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January 2, 2022
Bible in a Year 2022

Happy New Year! Welcome to those who are returning for yet another walk-thru of the Bible and a special welcome to those who are new! We're glad you've joined us! Greg Daniels and I have been blessed to lead this group for several years now and have loved having a front row seat to so many growing in their faith. God is good and He honors every single moment we spend with Him in His Word so with that in mind, here are a few suggestions as you begin to help you have a successful year...

- 1) Pray before reading each day. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you and reveal more of Himself to you through His Word. Ask Him for wisdom and understanding as you read and what it might be that He would have you take away each day.
- 2) Read devotionally. What does that mean? It means reading through the Bible like this is not intended to provide an in-depth study. Simply pay attention to what words or phrases stick out to you and prayerfully meditate on what God may be saying to you.
- 3) Journal. Journaling is a way of meditating and/or reflecting on what God may be saying to you. I've been doing it for years and it has been super helpful in helping me gather and focus my thoughts. In fact, many of the devotionals I write come straight out of my journal. It can also give you a record to look back on at the end of the year as to what God has shared with you.
- 4) Grace. Give yourself a lot of grace. Life happens. We all know that. Don't beat yourself up if you miss a day or get bogged down in certain places...looking at you, Leviticus! ;-) Don't be afraid to skip ahead if you get too far behind.
- 5) Ask any question God lays on your heart. Reading the Bible should raise all kinds of issues. There is a lot in there that is confusing. You might find yourself wrestling with all sorts of doubts or fears. This is normal. It happens to me almost every year. ;-) Ask your questions. Share your doubts. Don't be afraid to talk about your struggles or confusion. This is a safe community to do that with.
- 6) Feel free to shoot Greg or myself any personal questions you may not want to share with the group. We're here to help! (Statedclerk@epcwest.org or doug@pepc.org)
- 7) Be gentle and kind to each other. We all have a share in making this a safe group. Let's make sure to be kind and gentle and encouraging in our responses to one another. Give people the space to struggle and be where they are on the journey. If things get too much, take a break, then dive back in.

Again, really thankful for the opportunity to take this journey with you, friends! Feel free to invite everyone you're connected with to join us! The more, the merrier!

Happy New Year!

Doug

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January 3, 2022
Cultivation

Readings for today: [Genesis 1-2](#)

Father, by Your Holy Spirit, open Your Word to us that we may hear Your voice, learn what You would have us learn, and grow ever deeper in our faith. We pray this in the name of Jesus, amen.

Human beings are made to cultivate. Cultivate the earth. Cultivate the Garden. Cultivate and care for all of life. In recent years, most of my focus has been on the creation story of Genesis one. The rhythm of morning and evening. Everything good and perfect. The Lord God speaking the universe into existence. Creating humanity in His own image. Giving us dominion over all He has made. Calling us to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. However, this year I decided to read the Bible in the old King James English. It translates the Hebrew “be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth...” That word “replenish” stuck with me as I turned the page and began reading chapter two. There it seems clear that humanity has a key role to play in cultivating all God has made. Everything was prepared. The ground was set. The seeds were planted. But nothing had yet grown because there had been no rain and “there was no man to work the ground.” (2:5) This does not mean that somehow God was helpless or too prideful to get His hands dirty, rather it suggests an invitation. A divine plan. God creating us for a purpose. To be the cultivators of all He has made. To be the stewards of all He has formed and fashioned. To care for the good and perfect world He has created. Remember, God is at rest. His work is complete. He now sits enthroned over all He has made and sends us – His servants – out to work according to His sovereign will. It is humanity’s job to work and keep the Garden. It is humanity’s job to name the animals the Lord God has made. It is humanity’s job to make sure the earth is continually replenished and tended and cultivated so that it will reflect the beauty and order and glory God intends.

So what happened? When did we make the turn from cultivators to exploiters? From stewards to squatters? From those focused on caring and replenishing to those focused on using creation to satisfy our own selfishness and greed? We’ll read about that tomorrow in Genesis 3 but the stage is set here in chapter two. Humanity will only retain her divine vocation insofar as she submits to God. In every instance save one, humanity is able to enjoy the fruit of her labor. As she cultivates, she is nourished. As she stewards, she is fed. As she cares for all God has made, the Garden itself provides for all her needs. However, there is one tree humanity is to cultivate but never taste. There is one tree she is to steward but whose fruit she is to never eat. She is to care for this tree but never experience its delights. This is her single act of submission to God. It is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and its fruit is forbidden. Who knows how long Adam and Eve passed by this tree as they went about their daily chores? Days? Months? Years? Eons? We have no idea how long Adam and Eve cultivated and tended and replenished the earth under God’s direction. We only know there came a day when they stopped on their way to work. Listened to a crafty serpent. Gave into temptation. And all creation fell into ruin.

Thankfully, that is not the end of the story. In Jesus Christ, we see the 2nd Adam. Humanity as she should be. Perfectly submitted to the will of His Father. A Cultivator. A Steward. A Man who lived out His vocation to care for all God has made. Everywhere Jesus went, life seemed to flourish. The earth and all that was in it was replenished. Diseases were healed. Demons cast out. The unclean became clean. He cultivated humanity and restored her to her original vocation so that we, in turn, could cultivate others including creation itself. This has vast practical implications for our lives. Am I seeking to cultivate or exploit those around me? Am I stewarding the resources God has entrusted to me for the good of the world around me or am I using them for my own personal benefit? Am I seeking to care for the world? Make healthy and good choices? Build deep and strong relationships? Am I seeking to

replenish the earth? Jesus summed it up simply when He said, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45) If we are to fulfill our divine vocation to be cultivators of creation, we must commit ourselves to a life of service to those around us and the world in the name of Jesus.

Readings for tomorrow: John 1:1-3, Psalm 8, 104

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January 4, 2022
Glory

Readings for today: [John 1:1-3, Psalm 8, Psalm 104](#)

Father, through Your Holy Spirit, open Your Word to me that I may meet you face to face, hear your voice, learn what you would have me learn, and grow ever deeper in my faith. I pray this in the name of Jesus, amen.

