One Day Closer to Home

A Book of Hope for Those in the Final Chapters

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"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."

— 1 Thessalonians 4:13 (NASB)

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CHAPTER 1

The Rearview Mirror

Part I: The Examples

You know the moment. You're cleaning out a closet, or a drawer you haven't opened in years, and your hand closes around something — a photograph, a letter, a program from a wedding or a graduation. And just like that, you're not standing in your hallway anymore. You're standing in 1978. You can hear the music. You can smell the perfume. You can see the face of someone who's been gone for twenty years, and for just a second, they're alive again.

It hits you somewhere behind the ribs.

And then you're back. The hallway. The drawer. The quiet house. And the present feels a little thinner than it did a moment ago.

If you're over sixty, you know exactly what I'm describing. You've felt it looking through old photo albums. You've felt it hearing a song on the radio that hasn't played in decades. You've felt it driving past the house where you raised your children, the one with the different color shutters now and someone else's car in the driveway. The past reaches out and grabs you, and honestly — you don't always fight it. Sometimes you go willingly.

Sometimes the past feels more real, more vivid, more *alive* than anything happening today.

There's a phrase for it. "The good old days."

And here's the thing — those days really were good. I'm not here to take that from you. The laughter around that table was real. The love was real. The feeling of purpose and strength and being in the middle of things — all real. Nostalgia isn't a sin. Memory is a gift from God. The ability to carry people and places and moments inside your heart long after they've passed from sight — that's not a flaw in the design. That's part of what it means to be made in the image of a God who remembers (Psalm 105:8).

So let me be clear from the start: this book is not going to tell you to stop remembering. It's not going to scold you for looking at old photographs or getting misty-eyed at Thanksgiving. That's not the problem.

The problem is when the rearview mirror becomes the windshield.

* * *

There's a difference between glancing back with gratitude and *living* back there. And the older we get, the easier it is to cross that line without noticing.

Think about it. When you were thirty, the future was enormous. It stretched out in front of you — decades of plans, possibilities, things you hadn't done yet. The past was short by

comparison. There wasn't that much to look back on. So you naturally leaned forward. You thought about what was next.

But somewhere along the way, the balance shifted. The past grew longer and richer. The future — at least the earthly future — started feeling shorter. And without anyone making a conscious decision, the gaze turned around. The best stories are behind you. The strongest years are behind you. The people you loved most — some of them are behind you. And so, almost by gravity, that's where your eyes go.

The world reinforces this. Notice how our culture talks about aging. "You've had a good run." "Enjoy your golden years." "You've earned a rest." All of it backward-looking. All of it assumes the meaningful part is over and what's left is to sit comfortably and remember it. The message, spoken or unspoken, is that you've crossed the peak and now you're on the way down.

Even in the church, we can fall into this without meaning to. We honor our older members — and we should — but sometimes the honoring sounds a lot like a conclusion. A tribute to what *was*. And the older Christian sits in the pew and smiles and accepts the gratitude and quietly wonders if anyone sees them as anything other than a monument to the past.

But what if that entire framework is wrong?

What if the reason the rearview mirror feels so compelling isn't because the best is behind you — but because you haven't yet seen what's ahead?

* * *

There was a man who had every reason to live in the past. His résumé was staggering — by any measure, religious or otherwise, he had accomplished more than most people could fit into three lifetimes. He had been a rising star in Judaism, a Roman citizen, a Pharisee trained under one of the most respected teachers in Israel. Then his life had been torn apart and rebuilt from the ground up. He had planted churches across the known world. He had survived beatings, shipwrecks, stonings, and betrayals. He had stood before governors and kings. He had written letters that would be read for two thousand years.

And he had also done things he deeply regretted. Before his conversion, he had dragged men and women out of their homes for believing in Jesus. He had approved of the execution of Stephen, one of the first martyrs of the faith. He carried that weight.

By the time he wrote his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul was an older man — and he was in chains. A Roman prison. Not the dramatic, defiant imprisonment of a young revolutionary, but the confined, uncertain waiting of a man whose body had taken decades of punishment and whose earthly future was very much in question.

If anyone had earned the right to look backward — to rehearse the victories, or for that matter, to dwell on the regrets — it was Paul.

He refused.

> *"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching*

> *forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*
>
> **— Philippians 3:13–14 (NASB)**

Read that again slowly, because every phrase is doing work.

"I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet." Paul is not writing from a place of spiritual arrival. He's not looking back at a completed journey. At the end of a life most of us can barely comprehend, he says, "I'm not there yet." There is still something ahead of him that he has not yet taken hold of.

"But one thing I do." Not ten things. Not a program. One deliberate, continuous act of the will.

"Forgetting what lies behind." The Greek word here — *epilanthanomai* — doesn't mean amnesia. Paul hasn't literally forgotten his past; he's just recounted parts of it in the verses immediately before this one (Philippians 3:4–6). The forgetting he's talking about is a *refusal to be defined by it.* A refusal to let the past — good or bad — become the thing that holds his gaze. He's not erasing the memories. He's declining to live in them.

"And reaching forward to what lies ahead." Here's where the language gets physical. The word Paul uses — *epekteinomenos* — is an image of a runner in full stretch. Leaning into the race. Body extended toward the finish line. It's not casual. It's not passive. This is a man straining forward with everything he has. An old man, in chains, straining forward.

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." The call is *upward*. Not backward. The prize is ahead, not behind. And Paul, with all his history — the glories

and the failures alike — has made a decision about which direction to face.

This is not a young man's bravado. This is an aging man's clarity.

* * *

Now, I need to say something here that might not be comfortable, because it's not comfortable for me either.

The rearview mirror is not just about warm memories. Sometimes it's about regret. Sometimes the past that grabs you isn't the golden, glowing kind — it's the 2:00 AM kind. The things you said. The things you didn't say. The years you wasted. The relationships you damaged. The silence where there should have been words, or the words where there should have been silence.

For some of you, the past isn't an old photo album. It's an old wound.

And the temptation is the same in either case — to set up camp there. To replay it. To turn it over and over in your hands as if examining it one more time will finally change what happened.

Paul knew both versions. He had the pedigree, the accomplishments, the mountaintop experiences — and he also had the memory of holding the coats of the men who killed Stephen. He had the faces of the families he tore apart before the Damascus road. He calls himself the foremost of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), and he's not being modest. He means it.

And his answer to *both* versions of the past is the same: forget what lies behind. Not because it didn't matter. But because it's not where you're going.

The warm nostalgia and the sharp regret have something in common — they both face the wrong direction. And they both, if you let them, will keep you from seeing what God has put in front of you.

* * *

Paul isn't the only one in Scripture who makes this point. Writing to the church at Colossae, he puts it differently but drives the same direction:

> *"Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."*
>
> — Colossians 3:1–2 (NASB)

"Set your mind on the things above." That's a present imperative in the Greek — it's continuous action. Keep setting. Keep directing your thoughts upward. It's not a one-time decision; it's a daily discipline of orientation. Where are you pointing?

And then there's a moment recorded by Luke that's brief but striking. Jesus is on the road, and someone says to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." But they want to handle a few things first. Look back at the life they're leaving. Settle accounts. Say goodbyes. And Jesus responds:

> *"No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."*
>
> — Luke 9:62 (NASB)

That sounds harsh until you understand what plowing looked like in the first century. A man guiding a plow behind an animal had to look straight ahead. If he turned to look behind him, the furrow went crooked. It wasn't a moral judgment — it was a practical reality. You cannot move forward in a straight line while looking backward. The geometry doesn't work.

And neither does the spiritual geometry. You cannot fully lean into what God has ahead of you while your heart is anchored in what's behind you.

* * *

So here's the question this book is going to spend the next twelve chapters answering — and I want you to sit with it, because it might be the most important question you consider this year:

What if the best is not behind you?

What if every day that passes isn't taking something from you but bringing you closer to something?

What if the aches in your body and the thinning of your calendar and the quiet of your house are not signs that life is winding down — but that you're approaching something so enormous it makes everything behind you look like a shadow?

The world will tell you to manage your decline gracefully. Make the best of it. Enjoy what's left.

This book is going to tell you something different. Not because I'm an optimist, and not because I think aging is easy. It isn't. The losses are real. The grief is real. The loneliness is real. My father-in-law used to say that growing old wasn't for the faint of heart, and he was right. We're going to talk about all of it honestly.

But we're going to talk about it facing the right direction.

In the chapters ahead, you'll meet an old man named Simeon who spent his entire old age leaning forward, waiting for something — and saw it with his own eyes. You'll meet an 84-year-old widow named Anna who never stopped serving, not for a single day. You'll stand with Caleb at 85 as he asks for the mountain with the giants on it. You'll walk with Abraham, a stranger in a foreign land, looking for a city whose architect and builder is God.

You'll hear Paul describe the body as a tent — temporary, fragile, and not your permanent address. You'll hear him describe what comes next in language so vivid it takes your breath: perishable becomes imperishable, dishonor becomes glory, weakness becomes power.

And at the end, if you've never surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, there will be a chapter for you too — not sentimental, but honest, urgent, and grounded in exactly what the New Testament teaches. Because every day closer to home is also one day less to respond.

But all of that starts here. With a decision about which direction to face.

Paul made his decision in a Roman prison, with chains on his wrists and a body that bore the scars of thirty years of hard

service. He was not young. He was not free. He was not comfortable. And he said, "One thing I do — forgetting what lies behind, reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on."

The rearview mirror will always be there. The memories aren't going anywhere. But they were never meant to be your destination.

Turn around.

The sunrise ahead is better than anything behind you.

CHAPTER 2

Simeon's Eyes

Part I: The Examples

Imagine waiting for something your entire life.

Not hoping for it in some vague, background sort of way — the way we all hope for good things to happen — but *knowing* it was coming. Having been told, by a source you trusted absolutely, that before you died you would see it with your own eyes. And then waiting. Year after year. Decade after decade. Getting older. Watching the world go on around you. Watching other people come and go. And still waiting.

Not because you were stubborn. Not because you had nothing better to do. But because the promise was real, and you believed the One who made it.

That was Simeon.

We don't know much about him. Luke gives us his story in eight verses — barely a paragraph in most Bibles. No genealogy. No title. No backstory about where he came from or what he did for a living. What Luke does tell us is enough to build a life on, and it's one of the most striking portraits of aging in all of Scripture.

> *"And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the*

> *consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ."*
>
> **— Luke 2:25–26 (NASB)**

Read those two verses carefully, because Luke is stacking details with a purpose.

Righteous and devout. Two words that together paint a picture of a man whose life was oriented around God — not in a showy, public way, but in the quiet, daily kind. "Righteous" speaks to his conduct. "Devout" speaks to his heart. This was a man who lived what he believed, consistently, over a long period of time.

Looking for the consolation of Israel. Here's the phrase that defines Simeon's posture. He was *looking for* something. The Greek word Luke uses — *prosdechomai* — means to wait for, to look for with expectation. It's not passive. It's not sitting in a chair staring out the window. It carries the sense of eager, active anticipation. Simeon was leaning forward.

And what was he looking for? The consolation of Israel. That phrase would have landed with enormous weight for Luke's readers. Israel had been waiting for centuries — through exile, through occupation, through silence. The prophets had spoken of a coming Deliverer, and then the prophets had gone quiet. By Simeon's day, Israel had been under Roman rule for decades. The temple still stood, the sacrifices still continued, but the glory had dimmed. The nation was waiting for God to act.

And Simeon, personally, had received a promise that he would see it happen.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. We aren't told when this revelation came. Was it when Simeon was young? Middle-aged? Already old? Luke doesn't say. But whenever it came, it transformed the way Simeon experienced every single day that followed. Every morning he woke up was a morning that might be *the* morning. Every trip to the temple was a trip that might end with God keeping His word.

He wasn't counting down to death. He was counting toward a promise.

* * *

Now think about what that kind of waiting would do to a person.

Most of us, if we're honest, experience aging as a process of subtraction. Every year takes something. Energy. Friends. Mobility. Independence. The hair thins, the joints stiffen, the list of medications gets longer, and the calendar gets emptier. We measure our age by what we've lost.

But Simeon's calendar worked differently. Every day wasn't taking him further from the good years — it was bringing him one day closer to the fulfillment of a divine promise. His age wasn't subtracting from his life. It was adding to his anticipation.

This is a fundamentally different way to experience time.

Think about the contrast with the way most people around him must have experienced their later years. In the ancient world, old age was respected but also associated with decline, just as it is now. The body weakened. The eyes dimmed. Friends and family

died. The world moved on. An old man in Jerusalem in the first century had plenty of reasons to sit quietly and reflect on what had been.

But Simeon wasn't reflecting. He was watching. The text says the Holy Spirit was *upon him* — present tense, ongoing reality. This wasn't a memory of something God had done for him once. This was a living, active, present relationship with the Spirit of God, sustaining him in his waiting and keeping the promise fresh.

Here's what I want you to see: Simeon's old age was not defined by what he had lost. It was defined by what he had not yet received.

And that made all the difference.

* * *

Then the day came.

> *"And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 'Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.'"*
>
> **— Luke 2:27–32 (NASB)**

There's so much happening here. Let's walk through it.

He came in the Spirit into the temple. This wasn't a routine visit. Simeon was led — prompted, moved, drawn by the Holy Spirit — to be in the right place at the right time. After years of waiting, the Spirit said, "Today." And Simeon went.

Consider what he saw when he got there. Not a king on a throne. Not an army marching through the gates. Not a blinding display of divine power. He saw a young couple from Nazareth — a working-class town with no particular reputation — carrying an infant, doing what the Law of Moses required for a firstborn son. It was an ordinary scene. Families came to the temple for this purpose every day. There was nothing outwardly remarkable about this particular couple or this particular baby.

But Simeon knew. The Spirit who had made the promise was the same Spirit who confirmed the fulfillment. And so this old man — we can picture his weathered hands, his aged frame — walked up to Mary and Joseph, and he took the child into his arms.

