing each other's burdens.

Paul wrote:

*“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”*

— Galatians 6:2

You were not meant to carry your burdens alone. And someone near you is carrying a burden right now that you are uniquely positioned to help with. That is fellowship — not a handshake at the door, but a life shared with people who are walking the same road.

The writer of Ecclesiastes said it simply:

*“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.”*

— Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

You need people. They need you. That is by design.

## The Race

There is another image Scripture uses for the Christian life — not just a walk, but a race. And a race requires endurance.

Paul, near the end of his life, wrote to Timothy:

*“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*

— 2 Timothy 4:7–8

*I have finished the course.* Not “I started the course.” Not “I ran really well for the first few years.” He finished. He kept the faith — all the way to the end. And because he did, a crown was waiting for him.

The writer of Hebrews used the same image:

*“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.”*

— Hebrews 12:1–2

A cloud of witnesses. Every person of faith who came before you — Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, the apostles, the millions of faithful Christians across two thousand years of history — they are the witnesses. They ran their race. They kept their faith. And now it is your turn.

And the instruction is clear: fix your eyes on Jesus. Not on the difficulties. Not on the doubts. Not on the people who will disappoint you. On Jesus — the author and perfecter of your faith. He started it. He will complete it. Your job is to keep running toward Him.

Jesus Himself told the church at Smyrna — a church that was suffering, that was being persecuted, that had every reason to give up:

*“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*

— Revelation 2:10

Faithful until death. That is the calling. Not perfect until death — faithful. There is a difference. Perfection means never failing. Faithfulness means never quitting. And the promise for

those who don't quit is not a pat on the back. It's a crown of life.

## The Hope

And here is where the story reaches its final destination — not the end, but the beginning of something that never ends.

One of the most common fears in the human heart is the fear of death. It's the question behind every question. It's the shadow that falls across every joy. And for those who have lost someone they love, it is the ache that never fully goes away.

Paul addressed this directly — and what he wrote was not a vague wish or a sentimental hope. It was a declaration rooted in everything we've been building in this book:

*“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.”*

— 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14

*So that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.* Christians grieve. When you lose someone you love, it hurts. Paul did not say, “Don't grieve.” He said, “Don't grieve like people who have no hope.” Because you have hope. And your hope is not a wish. Your hope is the resurrection of Jesus Christ — the same resurrection we examined in Chapter Seven, the same resurrec-

tion that proved He was who He said He was, the same resurrection that demonstrated His victory over death.

If Jesus died and rose again — and He did — then those who have fallen asleep in Him will also rise. That is the promise. Not “maybe.” Not “we hope so.” *Even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.*

Paul continued:

*“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”*

— 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18

*And so we shall always be with the Lord.* That is the end of the story. Or rather, it is the beginning of the real story — the one that never ends. Always with the Lord. No more separation. No more sin. No more death. No more gap to cross. Always with Him.

And Paul’s instruction? *Comfort one another with these words.* This is not abstract theology. This is the comfort you offer at the graveside. This is the hope you carry into the hospital room. This is the anchor that holds you when everything else is falling apart. Jesus rose. And because He rose, you will rise too.

## **The Life That Starts Now**


Let me bring this all the way back to where we started.

In Chapter One, we said that you are not an accident. That God made you on purpose, in His image, with a plan for your rescue that was in place before the foundation of the world. Every chapter since then has been the unfolding of that plan — the problem of sin, the long promise of rescue, the arrival of Jesus, the cross that paid the debt, the empty tomb that proved it all, the response that brings you into Christ, and the church that walks with you from here.

This is the life that follows. It is a life built on the foundation of everything you've read in this book — not a set of rules to keep, but a relationship to live. A relationship with the God who made you, the Savior who died for you, and the family He placed you in.

It will not always be easy. There will be days when you doubt, days when you stumble, days when the world presses in so hard you wonder if any of this is real. And on those days, you open the Book. You get on your knees. You lean on the people God put beside you. And you remember: the tomb is still empty. The promise still stands. And the God who started this work in you is faithful to complete it.

Paul wrote to the Philippians:



*“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began  
a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Je-  
sus.”*

— Philippians 1:6

He began the work. He will finish it. Your part is to keep walking — one step at a time, one day at a time, with your eyes fixed on Jesus.

This is not the end of your story. It is the beginning of the one that matters most.

And it starts now.