As I read these words, I look out the window of a home high above Grand Lake. It's winter. The snow has been falling the entire time we've been here. Our family is on their annual post-Christmas vacation to the mountains of Colorado. The lake is large and deep. Significant portions have yet to freeze over. The trees are laden with several inches of snow. The ground covered and every morning we can see the tracks of the animals who've passed by in the night. The stars at night have been covered by the clouds but normally they blaze with a brilliance we cannot see from our home in Parker. There's just something about coming up here that brings us closer to God. Closer to our Creator. Gets us in touch with the wonder of all He has made. And it brings new meaning to the words, "what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" (Psalm 8:4)

When I pause in the silence and solitude of a winter morning with my family still asleep and consider the blessings God has poured into my life, I am in awe. I enjoy the love of a godly woman who's been at my side for almost thirty years. I have deep friendships with my four children, two of whom are now adults and launching out on their own. I am blessed by the relationships I have with my parents, in-laws, siblings and their families. I am financially secure. My body is healthy and strong. My mind is clear. I have the privilege of serving as pastor for an amazing church, alongside spiritual leaders I admire, and work with a group of people I get to call friends. I get to teach aspiring pastors at a local seminary. I get to travel the world to preach the gospel and train church planters to go to places where the name of Jesus has never been heard. I get to serve our denomination in a variety of capacities as we seek God's will for the future of our life together. My life is rich and full. This must be the "glory and honor" the Psalmist is talking about. It's less about titles and achievements and more about relationships and the opportunities God gives us to serve in His Kingdom.

What keeps me from pride? What keeps human beings humble before the Lord? Here again, the Psalmist provides the answer. "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord. Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more! Bless the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord!" (Psalm 104:33-35) I keep my eyes focused on God. He gives and takes away. Surely I've had my dark moments along the way. Times when I wasn't sure I could pay the bills. Times when my physical health wasn't great. Times when my marriage was on the rocks. Times when my relationships with my children was strained to the point of breaking. Times when my professional career was in shambles. Yes, I've had my share of hard times. But in those moments, I discovered God at His most glorious! When I needed Him most, God was always there! Faithful. Steadfast. True. "In the beginning was the Word..." In our present darkness is the Word. At the end of all things will be the Word. He is the one who was and is and is to come! Place your trust in Him today!

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 3-5

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January 5, 2022
Where Art Thou?

Readings for today: [Genesis 3-5](#)

Father, through your Holy Spirit, open my eyes and heart that I may receive the gift of your Word today. Grant me wisdom and understanding so that I may know how to walk more fully in the light of the Lord.

Where art thou? What a question from God. It's not like God can't see Adam and Eve crouching in the bushes behind their fig leaves. The Psalmist is clear that there is no place I can hide from God. If I climb to the highest of heavens, God is there. If I plunge into the depths of the earth, God is there. If I rise on the wings of the morning and settle on the far part of the sea, even there God is waiting for me. Nothing is hidden from Him so why this question? What is God after with Adam and Eve? What is God after with me? Where are you, Doug? Where's your head? Where's your heart? I am here waiting for you, Doug. Where are you? Why are you hiding? Why are you running? Why are you avoiding Me? Where are you, Doug? I miss our time together in the silence and solitude of each morning and evening. I miss our time together in worship. Where are you, Doug?

It's a powerful question for reflection. It reminds me that God is ever seeking after me. Relentlessly pursuing me. He will not rest until He tracks me down. My heart is so prone to wander. I am so easily distracted. The cares and the worries of this world cause me a lot of anxiety. My desires can be all over the map. Physically, I am getting older and I can feel my body breaking down. I have more aches and pains than in previous years. The toll I've taken on my body is catching up to me. My shoulders ache. My back hurts. I can't do the things I once was able to do. Mentally, I continue to grow but I too often fill my mind with all sorts of unnecessary things. I do not think on what is noble or true or righteous or good but instead I allow myself to get drawn into the anger and frustration and bitterness that plagues so much of our world. Emotionally, I am learning. As a young boy, I learned to bury my emotions as a coping mechanism and have spent my entire life feeling stunted as a result. I feel deeply but cannot seem to find ways to express it. I have a hard time shedding tears. I do not let myself get too up lest I become disappointed or too down lest I feel weak. I keep a tight rein on my emotions because I am not sure I am safe. Spiritually, I know my sin. It is ever before me. I know my failures before the Lord. I know I do things I ought not to do and don't do things I should do. Where are you, Doug?

One can easily see my natural bent to be self-critical. ;-) But the above certainly does not define me and does not tell the whole story. When answering this question before the Lord, I must also acknowledge the many ways I have grown in my life. Yes, my body is breaking down and yet I enjoy good health. I get a good night's sleep. I exercise regularly. I eat well. I pay attention to how I physically feel. I maintain an active lifestyle. I want to honor God with my body. Mentally, I am sharp. I read the Bible daily. I read books that encourage and equip and help me think more deeply about my faith. I use my intellectual gifts to serve others and to build up the Body of Christ and I know God is pleased. Emotionally, I have come a long way. I am learning to express my feelings to those I love. I am learning to identify the lies I tell myself. I am becoming more comfortable with naming my feelings and talking about them. This, in turn, has helped me become a better listener. A more empathetic and sympathetic person. Someone who is emotionally safe for others. Spiritually, I am more like Christ than ever. God has done a great work in my life. He has drawn near to me as I have drawn near to Him. He has honored every moment spent in prayer and in His Word and in worship. He has literally re-shaped how I view the world. How I understand life. He has re-ordered my desires. These things are just as true for me as the self-critique. In fact, an honest look at my life would say they are more true of me.

For many years, my prayer has been “less of me, Jesus, more of you.” I have longed to decrease so that Christ may increase in my life. The only way that can happen is by intentionally dwelling in God’s presence. By living my life ever before Him, I become who He created me to be. Becoming like Christ has nothing to do with my work, it is a byproduct of being present before God. Perhaps this is why I find God’s question to Adam so heartbreakingly sad. Where are you, Adam? As a father, I know what it’s like to feel distant from one’s children. It’s the worst feeling in the world. To not know where they are physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually. To not feel connected to the one you love most. God must have felt all these feelings and more when He asked the question and His hope was for Adam’s return. Sadly, Adam and Eve chose to blame-shift. They chose to justify themselves. They chose the path of sin. How different things would be if they had torn off those fig leaves, confessed their sin, and humbled themselves before God! How different things would be in my own life if I too would stop trying to hide and vulnerably, authentically, honestly approached my Savior.