Picture that for a moment. An old man holding an infant. The image itself is striking — the end of one life cradling the beginning of another. But this was infinitely more than that. This was the moment Simeon had been living toward for years, possibly decades. Everything his life had been leaning toward was now resting in the crook of his arm, wrapped in cloth, small enough to hold.

And then he spoke.

"Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word."

That word "now" — in the Greek, *nyn* — carries the weight of the entire passage. *Now.* After all this time. After all the waiting. Now. It's a word of arrival, of completion, of a promise kept.

And notice what Simeon says next: "You are *releasing* Your bond-servant to depart in peace." The word is *apolyō* — to set free, to release, to let go. Simeon isn't describing death as defeat. He isn't describing it as loss. He's describing it as *release*. He has been held here by a promise, and now the promise has been fulfilled, and he is free to go. In peace.

This is not the language of a man who is afraid. This is not the language of a man who is clinging. This is a man who has seen what he was waiting for, and he is satisfied.

"For my eyes have seen Your salvation."

My eyes. Not someone else's report. Not a secondhand account passed down through a chain of sources. *My eyes.* The eyes that had grown dim with age, the eyes that had watched and waited for so long — those eyes had now seen the salvation of God. And it was enough.

* * *

There's something else in Simeon's words that we shouldn't rush past. He describes this child — this infant in his arms — as "a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." An old man in the Jerusalem temple, holding a forty-day-old baby — presented according to the purification requirements of Leviticus 12 — and he sees the entire scope of God's redemptive

plan. Salvation reaching beyond Israel to the nations. Light piercing into places that had only known darkness.

Simeon's vision hadn't narrowed with age. It had expanded.

That runs directly counter to what the world expects. The older we get, the smaller our world is supposed to become. Fewer people. Fewer places. Fewer interests. The circle contracts. But Simeon, at the end of his life, was seeing *more* clearly and *more* broadly than anyone around him. The young priests in the temple that day saw a routine ceremony. Simeon saw the hinge of human history.

Age had given him eyes, not taken them.

* * *

I want to come back to something, because it's easy to admire Simeon from a distance and harder to apply his example up close.

The waiting wasn't glamorous. Luke compresses it into a few verses, but think about what those years actually looked like. Simeon didn't know when the promise would be fulfilled. He woke up every morning with the same question: Is today the day? And most mornings, the answer was no. He went to the temple and came home. Another day. Another week. Another year. The promise unchanged. The fulfillment not yet.

That takes a particular kind of faith — not the dramatic, Red-Sea kind, but the quiet, daily, getting-out-of-bed kind. The kind that keeps believing on the four hundredth morning when nothing visible has changed. The kind that doesn't demand a timeline from God.

Some of you know exactly what that feels like. You've been praying for something for years. You've been waiting on God for answers that haven't come. Your body has gotten older while you've waited. Your circumstances have changed while you've waited. And the temptation — the very real, very human temptation — is to wonder if the waiting is all there is. If maybe you misunderstood. If maybe the promise wasn't what you thought it was.

Simeon didn't waver. The text gives no indication of doubt, no record of complaint. He waited, and he believed, and when the day came, he was ready. He was in the temple because the Spirit led him there, and he recognized the Christ because the Spirit opened his eyes. The waiting hadn't been wasted time. It had been preparation.

* * *

Here's what Simeon's story does to the rearview mirror.

If Chapter 1 asked you to stop looking backward, this chapter asks you to consider what you might see if you look forward. Simeon gives us a picture of what it looks like to age with your eyes on the horizon instead of in the photo album. His posture wasn't endurance — gritting his teeth and getting through his final years. His posture was *anticipation*. There was something ahead of him that he hadn't yet seen, and the prospect of seeing it gave every single day a charge of expectation.

For the Christian, that same dynamic is available to you right now. Not a specific revelation like Simeon received — but

something even better. You have the completed New Testament. You have the promises of God, written and preserved and confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You know what's coming. Not every detail — but enough.

You know that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). You know that what is sown perishable will be raised imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:42). You know that God will wipe away every tear, and death itself will be no more (Revelation 21:4). These aren't wishes. These aren't hopes in the thin, secular sense of the word. These are promises made by the One who raised Jesus from the dead.

And every day that passes brings you one day closer to seeing them fulfilled — with your own eyes.

Simeon held the promise in his arms and said, "Now I can go in peace." You haven't held it yet. But it's closer today than it was yesterday. And the question is the same one that shaped Simeon's entire old age: Will you spend your remaining days looking back at what was, or leaning forward toward what's coming?

The old man in the temple chose to lean forward.
And when the moment came, he was ready.

CHAPTER 3

Anna Never Left

Part I: The Examples

She almost gets missed.

Simeon is the one everyone remembers from that day in the temple. His prayer is famous. His words about the child — "a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel" — are quoted and studied and sung in liturgies around the world. Painters have imagined the scene a thousand times: the old man, the infant, the light streaming through the temple.

But there was someone else there. Standing close enough to hear Simeon's words. Close enough to see the child in his arms. An 84-year-old widow who had been in that temple longer than most people could remember. And Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, makes sure we don't miss her.

> *"And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."*

— Luke 2:36–38 (NASB)

Three verses. That's all Luke gives us. But packed into those three verses is one of the most remarkable portraits of faithfulness in the entire Bible — and a direct answer to one of the deepest fears of growing old.

* * *

Let's start with what Luke tells us about her, because as with Simeon, every detail is deliberate.

A prophetess. This is noteworthy. The role of prophet in Israel was not self-appointed. Anna had a recognized spiritual function among God's people. She wasn't simply a devout old woman who spent a lot of time at the temple — she was identified by Luke as someone through whom God had worked. This matters because it tells us that Anna's years of service were not invisible to God or to the community around her. She had a role. She filled it.

The daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. Luke gives us her father's name and her tribal lineage. This is more remarkable than it might appear. By the first century, most Israelites had lost track of their tribal identities — the Assyrian exile centuries earlier had scattered the northern tribes so thoroughly that they were commonly referred to as "the lost tribes of Israel." Asher was one of those northern tribes. The fact that Anna's tribal identity was still known suggests a family that had carefully preserved its heritage, its connection to God's people, across generations of upheaval. She came from people who remembered who they were.

She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four.

Here we need to do a little arithmetic, and there's an honest question about the text that's worth noting. The Greek can be read two ways. Some take it to mean Anna was eighty-four years old at the time of this event. Others read it to mean she had been a widow for eighty-four years — which, if she married young as was customary and was widowed after seven years, would put her well over a hundred years old. Either reading is grammatically possible. The NASB translates it "to the age of eighty-four," which is the more straightforward reading, and that's what we'll work with — while acknowledging that faithful students have read this differently.

What's not in question is the shape of her life. She was married for seven years. Then her husband died. And what followed was not a few years of widowhood before she moved on to something else. It was *decades*. Decades of being alone. Decades without the companionship, the provision, the partnership that marriage had given her. In a culture where a woman's security was closely tied to her husband or her sons, Anna's widowhood would have been more than an emotional loss. It was a social and economic vulnerability that lasted most of her adult life.

And what did she do with those decades?

She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.

* * *

Let that sink in for a moment. She *never left*.

Now, this likely doesn't mean Anna literally lived inside the temple complex twenty-four hours a day for sixty or more years, though some have suggested it. The temple had chambers and courts where devout people could spend extended periods, and the phrase "never left" may be Luke's way of expressing that the temple was her constant, daily, unwavering place of devotion. She was always there. If you went to the temple at dawn, Anna was there. If you went at dusk, Anna was there. She was as much a fixture of that place as the stones themselves.

But what I don't want us to miss is *what* she was doing there. Luke doesn't say she was sitting. He doesn't say she was resting. He says she was *serving*. The Greek word is *latreuō* — it's a word used for priestly service, for worship rendered to God as an act of devoted labor. It's the same word Paul uses when he describes his own ministry: "I serve God with my spirit" (Romans 1:9, NASB).

Anna's presence in the temple was not retirement. It was active, purposeful, costly service — night and day, with fastings and prayers.

Think about what that means. Fasting at eighty-four. Praying through the night at eighty-four. Not occasionally, not when she felt up to it, but as a pattern of life. A rhythm. A discipline sustained over decades. This woman was not winding down. She was not marking time. She was doing the hardest, most invisible, most demanding work there is — bringing the needs of God's people before God's throne, day after day, year after year, with nothing to show for it that the world could see.

And she didn't stop.

* * *

I want to pause here and speak directly to something that many of you feel but may not say out loud.

One of the cruelest lies of aging is that you're no longer useful. That the years when you could contribute are behind you. That whatever you had to offer, you've already offered it, and now it's time to step aside and let younger people carry the load.

The world says this in a thousand ways. The workplace says it with mandatory retirement ages and early buyout packages. The culture says it with its obsession with youth, with energy, with innovation, with the next new thing. Even the church, without meaning to, can say it by quietly moving older members out of meaningful roles and into honorary ones — appreciated but not needed. Valued for what they were, not for what they are.

And if you hear that message long enough, you start to believe it. You start to feel like you're taking up space. Like the most loving thing you can do is stay out of the way. Like your season of usefulness has a natural expiration date, and you've passed it.

Anna demolishes that lie.

At eighty-four years old, after decades of widowhood, she was not retired. She was not sidelined. She was serving God with an intensity that would exhaust most people half her age. And she wasn't serving despite her age — as if she were defying some natural limitation. She was serving *from* her age. The decades of prayer and fasting hadn't weakened her spiritual life — they had

deepened it. Every year of faithfulness had added to her capacity, not subtracted from it.

Her body was eighty-four. Her usefulness was undiminished.

* * *

And then the moment came. The same moment Simeon experienced — but Anna's response was different, and the difference matters.

At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Simeon held the child and spoke a prayer of release. His words were directed to God: "Now let Your bond-servant depart in peace." It was personal. It was between him and the Lord. And it was beautiful.

But Anna did something else. She gave thanks to God — and then she *spoke*. She spoke of Jesus. And she didn't speak to one person or two. She spoke to "all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

She became, in that moment, a proclaimer. An eighty-four-year-old widow became one of the very first people in history to announce to others that the Messiah had arrived.

Notice Luke's language: she "continued to speak." This wasn't a single remark. It was ongoing. She kept telling people. She became a woman with a message, and she delivered it to everyone she could find who had ears to hear.

Decades of prayer and fasting — invisible, hidden, known only to God — had prepared her for a public moment she could never have anticipated. She didn't know, during all those years of serving night and day, that one ordinary morning in the temple would change everything. She didn't know that the moment would come and she would be the one standing there, ready, positioned, prepared by a lifetime of faithfulness.

But she was. Because she never left.

* * *

There's a practical dimension to Anna's story that I want to draw out, because it speaks to something you may be living right now.

Anna's decades of service were almost entirely invisible. Nobody was writing about her in the Jerusalem newspapers. Nobody was giving her awards. For year after year, she prayed and fasted and served, and from any earthly vantage point, nothing was happening. The temple routine continued. The Roman occupation continued. The silence of God — no prophet had spoken in Israel for four hundred years — continued. And Anna continued.

That is not glamorous work. That is the kind of faithfulness that doesn't make for a compelling social media post. It is getting up and doing the same faithful thing today that you did yesterday and the day before, with no visible evidence that it matters.

Some of you are living in that exact space right now. You pray, and you're not sure anyone hears. You serve, and you're not sure it changes anything. You show up for worship, you encourage

the people around you, you study your Bible, you do the quiet, unglamorous work of being faithful — and the world yawns. Nobody notices. Nobody applauds. And you wonder, sometimes, if it adds up to anything.

Anna's story says it does.

Every prayer she prayed positioned her for the moment she didn't know was coming. Every fast she endured kept her spiritually sharp when the world would have expected her to go dull. Every morning she showed up at the temple when she could have stayed home was another day of preparation for the day when preparation would matter most.

And when the moment arrived — when the Christ child was brought through those temple doors — she was ready. Not because she was lucky. Not because she happened to be in the right place. But because she had *always* been in the right place, doing the right thing, for the right reasons, for as long as anyone could remember.

She never left. And because she never left, she was there when it counted.

* * *

Here's what Anna's story means for you.

If Simeon teaches us that aging can be defined by anticipation — by leaning forward toward something God has promised — Anna teaches us something equally important: aging does not end your usefulness. It deepens it.

You may not feel useful. The world may not treat you as useful. Your body may not cooperate the way it once did. The roles you held may have been given to someone else. The phone may ring less often than it used to.

But if Anna at eighty-four could serve God with fastings and prayers — if she could be the one God chose to be standing in the temple at the exact moment His Son was brought through the door — then your age is not a disqualification. It is a credential.

Every year of faithful prayer is a year that has deepened your capacity. Every day of quiet service is a day that has positioned you for something you may not yet see coming. You are not obsolete. You are not finished. You are not taking up space.

You are Anna in the temple. And you have no idea what God might bring through the door tomorrow.

So don't leave.

CHAPTER 4

Give Me This Mountain

Part I: The Examples

Most people, by the time they reach eighty-five, have made peace with smaller ambitions. A quiet routine. A comfortable chair. A predictable day. The mountains — literal or figurative — are behind them. If they're honest, they'd admit they stopped climbing a long time ago.

Caleb hadn't gotten that memo.

At eighty-five years old, standing before Joshua to claim his inheritance in the Promised Land, Caleb didn't ask for a valley. He didn't ask for a quiet piece of flatland near the river where he could settle in and rest. He asked for the mountain — the one with the fortified cities on it, the one with the giants. The one nobody else wanted because it was too hard, too dangerous, too much.

He asked for the fight.

And in doing so, he left behind one of the most extraordinary examples of aging in the entire Old Testament — not because he was supernaturally preserved, but because his faith hadn't aged a day.

* * *

To understand what Caleb is doing in Joshua 14, you have to go back forty-five years.

The story begins in Numbers 13, when the children of Israel were camped at the edge of the Promised Land. God told Moses to send men to spy out the land — one from each tribe. Moses chose twelve men, and two of them were Joshua and Caleb.