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 6-7

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January 6, 2022
Favor with God

Readings for today: [Genesis 6-7](#)

Father, through your Holy Spirit, illumine my heart to the truths you want me to see today. Open the wonders of the Word to me in such a way that I will be challenged and equipped and more deeply converted to the gospel.

“Noah found grace in the eyes of God.” (Gen. 6:8)

“Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation, and Noah walked with God.” (Gen. 6:9)

“And Noah did unto all that the Lord commanded him.” (Gen. 7:5)

“By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” (Heb. 11:7)

I want to be like Noah. I want to be a person of faith. A person who is willing to forsake the ways of the world and cling to God. A person who is able to see beyond the horizons of this life to the life to come. A person who is able to pierce the veil of this earthly existence and peer into the heavenly realm. In past years, I've been struck by the evil of humanity described in this passage or the grief of God that caused Him to “repent” (!!!) that He had ever made humanity in the first place. I've wrestled over the identity of the Nephilim or tried to wrap my head around the “sons of God” having sexual relations with the “daughters of man.” Is this an early description of the crossbreeding that took place between Homo Sapiens and Neanderthals? Does it refer to the angelic beings who were cast out of heaven now taking human women as wives and bearing half-demonic offspring? Lots of questions to ponder for sure but this year I found myself drawn again to Noah. A man who found grace or favor in the eyes of God. A righteous man. A blameless man. A man who walked with God. A man who obeyed all God commanded him. And I want to be more like him.

How does one become such a person? By faith. Noah believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. The writer of Hebrews teaches us that it is impossible to please God without faith for whoever would draw near to God must believe He exists and rewards those who seek Him. (Heb. 11:6) Noah trusted God at a time when faith was in short supply. He believed God in a time when not much was known about Him. God had not yet revealed Himself on Mt. Sinai. God had not yet shared with humanity His divine name. God had not yet given the Ten Commandments. God had not yet made His covenant with Abraham. It's hard for me to fathom how Noah knew God much less walked with God. Did he hear the stories of his great-grandfather Enoch? One of the very few other people in the Bible who “walked with God?” Did he hear his grandfather tell of the day when Enoch was “taken?” Did his family talk about Enoch's character and manner of life? Did Noah make it his goal emulate him? Clearly, Noah must have known something about God. Must have believed he at least existed. Must have had a heart to seek God. And we know from Jeremiah 29:13 that “if we seek God, we shall find Him, provided we seek Him with all of our hearts.” Perhaps this seeking of God was enough for Noah to be declared righteous and blameless in his generation.

What we do know is once God chose Noah, Noah obeyed Him completely. He built the ark. Gathered the animals. Prepared for the long days and nights ahead when the floods would come and everything

he knew would be destroyed. Noah must have endured ridicule and scorn from his neighbors. The writer of Hebrews suggests Noah's act of obedience was a deliberate move to condemn the ways of the world. A rejection of the wickedness of the people who surrounded him. I cannot imagine what it must have been like to watch the world drown in judgment. To close your doors to your neighbors and friends. To shut out your community as the rains came and the floodwaters rose. But that's exactly what Noah did. He separated himself from the evil of those he lived among and escaped the wrath and judgment of God when it came upon the earth.

What does it mean for me to find favor with God? What does it mean for me to be righteous and blameless and walk with God? What does it look like for me to obey all God has commanded me? I have the benefit of living on the far side of the resurrection. God is not some shadowy, largely unknown being. He has revealed Himself completely and fully in the Person of Jesus Christ so faith for me is trusting in the life, death, and resurrection of my Lord. Righteousness and blamelessness come from walking with Jesus through all the ups and downs of life. Obeying God means obeying all Jesus has commanded His disciples in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. It means seeking Jesus with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. Loving Him above all over loves. Serving Him above all else. Placing my entire life into His hands. By committing myself to Christ, I condemn the world with all it's evil and wickedness and I become an heir to righteousness through adoption into God's own family.

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 8-9, Psalm 12

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January 7, 2022
Re-Creation

Readings for today: [Genesis 8-9, Psalm 12](#)

Father, through Your Holy Spirit, reveal Yourself to me in the reading of Your Word. Show me Your heart. Show me Your character. Show me Your face that I may know you more.

It's striking to me how similar the language of Genesis 9 is to the language of Genesis 1 and yet it's not exactly the same. I find myself pondering why that might be this morning. Take a moment and reflect on these passages again...

"And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day." (Genesis 1:27-31)

"And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it." (Genesis 9:1-7)

I imagine what I am seeing is the impact of the Fall. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever but His creation has suffered a mortal blow. The creature He made in His image – humanity – refuses to submit to His will, rejects the relationship God offers, and goes her own way. The results speak for themselves - "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth..." (Genesis 8:21) How does this evil manifest itself? Violence. Fear. Dread. These things were not present initially when God entrusted creation into our hands. In the beginning, humanity lived in harmony with all God had made. Yes, they were called to "subdue the earth" and "have dominion" but one doesn't get the sense that it was coercive or forced. God renews His call to Noah after the flood but the differences are stark. The creation mandate remains – "Be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth" but then the reality of the brokenness of sin settles in. Noah and his family will subdue the earth and exercise dominion but it will be through fear and dread. The animals of the earth, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea will all run from them. They will resist even as they are given into their hands. The reality of violence is acknowledged as is the first mention of the principle of lex talionis or proportional justice. God seeking to restrain the violent impulses that drove humanity pre-flood into chaos. The flood was an act of re-creation. God turning loose the waters that existed at the beginning of time to reshape all He had originally made. The Garden is gone. Paradise is lost. The world is now a hostile, violent, dangerous place full of fear and dread. Noah and his family will have to fight to survive.

So little has changed in the thousands of years since Noah first stepped off the ark. The world is still full of violence and fear and dread. It is full of hate and rage and greed. Humanity has made incredible progress technologically but has remained morally deficient. Human history provides plenty of empirical evidence for the doctrine of original sin and total depravity. Shoot, my own life provides the same! We just don't want to submit. We refuse to humble ourselves before God. We will not relinquish our selfish hold on this world. Thankfully, God has not left us in our broken condition. He will not leave us in our fallen estate. I love how the Apostle Paul puts it in Ephesians 2, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." (Ephesians 2:13-14, 16) Jesus Christ left His home in heaven to come to the "far country" of this world to reclaim those who were lost. His desire was to draw us close. Draw us into His loving embrace. He is so faithful, He will pursue every human being. He will chase down every lost soul. He will leave no one behind. How did humanity respond? The way we always do. We rejected Christ. We killed the Lord of glory rather than submit to His embrace. Jesus became a victim of violence. A victim of humanity's fear and dread. A victim of humanity's hostility to the will of God. And yet through His death, God brought an end to sin. He broke the power of death. He set us free from bondage to evil. He made a way back to Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 10-11

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January 8, 2022
A Mighty Man

Readings for today: [Genesis 10-11](#)

Father, your Word brings life. Life to my spirit. Life to my mind. Life to my heart. Life to my body. It reminds of my purpose which is to worship You and serve You and enjoy You forever. Through your Spirit share with me more deeply how to become the man You created me to be.

Nimrod. A mighty hunter before the Lord. A legendary king. A powerful tribal warlord. The “first on earth to be a mighty man.” The man who founded Babel. Is he the architect of the tower? Is he the one who puts the plans together to build a ziggurat to the heavens? Does he convince the people they don’t need God? To build a monument to themselves? Is he one of the primary reasons they disobey the command to “be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth?” It wouldn’t surprise me. Even a cursory glance at human history reveals our tendency to fall for the strong man. The mighty man. The egotistical man. The narcissistic man. Who is lauded in our history books? Who is extolled for their leadership? I remember several years ago coming across a best-selling business book titled, “Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun” and thinking to myself, “surely, this isn’t serious?” Attila the Hun? One of the most brutal and terrifying kings in human history? This is the guy we’re supposed to emulate? And lest you think we’ve progressed beyond this myth in our modern era, consider how leaders like Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping or some of our own political leaders carry themselves? Consider how much we idolize celebrity or social influencers? Heck, even the church has bought into this leadership cult! I can’t tell you how many churches today are built around the narcissistic personality of the senior pastor and how many of them will fall by the wayside when such leaders inevitably fall. It’s brutal. I speak from personal experience. A significant part of my own ministry has been to go in and help clean up the mess these leaders leave behind. (Consider downloading The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill podcast to learn about a recent example of one such leader’s fall from grace.)

So let’s assume Nimrod did lead the people to build the Tower of Babel. Let’s assume he used his power to bring order and security to their lives. Let’s assume he leveraged their common language and tribal connections to keep them together. Nimrod must have been a persuasive speaker. A charismatic leader. A man who could cast a vision. Tragically, his vision was not God’s vision. Instead of sending the people out to explore and fill the earth, he encourages them to stay together. Instead of caring and cultivating the earth so it would be fruitful, he leads them to the fertile plain of Shinar where they can settle down. Build a great city. Construct a mighty tower that would reach to the heavens. It makes perfect sense. It would be a symbol of safety and security. It would provide protection from the elements and the dangers of the world. It would give them a sense of place. A sense of connection. A sense of community. No matter how far they might wander from the city they had built, they could keep the tower in view and always find their way back home.

Frankly this doesn’t sound all that bad until you take a step back and realize they were doing all these things without God! “And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men had built. And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” (Gen. 11:5-6) This is the Garden of Eden all over again. Humanity wanting to be like God. Humanity choosing independence from God. Humanity rebelling against God’s explicit command. Thankfully, God refuses to let humanity persist in her sin. Just as He expelled Adam and Eve before they could eat of the Tree of Life and be trapped forever in their broken estate, He now confuses the

languages of the people and scatters them over the face of the earth lest they become forever ensnared by their innate selfishness and narcissism.

What about me? If I'm honest, I know I am no different than Nimrod. Given the right set of circumstances, I am confident I would fall for the same temptations. I have narcissistic tendencies. I can be as selfish and greedy and proud as the next person. My heart is an idol factory. My nature is ever inclined towards sin. My thoughts and attitudes and actions reflect the deep brokenness of my condition. I am not immune. So where have I gone astray? Where do I lead my family or my congregation astray? Where have I gone against the express will of God in my own life? What towers am I trying to build? Am I seeking to become an influencer? Build an online platform? Measure my success by the size of the church I serve? Am I operating out of a desire for safety and security? Am I seeking to build my home and my life and my community through my own effort apart from God? Or am I seeking God? Am I walking with open hands before Him? Am I following in His footsteps?

Readings for tomorrow: None

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January 10, 2022
God's Call

Readings for today: [Genesis 12-13](#)

Father, everything I need to know about a life of faith and my salvation is revealed in Your Word. It is sufficient for all my spiritual needs. Through your Holy Spirit, direct me to what You would have me see and have me learn today.

I remember my last year at Princeton. All of my friends had passed their ordination exams. All of them were interviewing with different churches. All of us were praying for each other and talking about where the Lord might be leading us. Some felt drawn to particular places. Beaches. Mountains. Places they had always dreamed of living in. Some wanted to be close to home. Close to family. Close to those they loved. I too wanted these things if I am honest. At the same time, my wife and I felt very drawn to Genesis 12:1 - "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee..." As we read these words (not in the King James, mind you!), we realized God was calling us to walk with open hands and an open heart before Him. To let Him guide and direct our steps. To go wherever He might call. To place no limits on Him. So we looked at churches all over the United States. We sent resumes out to about thirty of them. We interviewed with three of them and had a fourth interview scheduled before God showed us the place He wanted us to go. A wonderful church called Overlook Presbyterian Church in the southern port city of Mobile, AL.

We spent six great years there. We were embraced by the community. We built special friendships with the people in our congregation. They taught me almost everything I know about how to pastor well. I can still see them in my mind's eye and my heart warms at the thought of them. I would mention their names but there really are too many to count and all of them had a deep impact on my life and my family. Then God's call came to us again towards the beginning of 2008. It was just after we bought our first home. Just after we settled in for the long haul or so we thought at the time. We moved north to a little town called Sun Prairie outside of Madison, WI to plant a church. We spent two terrible years there. The worst years of our lives. It almost cost us our marriage. Almost cost us our family. I was broken in more ways than I could imagine. Some asked us if we had misheard God. Not at all. The Lord gives and takes away and He met us in the midst of that traumatic experience. He put some wonderful friends in our lives who ministered to us in ways I cannot even begin to describe. They loved us. Listened to us. Prayed with and for us. They were a sanctuary. A refuge. And it is largely because of them that we are still together and still in ministry today. Thankfully, God's call came again at the end of 2009. We moved west. Back home to a little town near where both Kristi and I grew up called Parker, CO to pastor a great church called PEPC. We've had twelve amazing years here. We've been embraced by our church family. Put down deep roots in our community. Shared life with some incredible friends. Raised our kids. Watched God work miracles. The Lord has used PEPC to heal us. Encourage us. Strengthen us. Challenge us. We've grown in more ways than we could ever have imagined and we are thankful for God's abiding presence every step of the way.