The twelve spies went into Canaan and spent forty days exploring it. What they found was exactly what God had promised: a land flowing with milk and honey, rich and abundant. They brought back fruit so large it took two men to carry a single cluster of grapes on a pole between them. The land was everything God said it would be.

But there was a problem. The land was also occupied. The cities were fortified. The people were large and strong. And ten of the twelve spies came back terrified.

> *"We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us... The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size... and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."*
>
> **— Numbers 13:31–33 (NASB)**

Grasshoppers. That's how ten of the twelve spies saw themselves — small, insignificant, about to be crushed. They looked at the giants and forgot the God who had brought them out of Egypt. They looked at the fortified walls and forgot the God who had parted the Red Sea. Fear rewrote their memory.

But two men saw it differently.

> *"Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, 'We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it.'"*
>
> — Numbers 13:30 (NASB)

Caleb and Joshua stood against the entire congregation. The same land, the same giants, the same fortified cities — and they reached the opposite conclusion. Not because they couldn't see the obstacles. They could see them just fine. But they could also see God. And when you put the giants on one side of the scale and God on the other, the math isn't close.

The people didn't listen. They chose fear over faith, and God responded: that entire generation — everyone twenty years old and older — would wander in the wilderness for forty years and die without ever entering the Promised Land. Everyone except two men. Joshua and Caleb.

Why Caleb? God Himself says it:

> *"But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it."*
>
> — Numbers 14:24 (NASB)

A different spirit. That phrase is worth sitting with. Not a different body. Not a different skill set. A different *spirit*. Something inside Caleb was oriented differently than the people around him. Where they saw obstacles, he saw opportunity. Where they saw reasons to retreat, he saw reasons to advance. And God noticed.

"Has followed Me fully." In the Hebrew, the phrase carries the sense of filling up, completing, going all the way. Caleb didn't follow God halfway. He didn't follow God when it was convenient or when the odds looked good. He followed fully — completely, without reservation, even when he was the only one in the room willing to do it.

And for that, God made him a promise.

* * *

Now fast-forward forty-five years.

The wilderness wandering is over. Joshua has led Israel into Canaan. The major campaigns are behind them, and the land is being divided among the tribes. Caleb — forty years old when he spied out the land, now eighty-five — comes to Joshua to claim what God promised him.

Listen to what he says:

> *"I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land, and I brought word back to him as it was in my heart. Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt with fear; but I followed the Lord my God fully. So Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land on which your foot has trodden will be an inheritance to you and to your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God fully.' Now behold, the Lord has let me live, just as He spoke, these forty-five years, from the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, when Israel walked in the wilderness; and now behold, I am eighty-five years old today."*

— Joshua 14:7–10 (NASB)

Caleb is rehearsing his history — not out of nostalgia, but as evidence. He's building a case. God made a promise. Forty-five years have passed. God has kept him alive through all of it. And now it's time to collect.

But here's where it gets remarkable. Watch what he says next:

> *"I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in."*
> — Joshua 14:11 (NASB)

At eighty-five years old, Caleb claims his strength is undiminished. Now, we can ask an honest question about what this means. Is he saying his physical strength was miraculously preserved at the same level as when he was forty? That's possible — God had sustained Israel's shoes and clothing for forty years in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 29:5), so supernatural preservation wasn't without precedent. Or is Caleb speaking about the *kind* of strength — the resolve, the courage, the willingness to fight — rather than making a precise statement about his physical condition? The text doesn't tell us which. What the text *does* tell us is that Caleb, at eighty-five, assessed himself as ready. Ready for war. Ready for the hardest assignment on the map.

And then comes the line that gives this chapter its name:

> *"Now then, give me this hill country about which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there,*

with great and fortified cities; perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I will drive them out as the Lord has spoken."

— Joshua 14:12 (NASB)

Give me this mountain.

Not "give me a nice piece of land where I can enjoy my remaining years." Not "give me something manageable for a man my age." Give me the hill country. The one with the Anakim — the descendants of the giants, the very people whose size had terrified the other spies forty-five years earlier. The land everyone else was afraid to touch.

Caleb wanted the hard one.

* * *

Why? What drives an eighty-five-year-old man to volunteer for the most difficult assignment instead of requesting the easiest one?

The text gives us the answer, and it's the same answer it gave us forty-five years earlier: a different spirit.

Caleb's faith hadn't retired. His confidence in God hadn't diminished with age. The same fire that made him stand against ten frightened spies and an entire rebellious congregation at age forty was still burning at eighty-five. He wasn't delusional. He knew there were giants. He knew the cities were fortified. He said so — "you heard on that day that Anakim were there, with great and fortified cities." He wasn't ignoring the obstacles. He was measuring them against a God who had never failed him in forty-five years of keeping a promise.

Notice his language: "perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I will drive them out as the Lord has spoken." That "perhaps" isn't doubt. In context, it's deference — an acknowledgment that the outcome belongs to God. But the willingness to go is entirely present. Caleb isn't asking *whether* he should fight. He's asking for the chance.

And Joshua's response confirms everything:

> *"So Joshua blessed him and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance... because he followed the Lord God of Israel fully."*
>
> **— Joshua 14:13–14 (NASB)**

There it is again. *Fully.* The word that defined Caleb at forty still defined him at eighty-five. He followed God fully. Not partially. Not when it was convenient. Not until he reached a certain age and decided it was time to slow down. Fully. All the way. To the end.

* * *

Now here's where Caleb's story reaches into your living room.

You may not be facing literal giants. But you're facing something. Maybe it's the giant of declining health — the diagnosis that changed everything, the body that won't do what it used to do. Maybe it's the giant of loneliness — the empty chair at the table, the phone that doesn't ring, the friends who are gone. Maybe it's the giant of irrelevance — the feeling that the world has

moved on and you've been left behind, that your best contributions are in the past.

And the voice you hear — from the culture, sometimes from well-meaning friends, sometimes from inside your own head — sounds a lot like those ten spies: "You can't. You're too old. The obstacle is too big. Sit down. Be realistic. Be sensible. You're not forty anymore."

Caleb heard the same voice forty-five years earlier. He heard it from ten men who had seen the same land he'd seen and come to the opposite conclusion. And he rejected it — not because he couldn't count, but because he could count on God.

At eighty-five, he was still rejecting it.

That's not recklessness. That's faith. Real, tested, weathered, forty-five-years-in-the-making faith. The kind of faith that has seen God keep His promises over decades and concluded, reasonably, that He'll keep this one too.

* * *

There's something else in Caleb's story that I don't want us to miss, because it connects directly to the rearview mirror from Chapter 1.

Caleb referenced his past — his faithfulness at Kadesh-barnea, the promise Moses made, the forty-five years God had sustained him. He wasn't ignoring his history. But he wasn't living in it, either. He brought up the past for one reason: to build the case for his future. Every detail he mentioned pointed forward.

"God promised me this land. God kept me alive to receive it. Now give it to me so I can go take it."

His past was a launching pad, not a destination.

That's the difference between nostalgia and testimony. Nostalgia looks back and sighs. Testimony looks back and then turns around and says, "And He's not done yet." Caleb had forty-five years of evidence that God was faithful, and he used every bit of it — not to reminisce, but to fuel the next charge up the next mountain.

If you've walked with God for decades, you have that same evidence. Every prayer He answered. Every trial He brought you through. Every promise He kept. That's not just a collection of nice memories. That's your arsenal. That's the evidence that the God who sustained you at forty and fifty and sixty is the same God standing with you at seventy and eighty and beyond.

The question is what you'll do with it. Will you frame it and hang it on the wall? Or will you bring it to Joshua and say, "Give me this mountain"?

* * *

Caleb got Hebron. The text tells us he drove out the three sons of Anak (Joshua 15:14). The eighty-five-year-old man took the mountain with the giants on it, just as he said he would.

But the point of his story isn't the military victory. The point is the posture. At an age when everyone around him would have understood if he'd chosen something easy, he chose something

hard — because his faith hadn't become passive with age. It had become sharper.

Simeon leaned forward in anticipation. Anna served without ceasing. Caleb charged the hill.

Three different people. Three different expressions. One common thread: not one of them had turned around to face the past. Every one of them was still moving forward, still looking ahead, still believing that God had something in front of them that was worth everything they had left to give.

You're not eighty-five. Or maybe you are. Either way, there's a mountain in front of you. It might be smaller than Caleb's or it might be bigger. It might be a ministry you've been afraid to start. A conversation you've been putting off. A commitment you've been hesitant to make. A service you've been told you're too old to render.

Give me this mountain.

Say it out loud if you have to.

The God who kept Caleb alive for forty-five years to fulfill a promise hasn't lost track of you either. And He didn't bring you this far to let you sit in the valley.

CHAPTER 5

Outwardly Wasting, Inwardly New

Part II: The Theology

You know the moment I mean.

It might have been getting out of a chair and hearing your knees announce themselves before you were fully standing. It might have been catching your reflection in a store window and wondering, for half a second, who that older person was. It might have been reaching for a word you've used a thousand times and finding it just... gone. Somewhere between your brain and your tongue, it slipped away, and you stood there with your mouth half open, waiting for it to come back.

The body is talking to you. And what it's saying is: *I'm not what I used to be.*

Nobody has to tell you this. You live it. You live it when you wake up stiff and it takes twenty minutes to feel like yourself. You live it when the doctor starts a sentence with "At your age..." and you realize he's not being rude — he's being accurate. You live it when you look at a photograph from thirty years ago and the distance between that face and the one in the mirror feels like a canyon.

The world has a word for all this. It calls it *decline*. And it isn't wrong — not exactly. Things are declining. Strength, stamina, vision, hearing, memory, mobility — the list gets longer every year. The world sees the trajectory and draws the obvious conclusion: you are on your way down.

But the world is only seeing half of it.

* * *

The first four chapters of this book showed you people. Simeon, leaning forward his whole life, waiting for a promise. Anna, widowed for decades and never once stepping back from service. Caleb at eighty-five, asking for the mountain with the giants on it. Those are real people who lived real lives, and their examples speak.

But now we turn a corner. From here forward, we are in the hands of the apostle Paul — and Paul doesn't just show us an example to follow. He tells us what is actually happening inside of us right now.

Paul knew something about suffering in the body. By the time he wrote his second letter to the Corinthians, the man had been beaten with rods three times, received thirty-nine lashes on five separate occasions, been stoned and left for dead, been shipwrecked three times, and spent a night and a day adrift in the open sea. He catalogued it all in the same letter — not as a complaint, but as a credential. This was a man whose body had been through more than most of us will ever face.

And in the verses leading up to our passage, Paul has been describing what that life felt like from the inside: "afflicted in every way... perplexed... persecuted... struck down" (2 Cor. 4:8–9). He compared himself to a clay jar — something fragile, ordinary, easily broken — carrying an extraordinary treasure inside it. That contrast between the fragile container and the priceless content is the setup for everything that follows.

It was this man — not a comfortable theologian in a quiet study, but a scarred, weary, aging apostle — who wrote these words:

> *"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*
>
> **— 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 (NASB)**

Start with that first word: "Therefore." Paul is connecting what he's about to say to everything he's just described — the affliction, the clay jars, the life of Jesus being manifested in mortal flesh. The "therefore" means: *given all of that* — given the beatings, the aging, the wearing down — here is the conclusion.

"We do not lose heart."

The word Paul uses — *egkakeo* in the Greek — means to grow weary, to lose courage, to give in. It's the temptation to stop. To sit down on the side of the road and say, "I'm done." And Paul

says: we don't. Not because the circumstances have improved. Not because the body has rallied. But because of what he sees happening beneath the surface.

"Though our outer man is decaying."

He doesn't soften it. He doesn't say "slowing down" or "entering a new season." The word is *diaphtheiro* — it means to be progressively destroyed, to waste away. It's the same word family used for corruption and ruin. Paul looks at the physical deterioration of the human body and calls it exactly what it is. No euphemism. No spin.

If you are living in a body that aches, that forgets, that can no longer do what it once did — Paul is not going to pretend otherwise. He sees what you see. He felt what you feel.

But he doesn't stop there.

"Yet our inner man is being renewed day by day."

That word "yet" carries the whole passage. Two things are happening at the same time. Not one after the other — not "first you suffer, then you're renewed someday." Simultaneously. The outer man is wasting away, and the inner man is being made new. Right now. In the same person. At the same moment.

The word for "renewed" — *anakainoo* — means to make new again, to restore to a fresh condition. And it's in the present tense. This isn't a one-time event. It isn't something that happened at conversion and stopped. It is happening to you *today*. Day by day. The Greek literally reads *hemera kai hemera* — "day and day." Every single day the body loses a little more ground, the spirit is being refreshed, restored, rebuilt.

Paul used the same language elsewhere. To the Colossians, he wrote of the new self "who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him" (Col. 3:10). To the Ephesians, he prayed that God would grant them "to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). This is not a passing metaphor. It is Paul's settled understanding of what God is doing inside the believer — a renovation that does not stop, even when the building it's happening in is falling apart.

* * *

The world can only see one side of this. It sees the outer man — the slower steps, the reading glasses, the hearing aids, the medications lined up on the counter. It draws its graph line going down and says, "This is your story." And if the outer man is all there is, then the world is right.

Paul says there is more. And he says it not as a theory, but as a man who lived it.

There is a reason this matters specifically for those of us in the later years. When you're young, you can outrun the decay. The body heals fast. The losses are small. You pull a muscle and it's gone in a week. You lose a night of sleep and bounce back the next day. The outer man's decline is so gradual it's nearly invisible.

But there comes a point — and if you're reading this book, you may already be past it — where the decay announces itself every morning. It shows up in the mirror, in the pharmacy, in the

things you used to do without thinking that now require help. And that's when the temptation hits hardest: *to lose heart.*

Paul wrote this for you.

Not for the young athlete who can't imagine decline. Not for the middle-aged professional too busy to notice it. For you. The one who feels the outer man decaying and wonders what's left.

What's left is the part of you that matters most. And it isn't winding down. It's waking up.