As I look back over my journey, I realize there is no way I could have planned it. There were so many twists and turns that only God could orchestrate. Some good. Some bad. Some ugly. Through it all, God was faithful to His promise to use all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose and I imagine Abram must have felt the same way. When he looked back on his journey from Ur to Haran with his father. From Haran to Canaan with his nephew. From Bethel to the Negev to Egypt and back again with Sarai before finally settling in Hebron. Abram had quite a journey. Especially at a time when it was dangerous, perhaps even foolish, to leave the safety and

security of your home, family, clan, and tribe. Abram left it all to follow God's will for his life. He left his business. Left his personal and professional network. Left his friendships. Left all that was familiar to go to the place God would show him. This is what stepping out in faith looked like for Abram...what does it look like for you? Where is God calling you to go? What is God calling you to leave behind? Are you willing to walk with open hands and an open heart before Him? Truly letting His Spirit guide and direct your steps?

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 14-16

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January 11, 2022

Hagar

Readings for today: [Genesis 14-16](#)

Father, through your Holy Spirit, open to me the wonders of Your Word. Teach me all that pertains to life and godliness that I may know You more deeply and experience You more intimately and serve You more faithfully.

Hagar has always fascinated me. She probably was given to Abram while he was in Egypt. Perhaps as an exchange for Sarai when Pharaoh took her into his household. Maybe she was part of Sarai's retinue when she left Pharaoh's household. We're not given the details. She would have been a young girl at the time. No rights. No voice. No status. She was a slave. The only reason we know her name at all is because of the role she is forced to play God's salvation plan. She has no choice in the matter. When her mistress decides to take matters into her own hands and produce the promised heir through human means, Hagar is pressed into service. She is of child-bearing age presumably. She's clearly demonstrated some measure of fertility already which is why Sarai would have chosen her and not another. Perhaps she even has other children? Again, we are not given to know. We only know she is given to Abram to be his concubine. A surrogate for Sarai who is barren.

Barrenness was a curse in the ancient world. Women were valued almost exclusively by the number of heirs they could produce. The more children, the more honored. The less children, the less honored. No children? Shamed. Sarai lived with shame almost all her life. Though loved by her husband, she could not give him what he desired most. She was old now. Long past child-bearing years so the promise of God to their family must have felt like a cruel joke. Especially when it didn't immediately come to pass. But Sarai wanted Abram to receive his reward so she does what any Ancient Near East matriarch who was barren would have done. She gives him her servant in her place. The goal being once the servant became pregnant and bore a child, they would be adopted as Abram and Sarai's own. Predictably, when Hagar does get pregnant, her relationship with Sarai changes. Now she has power. She can give her master something her mistress cannot. Becoming pregnant elevates her status in the household. She's almost on the same level now as her mistress and Sarai responds accordingly to re-establish her authority. She abuses Hagar and Hagar flees.

Hagar's prospects would have been dim at best. Alone. Pregnant. A runaway slave. No money. No family. Nowhere to go. Egypt must have felt like it was on the other side of the world. But God sees her. God looks after her. He finds her by the spring on the way to Shur. And he makes this incredible promise to her. One that echoes the promise He made to Abram. Her offspring will also become a multitude. One that cannot be numbered. This is simply unprecedented in the Ancient Near East. God treating Hagar as an equal to Abram. It's amazing and it reminds us yet again of what the Apostle Paul will later say, "God shows no partiality." (Romans 2:11) Jew or Gentile. Israelite or Egyptian. Master or slave. Rich or poor. Head of the household or servant of the household. Man or woman. It doesn't matter to God. He sees us. He knows us. He loves us. He looks after us. Just like He did Hagar. Just like He did Abram and Sarai. Is it messy at times? Yes. Is it confusing? Sure. Does it sometimes involve suffering? More often than we know. We are sinners after all. Our families are all dysfunctional on some level. Life in this world is never up and to the right. Hagar had to return and submit to Sarai in order to receive the promise. It wouldn't be the last time she and Sarai would get tangled up. But God worked through the dysfunction of their relationship to bring about His perfect will. What about your life? Where has God met you? Seen you? Looked after you? Where have you experienced His provision and grace?

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 17-19

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January 12, 2022
Relationship with God

Readings for today: [Genesis 17-19](#)

Father, through Your Spirit, reveal more of Yourself to me as you did to Abraham. Deepen our friendship. Strengthen our bond. Grow the intimacy between us that I may learn to hear Your voice more clearly and discern Your will more completely in my life.

What does it mean to have a relationship with God? Over the years I've heard many describe Christianity as a "relationship" not a "religion", but do we really understand what that means? Are we prepared for all the implications? Are we ready to embrace the demands? Do we appreciate the incredible privilege and honor it is to be called a "friend of God?"

James 2:23 says, "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness and he was called a friend of God." This is an astonishing truth. Out of all the people on earth, God chose Abraham as His friend. God appeared to Abraham. Spoke to Abraham. Made promises to Abraham. Cut a covenant with Abraham. Revealed the depths of His sovereign will to Abraham. When we talk about friendship with God, this is what it looks like. It looks like Abraham talking with God. Walking with God. In the everyday. In the ordinary. Over the course of a lifetime. Notice where God meets Abraham in our text for today. Abraham is 99 years old. Sarah, his wife, is 89 years old. Presumably they've been walking with God for many, many years. They've taken incredible steps of faith. Leaving their ancestral home of Ur. Leaving their adopted home in Haran. Embracing a nomadic lifestyle. Trusting God to lead and guide them every step of the way. Though they have no son, they've clung to the promise God first made them in Haran that they would become a great nation. The father and mother of a multitude of people. Though they have no homeland, they've clung to the promise God made them to give them the land of Canaan. Though they've done nothing to earn God's favor, they've clung to the promise God made them of an eternal covenant between Himself and their family for all generations. And because they believe God, He calls them friends.

Friendship with God brings with it all sorts of privileges and responsibilities. Abraham has been blessed. He's been protected. He's prospered. His household has grown. He has power and influence in the region. He is the peer of kings. But he also has responsibilities. He must live a particular way. He must never take pride in his wealth. It is the Lord's. He must keep God's covenant and teach his children to do the same. He must circumcise all the males in his household as a sign of obedience. He must become a priest of sorts for the human race, interceding on their behalf like he does for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Essentially, Abraham is to be the new Adam. A man who walks with God, cares for creation, and exercises dominion over all God has given him. This is how God will fulfill His original promise to bless the nations of the earth through Abraham and his descendants.

Now fast forward a few thousand years. I am a child of God. Justified by the Jesus' death and resurrection. Regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Adopted as God's own son. God has made me part of a new covenant He established for all who believe. I've been marked by baptism. I feast at His Table. I am now God's friend. What privileges and responsibilities do I bear? Like Abraham, I've been blessed. I've been protected. I've prospered. My household has grown. My circle of friendships is wide and global. I've been given power and influence. But I also have responsibilities. I must submit every area of my life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I must never take pride in my wealth or power or position. I must keep God's commands and teach my children to do the same. I must embrace humility and grace and forgiveness as a way of life. I must become a priest of sorts, interceding for my family, my church,

my community, my country, and the world. I must walk with God, care for creation, and exercise dominion over all God has given me in a way that brings life and love and joy and peace to those around me. This is how God will fulfill His promise to bless the nations through me...a spiritual descendant of Abraham. What about you?

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 20-23

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January 13, 2022
God Will Provide

Readings for today: [Genesis 20–23](#)

Father, there is always value in spending time in Your Word. You honor every precious moment. You speak through every single verse. There is a message for me each and every day. May I slow down long enough to listen to Your still, small voice as you speak to me today.

“God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” I have long wrestled with this verse. It has been an enigma to me. How could one walk with such faith? Did Abraham really believe what he was saying or was this wishful thinking? Is he just trying to buy time while he figures out another way? Is he just telling Isaac what he wants to hear because he cannot bring himself to tell him the truth? Did Abraham ever doubt his course of action? Did he ever wonder if he misheard God? What kind of man would even consider sacrificing his own son? Why would I ever consider such a person someone to emulate? Perhaps you’ve wrestled with some of these questions as well?

Recently, I’ve come to see this verse as the ultimate expression of Abraham’s faith. Abraham has this ability to take life as it comes. He walks with open hands before the Lord. He doesn’t cling to outcomes or conclusions or destinations. He began his journey with God without knowing where it would take him. He believed the promise of God for a son even though he had no idea of the timing. And here he is willing to offer his son as a burnt offering on a mountain God has yet to show him. He has no idea how this is all going to end. None of it made any sense. I’m sure it created all kinds of questions in his mind. But still he believes. He trusts God. He knows a promise has been made. A covenant has been established. God has committed Himself to Abraham and his descendants so somehow, somehow this will all work out. The promise will not fail. Isaac cannot die on this mountain. Abraham walks by faith not by sight. He doesn’t have to solve this problem. He doesn’t have to come up with “plan B” in case God doesn’t come through. He lets go of his need to control the outcome. He lets go of his need to understand the mysteries of God. He lets go of his need to know the end of the story.

I am learning this same lesson in my life. The uncertainties of this last season have really caused me to slow down. To take each day as it comes. To not plan too far ahead. To let go of the need to figure things out. It’s actually okay to not know all God is up to. It’s actually okay to not understand all His ways. It’s actually okay to not know how all the things I’ve got going right now in my life will end. This is super challenging to me. It cuts against the grain of my natural way of doing things. I have always been the “man with the plan.” In fact, I don’t just have “plan B” but plans “C, D, E...all the way to Z!” I hate uncertainty. I get incredibly anxious when I am confused. I don’t like feeling out of control. So you can imagine how COVID has exacerbated these things to the nth degree!

I’m learning to walk with open hands like Abraham. To trust that God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering. When the pandemic began, all my plans got thrown out the window. How in the world does one “pastor” remotely? How would our church respond to the crisis? How do I navigate the layers of conflict around public health policy, political hyper-partisanship, and ethnic tensions? How do I help people process the trauma and grief of the past two years? How can I cast a vision for the future of our ministry when I don’t even know what tomorrow may bring? How can I love my own family in the midst of our disagreements and divisions? I’ve wrestled with all these questions and more and what I’ve discovered is I don’t have to have all the answers. The more I slow down. The more I listen. The more I let go. The more I create space for God to step in and provide. And you know what? He has never once failed to show up! I’ve seen more miracles in the past year in my life and in my church

family than I can count and it is all because God has proved faithful to provide the “lamb” for every single “burnt offering.”

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 24-26

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January 14, 2022
God's Sovereignty

Readings for today: [Genesis 24-26](#)

One of the things I struggled with the most when I first started reading the Bible was reconciling how God could use such sinful, broken people to accomplish His plan. Why does God seem to overlook Abraham's lying? Why does God turn Lot's wife into a pillar of salt for a backwards glance and yet seemingly does nothing to Lot's daughters when they rape their father to get pregnant? How could God allow Hagar and Ishmael to be treated so terribly by Sarah? And what are we to make of the conflict between Esau and Jacob which began before they were even born? These events seem to call God's character into question.

And yet, when I take a step back to reflect on my own life, I realize God's still using sinful, broken people to accomplish His plan! I remember talking to a high school friend several years ago. We hadn't seen each other since graduation. As we got caught up, she asked me what I did for a living. "I'm a pastor." The stunned look on her face said it all. She and I were close in high school. She knew I was a drunk. She knew I was vulgar. She knew I was a liar. She knew I was arrogant and mean. Of all the careers she could have imagined me having back then, pastor wouldn't have even made the list! Sure, you say, that was thirty years ago. A lot's changed, right? You might be surprised. Yes, when Christ ambushed me at the University of Colorado in Boulder, my life was radically changed. But that doesn't mean I became any less a sinner. Yes, the Holy Spirit entered my heart that day and began the process of sanctification but I am constantly amazed at how deep my sinful tendencies run. Yes, I have grown in so many ways and have become far more disciplined and self-controlled but my internal thoughts and feelings still reflect much of the corruption of the Fall. Does my failure to live up to my calling in Christ Jesus call God's character into question?