* * *

But let's be careful here, because Paul is careful. Notice what he does *not* say. He does not say the inner renewal cancels out the outer decay. He doesn't promise that if you pray hard enough, the body will stop declining. He doesn't offer a spiritual formula for physical healing. The decay is real, and it continues. Paul lived in that reality every day of his life.

What he says is that something else is also real. Something the world cannot measure, cannot photograph, cannot chart on a graph. And that something is not merely holding steady — it is being *renewed*. Made new. Not patched. Not maintained. *Made new.* Day by day.

This is the paradox at the heart of aging in Christ. You are not simply getting older. You are not simply wearing out. Two things are true about you, and they are both happening right now: you are wasting away, and you are being made new.

And if you're honest, you've seen the evidence. Maybe not in the mirror — but in the life behind it. The peace that arrived uninvited when the diagnosis came. The clarity that deepened when the noise of ambition finally quieted. The prayer life that grew richer when the calendar grew emptier. The faith that used to be something you talked about on Sundays and became the thing you actually lean on when you get out of bed on Monday morning.

That's not decline. That's renewal. And it's happening day by day, whether the world can see it or not.

But there's a harder version of this question, and it would be dishonest to walk past it.

What about when the decay reaches the mind?

Not just the knees or the eyes or the stamina — the *mind*. The memory. The ability to recognize faces, to finish sentences, to recall the Scripture you memorized sixty years ago. If you are living with Parkinson's disease, or if someone you love is disappearing behind the fog of Alzheimer's, you know the fear this question carries. It's not just "I'm getting older." It's "Am I still *me*? Does God still know me when I can't remember Him?"

This is the paradox of 2 Corinthians 4:16 pushed to its most agonizing point. The outer man is decaying — and now the decay has reached the place where you experienced faith, where you talked to God, where you held the truths that held you. If the inner man is being renewed day by day, what happens when the mind can no longer perceive the renewal?

The answer is not in 2 Corinthians 4. It's in Romans 8.

Paul writes: "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26–27). The Spirit intercedes when we have no words. When the language is gone, when the prayers won't form, when the mind that once ran to God in every crisis can no longer find the path — the Spirit is praying for you. Not because you asked Him to. Because that is what He does.

And in Paul's second letter to Timothy, he writes one of the most quietly powerful sentences in the New Testament: "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). Your faithfulness may falter. Your memory of faith may dissolve. But His faithfulness does not depend on yours. He remains faithful because faithfulness is who He is. He cannot deny Himself.

The shepherd holds the sheep. The sheep does not hold the shepherd.

If you are watching someone you love drift behind a wall of confusion — if the woman who taught you to pray no longer knows your name — hear this: her faith is not stored in her memory. It is stored in her Savior. And He does not forget. The inner man is being renewed day by day, even when the mind can no longer report it. The Spirit is interceding, even when the tongue has gone silent. And the God who began a good work in her will be faithful to complete it — not because she can hold on, but because He can.

That's not disappearing. That's still one day closer to home.

* * *

Paul closes this passage by pointing forward — to a momentary, light affliction producing an eternal weight of glory, to the things not seen, to what is eternal rather than temporal. Those words deserve their own space, and they'll get it later in this book. What Paul does with the *scale* of suffering and glory is a different work from what he does here, and we'll take the time it deserves.

But for now, stay here. Stay with the paradox. Because the temptation for someone in the final chapters of life is to look in the mirror and believe that the story the mirror tells is the whole story.

It isn't.

The outer man is decaying. Paul said it, and you know it.

But the inner man is being renewed. Day by day. Today.

You are not on your way down. You are being remade from the inside out — and the part being remade is the part that lasts forever.

That's not decline. That's one day closer to home.

CHAPTER 6

The Tent and the Building

Part II: The Theology

If you've ever been camping, you know what a tent is like.

It's thin. The walls ripple with every breeze. Rain finds a way through if you give it enough time. A good gust of wind makes you wonder if the whole thing is going to come down. You can sleep in it — you can even get comfortable in it — but nobody confuses a tent with a house. A tent is temporary by design. You don't settle into a tent. You pass through it.

Paul had spent years living in tents. As a tentmaker by trade — Acts 18:3 tells us he worked with Priscilla and Aquila in that craft — he knew the material intimately. He knew how it stretched and sagged. He knew how it wore thin in places. He knew how it eventually gave out. And when he reached for a way to describe the human body, that's the word he chose.

A tent.

In the previous chapter, we stood with Paul in 2 Corinthians 4 and watched him name the paradox: the outer man is decaying while the inner man is being renewed day by day. He didn't flinch from the reality of physical decline, and he didn't pretend renewal was a substitute for what the body was losing. Two things were happening at once, and he held them both.

Now he takes the next step. If the outer man is decaying — if this body is wearing out — then what happens when it finally gives out? What's waiting on the other side of the last breath?

Paul answers. And what he says has steadied the hearts of dying believers for two thousand years.

* * *

> *"For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, in that while we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge."*
>
> — 2 Corinthians 5:1–5 (NASB)

> *"Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord — for we walk by faith, not by sight — we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."*
>
> — 2 Corinthians 5:6–8 (NASB)

Start with the opening words: "For we know." Not "we hope" or "we think" or "we wish." Paul says *we know*. There is a certainty here that doesn't come from speculation. It comes from revelation

— from what God has made known through the Spirit, the same Spirit Paul will reference at the end of this paragraph as the "pledge" of what's coming.

And what does he know?

"If the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God."

Two images. One fragile, one permanent. The tent — earthly, temporary, subject to wear and weather and eventual collapse. The building — from God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. The tent is what you're living in now. The building is what's waiting.

Notice the verb tense: "we *have* a building from God." Not "we will have." Not "we might receive." Paul writes it as a present possession — something already secured, already real, already belonging to the believer even while the tent is still standing. The building doesn't come into existence when the tent collapses. It's already there.

The word Paul uses for "torn down" — *kataluo* in the Greek — means to be dissolved, dismantled, taken apart. It's a word that fits the tent metaphor perfectly. Tents aren't demolished like stone buildings. They're taken down. The poles come out, the fabric folds, and what was a shelter a moment ago is nothing but material on the ground. That's what happens to the body. It doesn't explode. It comes apart. Slowly, sometimes. Quickly, other times. But it comes apart.

And when it does, what stands in its place is not another tent. It's a building. Permanent. Unshakeable. Eternal. Made by God's hands, not human ones.

* * *

Paul then describes the believer's experience inside the tent — and he doesn't dress it up.

"In this house we groan."

That word — *stenazo* — means to sigh deeply, to groan under a burden. It's the sound a person makes not out of despair but out of longing. Paul isn't describing hopelessness. He's describing the ache of someone who knows something better exists and feels the weight of not being there yet.

If you've ever sat in a hospital room and felt a weariness that went deeper than tiredness — that was the groan. If you've stood at a graveside and felt the wrongness of death pressing on your chest — that was the groan. If you've lain awake at night in a body that hurts and whispered, not in complaint but in honest longing, "How much longer?" — that was the groan Paul is talking about.

"Longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven."

Paul shifts the metaphor slightly. Now it's not just tent and building — it's clothing. The believer longs to be *clothed* with the heavenly dwelling, to put on the resurrection body the way you put on a garment. And the reason is specific: "so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life."

Swallowed up. The Greek word is *katapino* — to drink down, to consume entirely. Mortality doesn't simply end. It gets consumed by something so much larger and more powerful that it disappears into it, the way a single drop disappears into the ocean. Life — real, eternal, unending life — swallows mortality whole.

And then Paul makes a statement that should stop every anxious heart in its tracks:

"Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge."

God prepared you for this. The decay of the tent, the groaning, the longing — none of it is accidental. God made you *for* the building. The tent was never the destination. And to prove it, He gave you the Spirit as a *pledge* — the Greek word is *arrabon*, a down payment, earnest money, a guarantee that the full payment is coming. The Holy Spirit living in the believer right now is God's deposit on the resurrection. It's His promise, in person, that the building is real and the transaction is already underway.

* * *

Then Paul draws his conclusion — and it's one of the most quoted sentences in all of Scripture for those facing death.

"Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord — for we walk by faith, not by sight — we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."

Read it slowly. Paul sets up two states. At home in the body — absent from the Lord. Absent from the body — at home with the Lord. And given the choice, he says he *prefers* the second. He would rather leave the tent and be with Christ.

The word for "at home" — *endēmeo* — means to be among one's own people, to be in one's own country. It's a word for belonging. Right now, Paul says, we are "at home" in the body — this is where we live, where we dwell, where our experience happens. But we are *absent from* the Lord in the sense that we don't yet see Him face to face. We walk by faith, not by sight.

But when the tent comes down — when the body gives out — the believer is immediately *at home with the Lord*. The same word. The same kind of belonging. Only now it's not belonging to flesh and bone. It's belonging to Him.

This is the verse that has been read at more bedsides and spoken at more funerals than perhaps any other in the New Testament. And the reason is simple: it answers the question that every aging, every dying, every grieving person needs answered. *What happens when this body is done?*

You go home.

* * *

Now, let's be honest about what the text does and does not tell us here — because this is a passage where it's important to say what we know without saying more than we know.

Paul tells us that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. That's clear. The believer who dies is *with Christ*. Paul says the same thing in Philippians 1:23, where he describes departing this life as being "with Christ, for that is very much better." The destination is certain.

But Paul does not give us a detailed description of what that intermediate state — between death and the resurrection — looks like. He doesn't describe what the believer experiences, moment by moment, while waiting for the resurrection body he just described in verses 1–5. He uses the language of being "at home" with the Lord and of it being "very much better," but he doesn't fill in the details beyond that.

Some things we can say with confidence from this text and its context. The believer who dies is conscious and with Christ — Paul's language of "preferring" this state and calling it "better" doesn't fit an unconscious existence. The believer who dies is in a state of rest and comfort — being "at home" with the Lord is the opposite of the groaning and burden Paul described in the tent. And the believer who dies is still awaiting the resurrection — the "building from God" in verse 1, the resurrection body described more fully in 1 Corinthians 15, which we'll turn to in the next chapter.

But the specific nature of that intermediate existence — what it feels like, what it looks like, how time is experienced, what we are aware of — the text is largely silent. And where the text is silent, we should be too. There are enough confident promises in these eight verses to anchor every dying believer's hope. We don't need to add to them by speculating about what God chose not to reveal.

What we know is enough. To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. That is the promise. And it is unbreakable.

* * *

There's one more thing here that matters for those of us reading this book.

Paul says he is "always of good courage." Twice in this passage he uses the word — *tharrheo* — which means to be confident, to be bold, to take heart. It's the opposite of the *egkakeo* from the previous chapter — the temptation to lose heart. Paul isn't just not losing heart. He's actively courageous. And the source of that courage is specific: he knows where he's going.

That changes everything about how you live in the tent.

If the tent is all there is — if this body, this life, this declining set of capacities is the whole story — then courage makes no sense. You're watching the walls come down with nothing behind them.

But if there's a building — if the God who made you for this very purpose has already placed His deposit in you and promised that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life — then the tent coming down isn't the end of the story. It's the last page before a new chapter that never ends.

You're living in a tent. It's wearing thin. The poles are starting to lean. The fabric doesn't hold like it used to.

But there's a building waiting — one not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. And the God who prepared you for it has already given you His pledge.

Every day the tent gets a little thinner is one day closer to the building.

One day closer to home.

CHAPTER 7

Sown Perishable, Raised Imperishable

Part II: The Theology

When someone you love dies, you stand at the edge of a hole in the ground and watch a box go down.

Everything about that moment says *ending*. The dirt. The weight. The finality of it. The flowers on top that will wilt by Thursday. The people around you in dark clothes, holding tissues and each other. The silence afterward, when everyone has gone home and the chair is still empty and the house is too quiet.

The world looks at a burial and sees a period at the end of a sentence.

Paul looked at a burial and saw a planting.

That's not poetry. That's the argument he makes in one of the most extraordinary passages in the entire New Testament — 1 Corinthians 15:35–58 — where he takes the hardest question a grieving, aging, dying person can ask and answers it with the force of a man who has seen the risen Christ with his own eyes.

The question is simple: What kind of body do we get?

The answer is anything but.

* * *

To understand where Paul is going, you need to know where he's been. First Corinthians 15 is the great resurrection chapter — all fifty-eight verses of it — and Paul has been building his case from the beginning. He opened with the historical fact of Christ's resurrection: "He was buried, and He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (15:4). He listed the eyewitnesses — Peter, the twelve, five hundred brothers at once, James, all the apostles, and finally Paul himself. He argued that if Christ has not been raised, then faith is worthless and believers are still in their sins. And he established that Christ's resurrection is not an isolated event but "the first fruits of those who are asleep" (15:20) — the opening act of a harvest that includes everyone who belongs to Him.

By the time he reaches verse 35, the fact of the resurrection has been established. Now someone raises the practical objection:

> *"But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?'"*
>
> **— 1 Corinthians 15:35 (NASB)**

It's the question of the skeptic, but it's also the honest question of the believer whose body is failing. How does this work? The body that goes into the ground is broken, worn out, decayed. What comes out of it? Is it the same body, patched up? Something entirely different? Something less?

Paul's first word in response is blunt.

> *"You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be,*

> *but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own."*
>
> **— 1 Corinthians 15:36–38 (NASB)**

A seed. That's his answer. You plant a bare grain of wheat — small, dry, unremarkable. It goes into the ground and, to all appearances, it's gone. But what comes up is not the seed. What comes up is a living plant — with roots and a stalk and leaves and grain of its own. It's connected to what was planted, but it's not the same thing. It's immeasurably more.

The word Paul uses for "bare grain" — *gymnos* — means naked, stripped down. The seed that goes into the soil is the thing at its most reduced. No husk, no stalk, no life visible. Just the raw kernel. And from that raw kernel, God gives it a body "just as He wished."

That phrase matters. God gives it a body. The resurrection body is not a natural development. It's not something the seed produces on its own. It's what God gives. He is the one who determines what comes out of the ground, and what He gives is precisely what He wishes to give.

Every farmer knows this, even if he's never thought about resurrection. You put a dry, dead-looking seed in the dirt, and what comes out is alive, green, fruitful, and far more glorious than what went in. The seed had to die for the plant to live. And nobody stands over a wheat field and mourns the seeds.

* * *

Paul then broadens the argument. Not all bodies are the same, he says — and he wants you to see how wide God's creative range is.

> *"All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory."*
>
> **— 1 Corinthians 15:39–41 (NASB)**

Look at what he's doing. He's dismantling the assumption behind the skeptic's question — the assumption that a body must look like what we currently know. Paul says: look around you. God has already made an astonishing variety of bodies. The flesh of a man is not the flesh of a fish. The glory of the sun is not the glory of a star. Even star differs from star. If God can do all of that with the physical creation you can see, why would you assume He's limited in what He can do with the resurrection?

The word "glory" — *doxa* — appears four times in these three verses. Each body God makes carries its own kind of glory, its own radiance, its own weight of splendor. And they're all different. The point isn't that one is better than another. The point is that God is not constrained. He has an infinite range. And the body He's preparing for you is not a lesser version of what you have now. It's a different order of glory entirely.

* * *

Then comes the passage that, if you've spent any time at all thinking about what happens after death, you need to read slowly enough to feel every word.

> *"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."*
>
> — 1 Corinthians 15:42–44 (NASB)

Four contrasts. Four times Paul sets what goes into the ground against what comes out of it. And every single contrast moves in one direction: up.

Sown perishable — raised imperishable. The body you're living in is subject to decay. It breaks down. It wears out. Cells stop replicating correctly. Systems fail. The resurrection body is *imperishable* — *aphthartos* in the Greek — incapable of decay, beyond the reach of corruption. The thing that defines your body right now — its gradual deterioration — will have no hold on the body that's coming.

Sown in dishonor — raised in glory. The word for "dishonor" — *atimia* — means without value, without dignity. It's what happens when the body that once ran and worked and embraced the people it loved is reduced to something that needs to be carried, cleaned, managed. There is a dishonor in that — not a moral dishonor, but the indignity of a body that can no longer do what it was made to do. The resurrection body is raised in *glory* —

in doxa, in radiance, in the full weight of what God intended a human body to be.

Sown in weakness — raised in power. You know this one personally. The weakness that makes you sit down halfway through a task you used to finish without thinking. The weakness that makes you ask for help with things you once did alone. The weakness that shows up in bloodwork and bone scans and the grip strength test at the doctor's office. That weakness is real. But the resurrection body is raised in *power* — *dunamis* — the same word used for the power of God Himself. Not human power restored. Divine power given.

Sown a natural body — raised a spiritual body. The word "natural" — *psychikos* — refers to the life-principle that animates every human being, the soul-driven body suited to this earthly existence. The word "spiritual" — *pneumatikos* — doesn't mean immaterial or ghostlike. It means animated by the Spirit, empowered by God's Spirit, suited to the eternal existence that's coming. The resurrection body is not less physical than the one you have now. It's more. It is a body perfectly fitted for life in the presence of God.

* * *

If you are reading this book in a body that is failing — if the perishable nature of your flesh is something you confront every morning — then hear what Paul is saying.

What you are heading toward is not less than what you had. It is not a diminished version of your best years. It is not a spiritual

existence where you float around without form or substance. It is a body — a real, given-by-God, raised-in-glory body — that does everything your current body cannot.

It will not decay. It will not weaken. It will not dishonor you. It will not fail.

And it will be yours. Not borrowed, not temporary, not a tent that wears thin in the weather. Yours — given by the same God who designed the variety of flesh and the differing glories of the stars. The God who gives each seed a body just as He wishes will give you a body beyond anything you can imagine.

* * *

Paul closes this chapter with a crescendo that has echoed through every century since he wrote it:

> *"Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'"*
>
> **— 1 Corinthians 15:51–55 (NASB)**

A mystery — something previously hidden, now revealed. Not everyone will die before Christ returns, but everyone will be

changed. And the change will not be gradual. It will happen in a moment — *en atomo*, in the Greek, from which we get the word "atom." An indivisible instant. The smallest possible unit of time. In the twinkling of an eye. That fast.

And when it happens, Paul reaches back to the prophets. "Death is swallowed up in victory" — drawn from Isaiah 25:8. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" — echoing Hosea 13:14. The taunting language is deliberate. Death, which has terrified humanity since Eden, is being mocked. It is being addressed directly and told: you lose. You had your moment, and it's over. The perishable has put on the imperishable. The mortal has put on immortality. And you, death, have nothing left.

That word "swallowed up" — *katapino* — is the same word Paul used in 2 Corinthians 5:4, the passage we just walked through in the last chapter. Mortality swallowed up by life. Death swallowed up in victory. The same consuming, overwhelming, totaling force. Death doesn't negotiate a truce. It gets swallowed whole.

And then the final line — the one Paul leaves ringing in the ears of every believer who has read this chapter with aching joints and fading strength and a body that reminds them every day that the tent is coming down:

> *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."*
>
> **— 1 Corinthians 15:58 (NASB)**

Be steadfast. Be immovable. Keep working. Because everything you do in the Lord — every prayer, every act of service, every morning you get up and choose faith over fear — is not in vain.

The body that aches while you do it is a seed.
And what's coming out of the ground is glory.

CHAPTER 8

Abraham's City

Part II: The Theology

There's a kind of loneliness that only comes with age.

It's not the loneliness of being alone in a room, though that happens too. It's the loneliness of being alone in a world that has moved on without you. The neighborhood doesn't look like it used to. The church pew has empty spaces where familiar faces sat for decades. The phone numbers in your address book belong to people who don't answer anymore. The language has changed, the music has changed, the rules have changed, and somewhere along the way you stopped recognizing the place you've lived your whole life.

You feel like a stranger. Not because you moved — but because everything around you did.

If that resonates with you, then Abraham has something to say. Because Abraham spent the last hundred years of his life feeling exactly that — and the writer of Hebrews tells us it was by design.

* * *

Abraham's story begins with a command and a departure.

God spoke to a man living in Ur of the Chaldeans — a settled, sophisticated city in Mesopotamia — and told him to leave. Leave your country. Leave your relatives. Leave your father's house. Go to a land that I will show you. That's it. No map. No address. No description of what was waiting. Just: go.

And Abraham went.

> *"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going."*
>
> — Hebrews 11:8 (NASB)

Read that last phrase again: "not knowing where he was going." Abraham packed up his household — his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, his servants, his livestock, everything — and walked away from the only home he had ever known, heading toward a destination God had not yet named. He went on nothing but the word of the One who called him.

That takes a kind of faith most of us can barely imagine. We want the five-year plan. We want the destination confirmed before we book the ticket. Abraham had a voice and a direction. That was enough.

But here's what makes Abraham's story relevant to this book. He arrived in Canaan — the land God had promised — and he never owned it. He never settled. He never built a permanent house or established a family estate or planted roots the way a man does when he's home.

> *"By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise."*
>
> — Hebrews 11:9 (NASB)

An alien. In the land of *promise*. The very place God had called him to, and Abraham lived there as a foreigner. Dwelling in tents — the same temporary, fragile shelters Paul would later use as a metaphor for the human body. Abraham had the promise, but he didn't have the permanence. He was in the right place but never at home.

The writer of Hebrews tells us why:

> *"For he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."*
>
> — Hebrews 11:10 (NASB)

Abraham wasn't confused. He wasn't lost. He wasn't wandering aimlessly hoping something would turn up. He was looking for something — a city. A real destination. But not a city built by human hands. A city with foundations — *themelios* in the Greek, meaning something laid down as a base, something permanent, something that cannot be moved. And the architect and builder of that city was God Himself.

The word translated "architect" — *technites* — means a craftsman, a skilled designer. The word for "builder" — *demiourgos* — means a maker, a creator who brings something into existence. God designed the city, and God built the city.

Abraham was walking toward it his entire life, and every tent he pitched along the way was just another night on the road.

* * *

A few verses later, the writer of Hebrews expands the picture — and this is where the passage reaches across the centuries and takes hold of anyone who has ever felt displaced by age.

> *"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them."*
>
> **— Hebrews 11:13–16 (NASB)**

Take this apart slowly, because nearly every phrase matters.

"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises." Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah — they all died without seeing the fullness of what God had promised. They believed it. They lived toward it. But they died before it arrived. The promise was real, but the fulfillment was beyond their lifetime.

"Having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance." This is remarkable language. They *saw* the promises — not with physical eyes, but with the eyes of faith. And they didn't just acknowledge them. They *welcomed* them. The Greek word —

aspazomai — means to greet, to embrace, the way you would welcome a guest you've been waiting for. They reached toward the promises the way a traveler reaches toward the lights of home from miles away. The promises were still distant, but they were already welcome.

"Having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." They said it out loud. This is who we are. We don't belong here. We are passing through. The word for "strangers" — *xenos* — is the root of our word "xenophobia," fear of the foreign. They were the foreign ones. And "exiles" — *parepidemos* — means a temporary resident, someone living alongside a country but not belonging to it. They pitched their tents in the land of promise and said: this isn't home.

"For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own." Their confession wasn't despair. It was direction. When you say "I'm a stranger here," you're also saying "I belong somewhere else." The writer says their words made it *clear* — unmistakable, obvious — that they were heading toward something.

"And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return." This is the Hebrews writer closing the back door. Abraham could have gone back to Ur. Nobody was stopping him. The road went both ways. But he never turned around. He never looked back and said, "Maybe the old country was good enough." The place he came from held no pull for him, because the place he was going was better.

"But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one."

Better. Not different for the sake of different. *Better.* The heavenly country isn't just an alternative to this one. It surpasses it in every way. And that's what they desired — that's what drew them forward through decades of tent-dwelling and promise-waiting and never quite being home.

And then the response from God that should make every aging stranger's heart swell:

"Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them."

God is not ashamed. Of these tent-dwelling, wandering, never-quite-settled people who spent their lives looking for something they hadn't yet reached — God was proud to be called their God. And the reason is the last phrase: He has prepared a city for them. It's ready. It's real. It's built. The architect designed it, the builder made it, and it is waiting.

* * *

Now here's where Abraham's story walks through your front door.

You feel like a stranger. The world you grew up in — the values, the pace, the assumptions, the way people treated each other — feels like a foreign country now. The friends who understood you without explanation are fewer every year. The church that felt like family has changed in ways you didn't ask for.

You walk through your own town and it doesn't feel like yours anymore.

And the voice in your head — the one that whispers in the quiet hours — says: *You don't belong here anymore.*

The voice is right. But not for the reason it thinks.

You don't belong here because you never did. Not fully. Not permanently. If you are in Christ, you have been a stranger and an exile on this earth your entire life — you just didn't feel it as sharply when you were young and busy and surrounded by people who were walking the same direction. Now the crowd has thinned. The road feels lonelier. The foreignness is harder to ignore.

But the foreignness is not a malfunction. It's a signal. It's telling you what Abraham knew, what Isaac knew, what Jacob and Sarah knew: you are seeking a country of your own. And it isn't behind you.

* * *

This connects to something we said in the very first chapter of this book. The rearview mirror is a powerful pull. The old neighborhood, the old friends, the old church, the way things used to be — nostalgia invites you to live there, to camp out in the past and call it home.

But the Hebrews writer says Abraham had the opportunity to return and didn't take it. He could have gone back. He could have looked at his tent and looked at the road behind him and said, "Ur had stone houses and paved streets and I knew where

everything was." But he kept walking. Because what was ahead was better than what was behind, even if he couldn't see it yet.

If you had been thinking of that country from which you went out, you would have had opportunity to return.

The old days are available to you. The photo albums, the memories, the "I remember when." You can pitch your tent in the past any time you want. Nobody will stop you. The road goes both ways.

But there's a city ahead. And God built it.

* * *

The loneliness of aging is real. The displacement is real. The feeling of being a stranger in a world you used to understand — that's real. This book has never pretended otherwise, and it won't start now.

But the loneliness is not the whole story. Abraham was lonely too. He spent a hundred years in tents, in a land he was promised but never possessed, burying his wife in a cave he had to purchase from the locals because he didn't even own a burial plot. If anyone had grounds for feeling displaced, it was Abraham.

And yet the writer of Hebrews says he was looking for the city with foundations. His eyes were forward. His displacement wasn't a failure — it was evidence that he was still on the road. Still moving. Still seeking.

You are on that same road. The tents are getting thinner, the company is getting smaller, and the landscape doesn't look familiar anymore. But the city is ahead. Its foundations are laid.

Its architect is God. And He is not ashamed to be called your God.

Every day you feel a little more like a stranger here is one day closer to the country where you finally belong.

One day closer to home.

CHAPTER 9

Free from the Fear of Death

Part II: The Theology

Nobody talks about it at dinner.

You can talk about your knee replacement. You can talk about the medications and the doctor visits and the test results. You can talk about the funeral you went to last month and what a nice service it was. But the thing underneath all of it — the cold, heavy thing that sits in the back of your mind at two in the morning when the house is dark and quiet — nobody talks about that.

The fear of death.

It doesn't always announce itself. Sometimes it comes as a sudden tightness in your chest when you hear an ambulance. Sometimes it's the low hum of dread when the doctor says, "We'd like to run a few more tests." Sometimes it's the thought you can't quite finish — the one that starts with "What if..." and trails off before you let yourself get to the end.

And sometimes it's not subtle at all. Sometimes you lie in bed and stare at the ceiling and the thought arrives fully formed: *I am going to die. And I don't know when. And I don't know what it will be like. And I am afraid.*

If you've never had that moment, you can skip this chapter. But if you have — if you know the weight of it, if you've felt the way it presses the air out of the room — then stay. Because two thousand years ago, a writer sat down and explained why God became a man. And the reason he gave is one that most people walk right past.

God became a man to set you free from that fear.