I don't think so. In fact, I think God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He simply is doing in my life what He first did in Abraham's life. He is sovereignly directing all things to serve the purpose of His will. His plan cannot be delayed. Cannot be detoured. Cannot be denied. God has chosen from the beginning to work His will through the creature made in His own image. God has chosen from the beginning to use sinful, broken creatures to bring about His will on earth as it is in heaven. God has chosen from the beginning to deposit the treasure of the gospel in weak and insecure and unfaithful people. That's why the Apostle Paul will later call us "jars of clay." Fragile. Chipped. Cracked pots through which God reveals His glory. It's the most amazing thing.

So back to the passage we read for today. When we read the text with the eyes of faith, we can see God at work. We see the guidance of God as He leads the servant of Abraham miraculously to Rebekah. (Reminds me of that great line from Casablanca where Bogart says, "Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine.") We see the hand of God present as Abraham settles his estate and dies peacefully among his people. His funeral, attended by his two boys, Ishmael and Isaac, must have been a tender scene. We see both Ishmael and Isaac receive the blessing of God as their families grow. We see God heal Rebekah's barren womb in what will become a pattern throughout the Old Testament. We witness the sovereign choice of God to elect Jacob to carry on the promise even though Esau is the firstborn. We see Esau confirm that decision as he despises his birthright, selling it to Jacob for a bowl of stew. Finally, we see God renew His covenant with Isaac only to have him break faith just like his father had done. Time and time again we are reminded that unless God acts to preserve His promise, we are doomed. The human race is just too dysfunctional. Too prone to evil. To

easily seduced by sin. This should challenge us as well as comfort us. So where is God challenging you today to follow His will? How is God comforting you in those areas where you fall short?

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 27-29

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January 15, 2022
Bargaining with God

Readings for today: [Genesis 27-29](#)

Father, open my eyes to the wonders of Your Word this morning so that I might hear Your voice and learn the truths You would teach me.

Jacob is such a contrast to his grandfather. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Jacob disbelieved God and would need to learn some hard lessons as a result. In both cases, God appears to them. In both cases, God makes promises to them. Yes, these promises must have seemed impossible at the time they were made. A promised child to a barren woman. Descendants outnumbering the sand on the seashore. Land for as far as the eyes could see. Prosperity. Abundance. Provision. Protection. The only difference is that Abraham received these promises by faith. He never doubted God would deliver. In fact, the Apostle Paul says, “No unbelief made Abraham waver concerns the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith and gave glory to God, fully convinced God was able to do what he had promised.” (Romans 4:20-21)

Jacob, on the other hand, seeks to bargain with God. Listen to what he says in Genesis 28:20-22 again, “If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.” It’s almost humorous to read in retrospect. Does Jacob really believe he has a choice? God has just appeared miraculously to him in a dream and told him He would be with him. God told him He would keep him safe wherever he would go. God told him He would bring him back to the land. God told him He would not leave Jacob until He had accomplished all He had promised. Jacob takes what begins as an unconditional covenant of faithfulness from God and tries to turn into a conditional human contract with an “out” clause.

How many times have I done the same? How many times have I tried to bargain with God? How many times have I placed all sorts of conditions on His love and grace? To be honest, I am much more like Jacob than I am like Abraham. At the same time, I’ve been following Jesus for close to thirty years now and I find myself growing in trust. Growing in faith. Growing in my confidence that God can and will do what He has promised. I’ve seen miracles. I’ve seen God come through when I was sure all was lost. I’ve heard testimony after testimony of God’s faithful provision in some of the most desperate of circumstances. It’s one of the reasons I try to journal. I want to make sure to keep a record of where God has fulfilled His promises to me. As I read back over all the answered prayers, my heart is encouraged. My eyes are lifted up. Hope floods my soul and I find myself renewed yet again. Where has God been faithful to you? Where has God met you over the last two years during COVID? How have you experienced His abiding faithfulness and abundant provision in your life?

Readings for tomorrow: None

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January 17, 2022
Self-Righteousness

Readings for today: [Genesis 30-33](#)

All of us are righteous in our own eyes. All of us have a great capacity to justify our thoughts, decisions, feelings, and actions. It's been said that "humanity's ability to sin is only exceeded by her ability to rationalize away her sin." I believe that with all my heart because I know my heart. I know how easy it is for me to blame-shift. I know how easy it is for me to shirk responsibility. I know how easy it is for me to justify my anger, frustration, hatred, bitterness, etc.

Many years ago, my life was at a breaking point. My job was not going well. I could feel the walls closing in. Every conversation with those I reported to seemed to end in conflict. I felt helpless. I was discouraged. It took a huge effort just to get out of bed each day. Rather than own my responsibility for the condition I found myself in, I blamed others. I retreated emotionally and relationally from those I loved. I neglected my wife and children. I spent hours distracting myself. All to no avail. This went on for months. My wife grew more and more distant and angry and upset. My children bore the brunt of my frustration. And I justified every bit of it because I was hurt. I was misunderstood. I was being let down. Finally my wife sat me down for the hardest conversation we've ever had in our marriage. "I never thought I'd ever say this but I don't like being married to you. You need to decide between me and your job. You have 24 hours." Her words broke me. That night I wrestled with God. I yelled at Him. Shook my fists. Blamed Him for everything that had gone wrong. For hours I paced the floor, pouring out all my fears and frustrations at Him. He simply listened and waited. Eventually I exhausted myself and said, "God, I need your help. I've made a mess of my life. I've got nothing left. And I'm afraid I'm going to lose everything I hold dear." God replied, "I know. I'm sitting in the middle of the mess with you. I've never left your side. I know you are afraid. I know you've failed. I know you've hurt those you love the most. But I can restore all things if you will simply hand your life over to me." Thankfully, I did. It's taken years but God has not only restored my marriage and my family and my career but He has given me so much more.

I think about my story every time I read the story of Jacob. Jacob was a master manipulator. A schemer to the core. He justified all sorts of sin in his life. He stole from his brother. He lied to his father. He was a poor husband and father. He took advantage of his uncle. He even tried to cut deals with God. All in an effort to avoid responsibility. Avoid accountability. Avoid facing the music. Eventually things caught up to him. He was traveling back to the land of his father when he heard his brother was on the way to meet him. He had four hundred men with him. Jacob assumed a reckoning was coming so he did what he always did. He tried to buy his way out of it. He sent his brother gifts. Attempts at flattery. None of it worked. Finally, Jacob had no choice but send his family over the river. Now he was all alone. The walls were finally closing in. He had nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide. God had him right where He wanted him. All night long, Jacob wrestled with God. We do not know what went through Jacob's mind but if his experience was anything like my own, I am sure God confronted him all of his past sin and it broke him. Literally. Physically. He would walk with a limp for the rest of his life. But he was now free.