* * *

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were under pressure — social pressure, economic pressure, possibly the threat of persecution — and who were tempted to abandon their faith and return to Judaism. The entire letter is an argument for the supremacy of Christ: He is greater than the angels, greater than Moses, greater than the Levitical priesthood, greater than the old covenant itself.

In the second chapter, the writer is explaining why the Son of God — the one through whom all things were made — took on human flesh. Why would the Creator of the universe become a creature? Why would the eternal One become a man who could bleed and weep and die?

The answer comes in two verses that are as compressed and powerful as anything in the New Testament:

> *"Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death,*

that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."

— Hebrews 2:14–15 (NASB)

Two verses. One sentence. And inside it, the entire reason for the incarnation — at least as this writer presents it.

Start with the premise: "Since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same." The "children" are human beings — those God intended to bring to glory (verse 10). We are flesh and blood. We are mortal. We live in bodies that can be hurt, that get sick, that wear out, that die. And because we are flesh and blood, He became flesh and blood. The word "partook" — *metecho* in the Greek — means to share in, to participate in, to take a portion of. Jesus didn't pretend to be human. He didn't appear human while remaining untouched by human experience. He partook. He took on the same flesh, the same blood, the same mortality.

And the reason is staggering: "that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil."

Through *death*. Not through a display of force from heaven. Not by simply declaring the devil defeated from the throne. Through death — by dying. Jesus entered the thing we fear most and used it as the weapon that destroyed the one who wielded it. The devil had the power of death — not in the sense that he could kill at will, but in the sense that death was his domain, his leverage, his chief instrument of terror. And Jesus walked straight into that domain and broke it from the inside.

The word "render powerless" — *katargeo* — is a strong word. It means to make idle, to make ineffective, to abolish the operative power of something. The devil hasn't ceased to exist. But his power over death — his ability to use death as a weapon of fear and slavery — has been destroyed. The instrument has been disarmed. The threat has been emptied.

How? Because Jesus died and rose again. Death took Him, and He came out the other side. The resurrection is the proof that death is not final, that the grave does not win, that the last breath is not the last word. When Jesus walked out of that tomb, the devil's most powerful weapon became an empty threat — a door that looks locked from the outside but has been blown off its hinges from within.

* * *

But the writer of Hebrews isn't finished. The purpose of the incarnation wasn't just to defeat the devil. It was to free us.

"And might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."

Read that phrase carefully: "subject to slavery all their lives." The writer is describing a condition — a lifelong condition — and he's calling it what it is. Slavery.

The Greek word is *douleia* — bondage, servitude. The fear of death, the writer says, is not just an occasional worry. It is a form of enslavement that holds people for the entirety of their lives. From the moment you become old enough to understand that you are going to die, the fear begins its work. It shapes your

decisions. It colors your relationships. It sits behind your ambitions and your anxieties and your refusal to think too hard about the future. Even when you're not conscious of it, it's there — a low hum in the background of every human life.

And for the aging believer, the hum gets louder. When you're twenty, death is an abstraction. When you're forty, it's a possibility. When you're sixty or seventy or eighty, it's a presence. The obituary page has names you recognize. The funeral home sends Christmas cards. The actuarial tables have opinions about you. The fear that was once theoretical becomes visceral, and it comes for you at night when the distractions are gone and the house is quiet.

The writer of Hebrews says Jesus became flesh and blood specifically to break that slavery. Not to manage it. Not to help you cope with it. To *free* you from it.

The word "free" — *apallasso* — means to release, to set at liberty, to deliver completely. It's the word you would use for a prisoner being unchained and walked out of a cell. The fear of death had you in chains, and Jesus came to take them off.

* * *

Now, let's be honest — because this book has been honest from the beginning, and this isn't the chapter to stop.

Being freed from the *slavery* of the fear of death is not the same as never feeling any apprehension about dying. Paul himself, in 2 Corinthians 5, described the believer as "groaning" in the tent of the body — there is a weight to mortality that faith does not

erase. Jesus, in Gethsemane, was "deeply grieved, to the point of death" (Matt. 26:38) as He faced the cross. If the Son of God felt the weight of approaching death, we should not pretend that faith makes us immune to it.

What the Hebrews writer is describing is freedom from the *tyranny* — the lifelong bondage, the enslaving power, the thing that holds you captive and dictates your emotional life. There is a difference between a soldier who feels fear before a battle and a man who is so paralyzed by fear that he cannot leave his house. The first feels the weight but moves forward. The second is enslaved.

Jesus came to move you from the second to the first. He didn't come to make death pleasant. He came to make it powerless. The fear may still brush against you in the night. But it doesn't own you. Not anymore. Because the One who holds the keys to death walked through it and came out alive — and He is standing on the other side, waiting for you.

* * *

This is where the threads of the last several chapters come together.

In Chapter 5, Paul said the inner man is being renewed day by day even while the outer man decays. In Chapter 6, he said to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. In Chapter 7, he said the perishable body is a seed that will be raised imperishable, in glory, in power. In Chapter 8, we walked with Abraham toward a city whose architect and builder is God.

Every one of those truths is a wall between you and the fear of death. Not a wall you built — a wall God built. Death is not the end of your story; it's the doorway to the building that replaces the tent. The body that goes into the ground is a seed, and what comes up is glory. The city with foundations is waiting, and God is not ashamed to be called your God.

The devil's power over death has been rendered powerless. His chief weapon is disarmed. And the slavery he used it to impose — that lifelong, two-in-the-morning, ceiling-staring bondage — has been broken by the blood of the One who partook of your flesh, died your death, and rose again.

You don't have to be afraid.

That's not a platitude. That's not wishful thinking. That's the conclusion of Hebrews 2:14–15 — stated as fact by a writer making the most important argument of his letter. God became a man so that you could be free. Free from the devil's leverage. Free from the tyranny of the grave. Free from the chains that rattle loudest when the night is quiet and the body is weak.

The fear may whisper. But it no longer commands.

You are free.

And every night you lay your head down without being owned by that fear is one day closer to the morning when you'll see why it was never worth being afraid.

One day closer to home.

CHAPTER 10

A Momentary Light Affliction

Part III: The Crescendo

You've carried heavy things.

Not just physically — though you've done that too, and your back remembers it. But heavy things that don't weigh anything on a scale. The phone call at 3 AM. The diagnosis. The empty chair at Christmas. The year that felt like it would never end, and then the year after it that felt the same way. You know what heaviness is. You've felt it in your chest, in your sleep, in the effort it takes some mornings just to stand up and face another day.

And if someone walked up to you in the middle of the heaviest season of your life and called it "light," you might have a few words for them.

Paul called it light.

The man who was beaten with rods three times, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked three times, adrift on the open sea, who went without sleep and food and warmth — the man who carried the daily pressure of every congregation he had helped establish, who worried about their faithfulness the way a father worries about his children — that man sat down and described the sum total of every affliction he had ever endured, and the word he chose was *light*.

He wasn't being careless with the language. He was doing math. And when you see the math, you'll understand why he chose the word he did.

* * *

Earlier in this book, we spent time in the verses just before the ones we're coming to now. In Chapter 5, we looked at Paul's paradox in 2 Corinthians 4:16 — the outer man decaying while the inner man is renewed day by day. That was about the *paradox*: two things happening at once, in opposite directions, inside the same person.

But Paul wasn't finished. He went on to do something different with the very next breath — something that isn't a paradox at all. It's a comparison. A weighing. And what he puts on each side of the scale changes the way you see everything you're going through.

> *"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*
>
> — 2 Corinthians 4:17–18 (NASB)

Two verses. One sentence. And inside it, a complete recalibration of how to measure suffering.

* * *

Start with what Paul puts on the left side of the scale: "momentary, light affliction."

The Greek word translated "momentary" is *parautika* — it means just for the present, lasting only for now, passing. And the word translated "light" is *elaphron* — literally, having little weight. Easy to carry. Insignificant on the scale.

Now hold those two words in your mind and ask a question: What exactly is Paul calling momentary and light?

The answer is in his own autobiography, written just a few chapters later in this same letter. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul lays out a catalog of what he had endured for the sake of Christ. And it is not a short list.

Five times he received thirty-nine lashes from the Jews. Three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned — dragged outside the city and left in a heap. Three times he was shipwrecked. He spent a night and a day drifting in the open sea. He had been in constant danger — danger from rivers, from robbers, from his own countrymen, from Gentiles, in the city, in the wilderness, at sea, from false brothers. He had gone without sleep, without food, without adequate clothing. And on top of all of it, the daily pressure of his concern for the churches — every congregation a weight on his heart (2 Corinthians 11:23–28).

That is what Paul is calling "light."

This is not a man who had an easy life and didn't know what real suffering felt like. This is a man who had been through more physical pain, emotional anguish, and relentless hardship than most of us will ever experience — and he weighed it all, every last ounce of it, and pronounced it *light*.

He wasn't minimizing it. He wasn't pretending it didn't hurt. He was comparing it to something else. And what he put on the other side of the scale made everything on this side look like nothing.

* * *

Here's the other side: "an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

Watch what Paul does with the language. On the left side, the affliction is *momentary*. On the right side, the glory is *eternal*. On the left, the affliction is *light* — it has no weight. On the right, the glory is heavy — it has *weight*. The Greek word is *baros*, and it means heaviness, burden, substance. Glory isn't wispy or thin or floating somewhere in the abstract. It has mass. It has heft. It is the most solid, substantial, weighty thing that exists.

And then, as if the contrast between momentary and eternal, light and weighty, weren't enough, Paul piles on a phrase that nearly breaks the language: *kath' hyperbolēn eis hyperbolēn* — "far beyond all comparison." The NASB is doing its best with that phrase, but the Greek is stacking the word *hyperbolē* on top of itself. Beyond excess unto excess. Surpassing upon surpassing. It's the kind of expression a man uses when the thing he's trying to describe has outrun every word in his vocabulary.

Paul is saying: I have stood on both sides of this. I have felt the affliction. I know what it weighs. And I am telling you — when you put it on the scale next to what God has prepared, it doesn't register.

Not because the suffering isn't real. But because the glory is *that* heavy.

* * *

There's a word in the middle of verse 17 that's easy to miss, but it changes everything once you see it. Paul says that this momentary, light affliction "is producing for us" that eternal weight of glory.

Producing. The Greek is *katergazetai* — it means to work out, to bring about, to accomplish. Paul isn't just saying that suffering and glory happen to exist in sequence — that you endure one and then receive the other, like standing in a line. He's saying the affliction is actually *producing* the glory. Working it out. Accomplishing it.

This is not a transactional claim — as if God is paying you in glory for the suffering you endure. It's deeper than that. The affliction itself, borne in faith, is part of the process by which God is shaping the eternal thing He has prepared for you. The suffering isn't just the road to glory; it's doing something. It's working.

James said something similar: "the testing of your faith produces endurance" (James 1:3). And Peter: "so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7). There is a consistent testimony in the New Testament that trials, endured in faith, are not wasted. They are productive. They are accomplishing something that outlasts the trial itself.

The morning your knees hurt so badly you weren't sure you could get out of bed — but you did, and you prayed, and you went on about the work of faith — that morning was not wasted. The year you spent at the bedside of someone you loved, watching them slip away one piece at a time, and you kept trusting God through every awful day of it — that year was not wasted. The quiet suffering that nobody sees and nobody applauds and nobody writes a card about — it is not wasted.

It is producing something. And what it's producing has weight.

* * *

Then Paul tells you how to live in this reality. Not just how to believe it — how to see it.

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen."

The word "look" here — *skopeō* — is deliberate. It means to fix your attention on, to consider, to direct your gaze. It's the root of the English word "scope," and the idea is the same: a focused, intentional act of looking. Paul is not describing passive sight — what happens to fall in front of your eyes. He's describing a decision about where to aim them.

And the decision is counterintuitive: look at the things which are *not* seen.

That sounds like a contradiction until you realize what Paul means. The things that are "seen" — visible, tangible, right in front of you — are your aching body, your shrinking calendar,

your empty house, your thinning circle of friends. Those are real. You see them every day. And they press in hard.

But they are temporary. The Greek word is *proskaira* — lasting for a season, bound by time. What you see is real, but it is passing.

The things which are "not seen" — the building that replaces the tent, the imperishable body that replaces the perishable one, the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God — those you cannot see yet. But they are *eternal*. Not bound by time. Not passing. Not going anywhere.

Paul is asking you to do the thing that goes against every instinct of the body you live in: take your eyes off the visible, temporary evidence and fix them on the invisible, eternal reality. Not because the pain isn't real. But because the pain is not the whole picture. And the part you can't see yet is the part that weighs the most.

* * *

This is where the math changes everything.

When you're lying in bed at night and the body aches and the house is quiet and the losses stack up in your mind like stones, the scale feels tipped all in one direction. The suffering is heavy. The grief is heavy. The loneliness is heavy. And the future — the earthly future — looks like more of the same, only less of it.

But Paul says you're looking at the wrong side of the scale. You're weighing your affliction against your circumstances. You're

measuring your suffering against the years you have left. And by that math, the scale is crushing.

His math is different. He puts your affliction on one side and eternity on the other. He puts your momentary, passing, time-bound pain on the left — all of it, every last ounce — and on the right he puts the weight of glory that God has been preparing for you since before the world began. And the right side isn't just heavier. It isn't just a little more. It is *beyond all comparison*. It buries the scale. The left side goes up so fast it isn't even a contest.

That's what Paul saw. That's why he could call it light. Not because it didn't hurt. Because he had seen what it weighed against.

* * *

And here is where it becomes personal.

You are not Paul. You probably haven't been stoned or shipwrecked or beaten with rods. But you've carried your own afflictions, and they don't feel light to you. The slow loss of independence. The friends who aren't here anymore. The body that won't do what it used to do. The days that feel more like endurance than enjoyment. Those are your thirty-nine lashes, your open sea, your night without warmth.

And Paul, who carried more than you and more than me and more than almost anyone, looked at the whole pile and said: *This is producing something. And what it's producing outweighs everything on this side of the scale so completely that there isn't even a unit of measurement for the comparison.*

You don't have to pretend the suffering is easy. Paul didn't. You don't have to paste a smile over the hard days and call it faith. Paul groaned in the tent — he told you that himself.

But you can recalibrate the scale. You can take the thing that feels like it's crushing you and set it next to the thing God has promised — the eternal, weighty, real, solid glory that your affliction is producing right now, today, in this very season of your life — and you can see it for what it is.

Momentary. Light. And almost over.

The glory, on the other hand, is forever. And it has a weight that nothing in this world can match.

Every hard day is one day less of the momentary. One day closer to the weight of glory. One day closer to the thing that tips the scale so far it never comes back.

One day closer to home.

CHAPTER 11

No More Tears

Part III: The Crescendo

You still set the table wrong sometimes.

Not every time. But sometimes — when your mind is somewhere else, when you're moving through the kitchen on habit instead of thought — your hand reaches for one too many plates. Or you pour two cups of coffee before you remember there's only one to pour. Or you hear something funny on the television and you turn to say something, and the chair is empty, and the words just stop in your mouth.

It's the small things that get you. Not the big moments — you've learned to brace for those. The anniversary. The birthday. The holidays. You know those are coming, and you steel yourself, and you get through them. But it's Tuesday afternoon at the grocery store, standing in front of the brand of crackers he always liked, that undoes you. It's hearing her name in someone else's conversation. It's the smell of a jacket you haven't moved from the closet because moving it would mean something you're not ready for it to mean.

Grief doesn't shout. Not after the first year. After the first year, it whispers. And it whispers at the strangest times.

If you've lived long enough to be reading this book, you've buried people. Maybe a spouse. Maybe a parent you took care of at the end. Maybe a friend who was fine in September and gone by Christmas. Maybe — and this is the one nobody is ever ready for — a child. You've stood in funeral homes and signed guest books and sat through services and driven home afterward to a house that felt different than it did that morning.

And you've carried it. You've carried it because that's what you do. You get up. You go to worship. You take meals to other people who are hurting. You answer "I'm fine" to the question everyone asks because the real answer would take longer than anyone has time for. And somewhere underneath all of it, there's a question that doesn't go away, a question you may never have said out loud:

Will it always hurt like this?

Not the fear of your own death — we talked about that in Chapter 9, and the chains have been broken. This is something different. This is the ache of living in a world where the people you love leave it, one by one, and you are still here. This is the weight of accumulated goodbyes. This is the grief that doesn't come from fearing what's ahead — it comes from missing what's already gone.

The Bible has an answer for that question. And it doesn't come from Paul or from the writer of Hebrews. It comes from a vision — the most detailed picture Scripture gives us of what the end of the story looks like. And it was shown to an old man who knew exactly what it felt like to be the last one still standing.

* * *

John was the last of the original twelve apostles. By the time he received the Revelation, he was an old man — likely the only one of Jesus' inner circle who had not been killed for his faith. Peter was gone. James had been executed decades earlier. Paul, who had joined the work later and carried it farther than anyone, was gone too. The men and women John had labored alongside for an entire generation — most of them were gone.

And John himself was in exile on Patmos, a small island in the Aegean Sea, banished there — the text says — "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Revelation 1:9). He was not in a comfortable retirement. He was isolated, removed from the churches he loved, an old man on a rock in the sea.

It was there — in that isolation, at that age, carrying that weight of loss — that God pulled back the curtain and showed him how the story ends.

What John saw fills the closing chapters of Scripture. And in seven verses near the end, he records a vision so direct, so tender, and so complete that it answers the deepest ache a human being can carry.

* * *

> *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."*

— Revelation 21:1–2 (NASB)

The first thing John sees is newness. A new heaven and a new earth. The old order — the one you and I live in right now, the one with the pain and the funerals and the Tuesday afternoons at the grocery store — has passed away.

The word "new" here is important. The Greek is *kainos*, and it doesn't mean new in the sense of "recently made" — that would be *neos*. *Kainos* means new in character, new in quality, new in kind. It's the difference between buying a new car off the lot and having your old car completely restored and transformed into something better than it was the day it rolled off the assembly line. The creation isn't discarded. It's renewed. Made what it was always meant to be.

And notice the direction: the holy city comes *down*. Out of heaven. From God. To where humanity is. This is not a vision of people escaping the world and floating away to some distant place. This is God coming down. The dwelling of God arriving to be with human beings.

John describes it as a bride adorned for her husband — the language of preparation, of anticipation, of something beautiful that has been made ready for a specific moment. And the moment has come.

* * *

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among

them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.'"

— Revelation 21:3 (NASB)

If you've been reading this book carefully, a word in that verse should stop you. *Tabernacle*. The Greek is *skēnē*.

In Chapter 6, we sat with Paul's metaphor for the human body: a tent — *skēnos* in the Greek, from the same root. A temporary shelter. Fabric over poles. Something that wears thin, that groans under the weather, that was never meant to be permanent. And Paul said we groan in this tent, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven.

Here, in the last pages of the Bible, the tent image returns — but it has been completely transformed. The *skēnē* of God is among men. Not a frail, human tent being torn down, but the dwelling of God Himself, coming down to be with His people. The tent you lived in was temporary. The tabernacle He brings is permanent.

And the word "dwell" — *skēnoō* — means literally to pitch a tent, to tabernacle. It's the same word John used at the very beginning of his Gospel: "The Word became flesh, and *dwelt* among us" (John 1:14). When Jesus walked the roads of Galilee, that was a tabernacling — temporary, bounded by thirty-three years and a cross. What John sees in Revelation 21 is the permanent version. God among men. Not for a visit. Not for a generation. Forever.

"They shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them."

That's the destination. Not a place, primarily. A presence. The journey Abraham began — the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God — this is where it arrives. The homesickness the stranger feels in a foreign land — this is where it ends. God with His people. Permanently. Completely. Without barrier, without separation, without a veil between.

* * *

And then comes the verse that breaks you open — if you let it.

> *"And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."*
> — Revelation 21:4 (NASB)

Read it again, slowly, and let every phrase land.

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes." The Greek word — *exaleiphō* — means to wipe off, to smear away, to obliterate completely. It's a physical word. A hands-on word. This is not a decree issued from a distant throne. This is God, close enough to touch your face, wiping the tears away with His own hand.

And notice — He doesn't prevent the tears. He wipes them away. That means they were real. Every tear you've cried over every person you've lost, every lonely night, every grief you carried quietly because you didn't want to burden anyone else — those tears were real, and God saw every one of them. The Psalms already told you that: "You have taken account of my wanderings;

put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?" (Psalm 56:8). He has kept count. He hasn't missed a single one. And the day is coming when He will wipe away the last of them — not by telling you to stop crying, but by removing every reason you ever had to cry.

"There will no longer be any death." Gone. Not reduced. Not managed. Not pushed to the margins. Gone. The thing that has haunted every chapter of this book — the decaying body, the tent being torn down, the fear that holds people in slavery — it is gone. Death came into the world through sin (Romans 5:12), and it has stalked every generation since. But it does not get the last word. It was swallowed up in victory when Christ rose (1 Corinthians 15:54 — the *katapino* we traced through Chapters 6 and 7). And in this vision, the victory is final and complete. Death is no more.

"There will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain." John lists them one by one, as if he wants to make sure you don't miss any. Mourning — the heavy, ongoing weight of loss. Crying — the sharp, immediate sting of it. Pain — the broad, relentless companion of life in a fallen body. Every one of them: gone.

And then the summary, the phrase that gathers it all up: "The first things have passed away."

The first things. That's what all of this is — everything you're enduring right now. The aching joints. The funerals. The loneliness. The nights. The grief. All of it belongs to the first order of things. And first things pass. They are *proskaira*, to use the word Paul gave us in the last chapter — temporary, lasting for a season, bound by time. They feel permanent when you're in the

middle of them. But they are first things. And first things have an expiration date.

* * *

> *"And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' And He said, 'Write, for these words are faithful and true.'"*
>
> — Revelation 21:5 (NASB)

"I am making all things new." Not: I am making all *new* things. The emphasis matters. God is not scrapping the creation and starting over. He is taking what exists — what is broken, what is groaning, what is worn thin — and making it new. *Kainos*. Renewed. Restored. Transformed into what it was always designed to be.

This is the same pattern we saw in Chapter 7. The body that goes into the ground is not replaced with a different body. It is *raised* — the same body, transformed. Perishable becomes imperishable. Dishonor becomes glory. Weakness becomes power. The seed goes in one thing and comes out something beyond recognition — but it is the same seed. Continuity and transformation, not annihilation and replacement.

And then God says something you should underline if you own a pen: "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

He commands John to write it down. And He gives the reason: because what He has just said is *faithful and true*. Reliable. Trustworthy. Not symbolic hand-waving. Not poetic overstatement. Faithful. And true. God is staking His own

character on the promise. The tears will be wiped away. Death will end. Pain will pass. He has said it, and He does not lie (Titus 1:2).

* * *

> *"Then He said to me, 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.'"*
>
> — Revelation 21:6–7 (NASB)

"It is done." Three words, and they carry the finality of everything God set out to accomplish from the beginning. The plan that started in Genesis — the plan that ran through Abraham and Moses and David and the prophets, through the incarnation and the cross and the empty tomb — it is done. Complete. Finished.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." He was there before the first things began, and He will be there when the first things pass away. He is not inside the story, subject to its twists and uncertainties. He is the Author. He knows how it ends because He wrote the ending.

And the promise is personal: "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son."

Inherit. Not earn. Inherit. The language is familial — a father and his children. The overcomer doesn't purchase this future; he receives it as an heir. And the inheritance isn't a mansion or a reward or a title. It is a relationship: "I will be his God and he will be My son." The deepest longing of the human

heart — to belong, fully and permanently, to the One who made you — is the inheritance that waits on the other side.

* * *

This is what you are walking toward.

Every truth this book has traced — the inner man being renewed, the tent giving way to the building, the perishable seed being raised in glory, the city with foundations, the fear of death broken, the affliction that is momentary and light — every one of those truths was a thread, and they all lead here. To this. To God dwelling with His people, death gone forever, every tear wiped away by the hand of the One who kept count of them all.

You are not walking toward a void. You are not walking toward an ending. You are walking toward the moment when God looks at everything that has ever caused you pain and says, "The first things have passed away," and then — with His own hand — wipes the last tear from your face.

The grief you carry right now is real. The empty chair is real. The quiet house is real. I am not going to stand here and tell you it doesn't hurt, because it does, and pretending otherwise would be a lie.

But it is a first thing. And first things pass away.

The day is coming — faithful and true, because the One who promised it does not lie — when there will be nothing left to grieve. No more death. No more crying. No more pain. Only the presence of God, permanent and close, and a world made new.

Every tear you cry between now and then is one He has counted. And every day that passes is one day closer to the day He wipes the last one away.

One day closer to home.

CHAPTER 12

Why Are You Still Waiting?

Part III: The Crescendo

This chapter is different from the others.

For eleven chapters, this book has been speaking to you about hope — the hope of the aging believer, the hope that comes from knowing that every day is one day closer to home. We've walked with Simeon and Anna and Caleb. We've sat with Paul's paradox and his tent and his seed and his scale. We've looked at Abraham's city and the fear of death broken and the tears that God will one day wipe away with His own hand.

And maybe, as you read, something didn't sit right. Not because the words were wrong, but because you knew — quietly, in the place you don't talk about — that the promises weren't yours. Not yet.

Maybe you've been around the church your whole life. You know the songs. You know the stories. You can quote the verses from memory. But if you're honest — completely honest, the kind of honest that only happens when nobody else is listening — you've never done what the New Testament says to do in order to be in Christ. You've believed, in a general sense. You've tried to live a good life. But you've never taken the step. And you've told yourself there would be time.

Or maybe you've never been in a church at all. Maybe someone handed you this book, or you picked it up out of curiosity, and you've been surprised by what you found. The Scriptures were clearer than you expected. The hope was more real than you thought it would be. And something in you leaned toward it.

Either way, this chapter is for you.

I'm not going to pressure you. I'm not going to play on your emotions or try to scare you into something. But I am going to be honest with you — as honest as this book has been from the beginning — because the stakes are too high for anything less. And what I'm going to do is very simple: I'm going to show you what the New Testament says. Not what tradition says. Not what any particular group or creed says. What the text itself says, in plain language, supported by every example of conversion recorded in the first century.

You can judge for yourself whether it's true.

* * *

Start here, because everything else rests on this.

> *"Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."*
> — John 8:24 (NASB)

Jesus said those words Himself. And they are as clear as anything in the New Testament: without belief, there is no salvation. If you do not believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be — the Christ, the Son of the living God, the one sent by the Father to do what

no one else could do — then nothing that follows in this chapter applies. It all starts here.

But the New Testament is careful about what belief means. It is not merely agreeing that Jesus existed, or that He was a good teacher, or even that He rose from the dead. James writes that "the demons also believe, and shudder" (James 2:19). The demons have no shortage of factual knowledge about who Jesus is. What they lack is surrender. What they lack is the kind of belief that bends the knee and changes the life.

The belief the New Testament calls for is a conviction — deep enough to act on, strong enough to reorder your priorities, real enough to carry you through what comes next. It is the foundation. Nothing is built without it. But it is not the whole building.

And Jesus Himself made that clear. In His final commission to the apostles before ascending to heaven, He said:

> *"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has not believed shall be condemned."*
>
> — Mark 16:16 (NASB)

Look at what Jesus joins together in that sentence: believed *and* baptized. Not believed alone. Not baptized alone. The two are bound together by the Lord Himself, and together they lead to the result — "shall be saved." What Jesus has joined, no man has the authority to separate. You cannot take the belief and leave the baptism and claim you have what He promised. He put them together. They stay together.

* * *

On the day of Pentecost — the first day the gospel was ever preached in its fullness, after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus — Peter stood before a crowd that had just come to believe. They had heard the evidence. They had been convinced. Luke records their response:

> *"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 (NASB)

They believed. And their belief produced a question: *What do we do now?* If belief alone were sufficient, Peter's answer should have been, "Nothing. You believed. You're saved." But that is not what he said.

> *"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 (NASB)

Two things. Repent and be baptized. For the forgiveness of sins.

Repentance is a turning. The Greek word — *metanoeō* — means a change of mind, but in the New Testament it is never merely intellectual. It produces a change of direction. You were walking one way; now you walk another. You were living for one set of priorities; now you live for a different one. God "is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts

17:30). It's not optional. It's not for some people and not others. It's a command that applies to everyone who hears the gospel.

But notice — Peter doesn't stop at repentance. He joins it directly to baptism. Repent *and* be baptized. For the forgiveness of sins. The two are linked in the same sentence, aiming at the same result. And on that day, Luke tells us, about three thousand people did exactly what Peter said (Acts 2:41). They didn't go home to think about it. They didn't schedule it for a more convenient time. They heard. They believed. They repented. They were baptized. That day.

* * *

Paul, writing to the church at Rome, describes what happens in baptism — and the picture is one of the most vivid in the entire New Testament.

> *"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 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. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection."*
>
> **— Romans 6:3–5 (NASB)**

Read that slowly, because what Paul describes is not a ritual. It's not a ceremony. It's not a symbol of something that has already happened somewhere else. It is a burial and a resurrection.

When you go down into the water, you are being buried with Christ. The old life — the sin, the guilt, the separation from God — goes into that grave. And when you come up out of the water, you are raised with Christ to walk in newness of life. It is a death and a birth in the same moment. The old man dies. The new man rises. United with Christ in the likeness of His death. United with Christ in the likeness of His resurrection.

That is what baptism is. Not an outward sign of an inward change that already took place. Not an optional step you get around to when it's convenient. It is the moment of transition — the point at which you pass from the old life into the new, from death into life, from outside of Christ to inside of Christ. Paul says you are baptized *into* Christ Jesus. That's how you get in.

And the beauty of it is the picture itself. The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). And in baptism, you reenact that gospel with your own body. You die with Him. You are buried with Him. You are raised with Him. The most important event in the history of the world becomes your personal story — not as a metaphor, but as a real, tangible act of faith that changes your standing before God.

And consider what that means for every promise in this book. Paul writes to the Ephesians that God "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places *in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3). Every spiritual blessing — redemption, forgiveness, the sealing of the Holy Spirit, the inheritance, the hope — all of it is located *in Christ*. Not outside of Him. Not near Him. *In* Him. And the question becomes unavoidable: How does a person get *into* Christ? Paul answers it in Galatians 3:27 —

"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." That is the only door the New Testament describes. Every blessing is in Christ, and baptism is how you get into Christ. The building that replaces the tent, the body raised imperishable, the city with foundations, the tears wiped away — every one of those promises belongs to those who are *in Him*. And this is how you get there.

* * *

There is one more piece, and it comes before the water.

> *"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 (NASB)

Confession. Saying it out loud. Declaring with your mouth that Jesus is Lord — not just a teacher, not just a good man, but *Lord*. It's the moment where belief stops being private and becomes public. You are saying, before God and before anyone who will hear, that you have put your trust in Jesus as the risen Son of God.

We see this in the only detailed one-on-one conversion account in the New Testament. In Acts 8, Philip meets an Ethiopian man on a desert road, teaches him about Jesus from the book of Isaiah, and when they come to water, the man asks, "What prevents me from being baptized?" And Philip tells him: "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The man's response

— "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" — is the confession. And then, immediately, they go down into the water, and Philip baptizes him (Acts 8:36–39).

No waiting period. No class. No special building. A desert road, a body of water, a confession of faith, and a burial with Christ. That's the New Testament pattern.

* * *

And now we come to the verse that gives this chapter its title.

There was a man named Saul — a Pharisee, a persecutor of Christians, a man who had watched with approval as Stephen was stoned to death. On the road to Damascus, the risen Jesus appeared to him in blinding light and said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul was struck blind. For three days, he sat in darkness in a house in Damascus. He didn't eat. He didn't drink. He prayed.

If belief alone were the point of conversion, Saul was already there. He had seen the risen Lord with his own eyes. He believed. He was praying. Three days had passed. And yet he was still in his sins.

God sent a man named Ananias to him. And when Ananias arrived, he didn't say, "Good news — you were saved on the road." He said this:

> *"Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name."*
>
> — Acts 22:16 (NASB)

"Wash away your sins." After three days of belief. After three days of prayer. After seeing the risen Christ face to face. Saul's sins were still there. They were washed away in the water of baptism — not before.

And the question Ananias asked is the one I'm asking you: *Why do you delay?*

* * *

The pattern in the New Testament is not complicated. It is consistent across every account of conversion Luke records in the book of Acts. People heard the gospel. They believed it. They repented of their sins. They confessed Jesus as Lord. And they were baptized — immediately, urgently, without delay.

The three thousand on Pentecost — that day (Acts 2:41). The Ethiopian — on a desert road, as soon as they found water (Acts 8:38). The Philippian jailer — in the middle of the night, "that very hour" (Acts 16:33). Saul — as soon as Ananias told him to stop waiting (Acts 22:16).

Not one of them was told to say a prayer and wait. Not one of them was told that belief alone was enough. Not one of them was told that baptism was optional, or symbolic, or something to schedule for later. In every case, the response to the gospel was immediate, and in every case, it included baptism. Not because the water has magic in it — it doesn't. But because baptism is the act of faith in which God does the work. It's where you are buried with Christ and raised with Christ. It's where sins are washed away. It's the transition point.

If the New Testament says it is, I don't have the authority to say it isn't. And neither does anyone else.

* * *

Now, let me speak to you directly, because this is not an academic exercise.

You've read eleven chapters about what God has prepared for those who belong to Him. The inner man being renewed day by day. The building that replaces the tent. The imperishable body that will be raised in glory and power. The city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. Freedom from the slavery of the fear of death. A weight of glory beyond all comparison. Every tear wiped away. No more death. No more pain. God dwelling with His people forever.

Every one of those promises is real. And every one of them belongs to those who are in Christ.

The question is whether you are.

If you are not — if you have never believed with all your heart, repented of your sins, confessed Jesus as Lord, and been buried with Him in baptism to be raised in newness of life — then every promise in this book is waiting for you. Not behind you. Ahead of you. Today.

The writer of Hebrews, quoting the Psalm, put it as urgently as language allows:

> *"Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."*
> — Hebrews 3:15 (NASB)

Today. Not when you feel ready. Not when you've cleaned your life up enough. Not when the circumstances are better. Today. Because tomorrow is not promised to anyone — and this book, more than most, has reminded you of that.

You may be seventy. You may be eighty. You may feel like you've waited too long, that too many years have passed, that too much has happened. But Ananias didn't ask Saul how long he had waited. He asked him why he was *still* waiting. The length of the delay doesn't matter. What matters is that it ends.

If you hear His voice today — in these words, in this chapter, in the quiet of your own heart — don't harden your heart. Don't set the book down and tell yourself you'll think about it later. Find a faithful Christian. Open your Bible. Ask them to show you these passages for yourself. And when you've seen what the text says — when you've believed it with your whole heart — don't wait.

Get up. Be baptized. Wash away your sins, calling on His name.

And then every promise in this book — every single one — becomes yours.

The building. The body raised in glory. The city with foundations. The tears wiped away. God dwelling with you forever.

One day closer to home.

CHAPTER 13

Press On

Part III: The Crescendo

We started this book with a man in a Roman prison.

He was old. He was in chains. His body bore the scars of thirty years of beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, sleepless nights, and the relentless weight of caring for every congregation he had helped build. His earthly future was not promising. By any measure the world uses, the best was behind him.

And he sat down and wrote a letter that included these words:

> *"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*
>
> **— Philippians 3:13–14 (NASB)**

When you read those words in Chapter 1, they were an introduction. A statement of direction. A man refusing to look in the rearview mirror and choosing instead to face forward, straining toward something he hadn't yet reached.

Now you know what he was straining toward.

* * *

You've spent twelve chapters walking through what lies ahead of the aging believer, and it is not what the world told you it was. The world told you the best was behind you. The world told you to manage your decline, enjoy what's left, be grateful for what you had. The world handed you a rearview mirror and told you that was all there was to see.

But you've seen something else now.

You stood with Simeon in the temple — an old man who had spent his entire old age leaning forward, not backward. He didn't define his final years by what he had already seen. He defined them by what he was *waiting* for. And when the moment came — when he held the fulfillment of God's promise in his own weathered hands — he was ready. His eyes had been pointed in the right direction.

You stood with Anna — eighty-four years old, a widow for most of her life, and she never left the temple. She didn't retire from the work of God because the years had piled up. She went deeper into it. Fasting. Praying. Serving. And when the moment of redemption arrived, she was there to see it — not because she got lucky, but because she had never left her post. Faithfulness put her in the room.

You stood with Caleb at eighty-five — a man with every right to ask for the easy ground, the level field, the quiet valley where an old man could rest. Instead, he looked at the mountain with the giants on it and said, "Give me this mountain." His past wasn't a rocking chair. It was a launching pad. And he charged.

Those were the examples. Real people, in real Scripture, who show you that age is not the end of the story. It never was.

* * *

Then the book turned, and the examples gave way to the theology — the truths that God, through the pens of Paul and the writer of Hebrews and the apostle John, laid down to anchor you for the final stretch.

Paul told you that the outer man is decaying — and he didn't flinch from it. He named it. The body is wasting away. You feel it every morning. But he said something is happening at the same time, in the opposite direction: the inner man is being renewed. Day by day. *Hemera kai hemera*. Not in spite of the decay, but alongside it. Two things, moving in opposite directions, inside the same person. And the one that's growing is the one that lasts.

He told you that the body you live in is a tent — temporary, groaning, wearing thin — and that God has a building waiting for you. Not made with hands. Eternal in the heavens. And he told you that to be absent from this body is to be at home with the Lord. Home. The word means what it means. You are not going to a strange place. You are going home.

He told you that the body that goes into the ground is a seed — and what comes out of the ground is something so far beyond what went in that there is no comparison. Perishable becomes imperishable. Dishonor becomes glory. Weakness becomes power. The natural body is sown; the spiritual body is raised. Not less physical. More. Not less real. More real than anything you've ever touched.

You walked with Abraham toward a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Abraham lived in tents his

whole life in the promised land — a stranger, a temporary resident, never quite at home. And the writer of Hebrews tells you why: he was looking for something better. A heavenly country. And God was not ashamed to be called his God, because He had prepared a city for him. The homesickness you feel — the sense that this world isn't quite right, that you don't quite fit, that something is missing — is not a sign that something is wrong with you. It's a sign that you were made for somewhere else.

You learned that the fear of death — the slavery that holds people captive their entire lives — was broken when Jesus took on flesh and blood, walked into death, and came out the other side. The devil's most powerful weapon was disarmed from the inside. The chains were cut. And you don't have to be owned by that fear anymore. The fear may whisper. But it no longer commands.

You learned Paul's math. You put your afflictions on one side of the scale — every ache, every loss, every hard day — and you put the eternal weight of glory on the other side, and the scale wasn't even close. Momentary. Light. And almost over. The glory, on the other hand, has a weight that buries the scale and never comes back.

And you saw what John saw on Patmos — the curtain pulled back, the end of the story revealed. A new heaven and a new earth. God Himself coming down to dwell with His people. Every tear wiped away by His own hand. No more death. No more mourning. No more crying. No more pain. The first things passed away, and all things made new. Faithful and true, because the One who promised it does not lie.

That is what lies ahead of you.

That is what Paul was straining toward when he wrote from that prison cell. Not a memory. Not a wish. A promise — backed by the character of God, sealed by the blood of Christ, and confirmed by the resurrection that proved it all true.

* * *

And if, somewhere in the reading, you realized the promises were not yet yours — if Chapter 12 spoke to something you had been putting off, something you knew needed to happen — then today is the day. Not tomorrow. Today. Believe with all your heart. Repent. Confess Jesus as Lord. Be buried with Him in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life. Every spiritual blessing is in Christ, and baptism is how you get into Christ. Don't wait. Ananias's question is still ringing: *Why do you delay?*

The door is open. Walk through it.

* * *

But this final chapter is not only for the one who hasn't yet obeyed. It is for you — the one who has been walking this road for years, maybe decades. The one who was baptized into Christ a long time ago and has been pressing on ever since. The one whose body aches and whose friends are fewer and whose mornings are quieter than they used to be.

This chapter is for you because the race is not over yet. And the last laps matter.

Paul didn't write Philippians 3:13–14 as a young man setting out. He wrote it as an old man pressing on. The word he used —

epekteinomenos — is the image of a runner in full stretch, body extended toward the finish line. Not coasting. Not drifting. Straining forward. And the thing he was straining toward was not behind him. It was not beneath him. It was above him. The upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

That call hasn't changed. It is still upward. It is still ahead. And it is still worth everything you have.

You may not be able to do what you once did. Your body has made that clear. But Simeon couldn't do what a young man does, either — and he held the Messiah in his arms. Anna couldn't keep up with the pace of a younger woman — and she was standing in the temple when redemption arrived. Caleb's bones were eighty-five years old — and he took the mountain.

The race is not about what your body can do. It's about which direction your heart is facing.

* * *

So here is the last thing I want to say to you — and it's the same thing I said at the beginning, but now you know why.

Turn around.

Not because the past wasn't real. It was. The laughter was real. The love was real. The people were real, and you will see them again. But the past is not your destination. It was never meant to be.

Your destination is a building not made with hands. A body raised in glory. A city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. A place where God Himself dwells with His

people, where death is gone, where every tear has been wiped away, where the first things have finally, permanently, irreversibly passed away.

And every single day — every morning you wake up with the ache in your back and the quiet in your house and the weight of another day in the tent — is one day closer to that.

Not one day farther from the good days.

One day closer to the best day.

Forget what lies behind. Reach forward to what lies ahead. Press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The sunrise ahead is better than anything behind you.

One day closer to home.

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