What about you? Where do you find yourself justifying your sin? Justifying your hurt? Justifying your feelings? Justifying your behavior? Where do you find yourself making excuses? Blaming others? Avoiding responsibility? Self-righteousness is the most deadly of sins. Turn to the Lord. Wrestle with Him. Let Him break you so that He might restore all you have lost.

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 34-37

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January 18, 2022
The Sin of Revenge

Readings for today: [Genesis 34-37](#)

Father, the stories of the Old Testament seem so foreign to me. I struggle as I read about the choices Your people make. Then I think about my own choices and I realize I am no different. Teach me even through all the brokenness how to follow You.

The choices the children of Jacob make are deeply unsettling. Massacring an entire city? Selling their brother into slavery? It's hard for me to connect to what's going on or how any of this could be even remotely be connected to God. It's hard for me to understand why God even puts up with them. Why He continues to reach out to Jacob and remain faithful to His promises? In my humanness, I think there must be a limit. There must be a point at which God will say, "No more!" That's enough. You've gone too far. The fact that God continues to associate and even protect such a broken, dysfunctional family creates all sorts of questions for me. Questions about God's character and nature. Questions about His purpose and intent. Questions about God's wisdom. These can be scary questions on some level for me because I was taught never to question God. Furthermore, I was raised in a home where you never questioned authority. So the fact that these questions even pop into my mind can raise all kinds of fears. Thankfully, I learned years ago that God's not scared of my questions. God's a big boy and can handle anything I might throw at Him. All one has to do is look throughout the Scriptures and see how God invites His people to bring all of their hopes and fears, doubts and uncertainties, confusion and struggles to Him. The Psalms are filled with all kinds of questions. The Book of Job must not be forgotten with it's honest, searching, probing questions of God's justice and righteousness and goodness. This is what I love about the Christian faith. This is what I love about my relationship with God. But still I wrestle through these passages every year.

One thing I have learned is to appreciate the cultural distance between the Ancient Near East in which Jacob and his family lived and the 21st century, Western culture in which I live. In those days, a family's honor was everything. It was worth more than all their wealth or influence or power. In fact, it was the source of all those things. When Dinah is raped by Shechem, it's important to note the language that is used to describe the act. Humiliation. Defilement. It's not just a violent act done to someone they loved but a shameful act against their entire family. The shame is compounded by Shechem's request to marry Dinah. And lest one have any sympathy at all for Shechem's family, their true intentions are revealed when they discuss the economic impact of intermarriage. It's clear their end goal is to eliminate Jacob and his clan altogether. This creates a blood feud between the two people groups and blood feuds in the Middle East – even to this day – are brutal. Jacob's sons massacre the males in the city thus eliminating any potential future threat or retaliation. They carry off all the wealth of the city, including the women and children and assimilate them into their own clan. It's as if Shechem and his family never existed. Jacob knows their actions could potentially create ripple effects that would spread throughout the region. It's possible clan members have intermarried into other tribes or other people groups and would feel compelled to respond. But Jacob's sons are unrepentant. The honor of their family and clan must come first.

So how does such a story relate to me? In 21st century America? Well, if I am honest, the one thing that does resonate in this story is the impulse to retaliate. To seek revenge. To get back at those who hurt me. I don't like feeling weak. I don't like feeling shamed. I don't like feeling wounded. So when these things happen to me, my first response is almost always to think of ways I can get back at the other person. Repay them for all the pain they have caused me. I scheme of ways I could respond. I have all

sorts of dreams/fantasies of what I could say or do that would balance the scales. Make things even. Sure, I would never massacre an entire city but I have lost control of my anger at times and lashed out. When attacked personally or professionally, I have found myself responding in kind. Using the gifts I have and the resources I've been given and the power I hold to defend my honor and that of my family or those I love. Far too often, I have refused to turn the other cheek. The results are always the same. Violence begets violence. Pain begets more pain. Hurt people simply go on hurting people. What's the answer? Forgiveness. Reconciliation. Letting go of my need to defend myself and instead laying down my pride and ego for the sake of the relationship. Some see this as weakness. What I've found is that it is the ultimate sign of strength. Only the truly strong can relinquish their need for vengeance. Only the truly strong can let go of their need to get back. Only the truly strong don't need to defend themselves or their honor. Only the truly strong can put the welfare of others – including their enemies – above their own.

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 38-40

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January 19, 2022
Unlikely People

Readings for today: [Genesis 38-40](#)

Father, Your Word is living and active. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to the deepest places of my being. May Your Word take root, Father, and bear fruit for Your glory.

God works in the most unlikely of places. God uses the most unlikely of people. Tamar is a great example. She's an outsider. It's highly likely she was a Canaanite which means she's not part of God's chosen people. She most likely knows little to nothing about God. She is chosen by Judah to marry his firstborn son. Er is a wicked man. We aren't told why. Perhaps he was abusive. Perhaps he was neglectful. Perhaps he was violent or hateful. Perhaps he despised the God of his fathers. Whatever his crime, it was worthy of death. She is then passed down to Onan. Not an uncommon practice in the Ancient Near East. The goal being the preservation of a bloodline. Onan rebels. His sin is not just sexual in nature. It actually shames the entire family. It disrupts the economic, social, and familial structure of Judah's family. God judges him harshly and he too dies. Who knows how Tamar must have felt at this point? Did she feel like damaged goods? Did she feel used and abused? Did she feel cursed? Time drags on. Judah is clearly unwilling to take another chance on her. She is in danger of not only remaining widowed but childless which was a fate worse than death back then. So she does the most remarkable thing. She makes a plan. She waits for the opportune time. Her plan is risky but it's all she's got. Knowing Judah is lonely, she dresses as a sacred Canaanite prostitute – a common vocation in those days – and waits for him to come by. He hires her. Sleeps with her. She conceives and the rest is history. Really important history. Her son Perez will become the ancestor of kings like David and Solomon and eventually Jesus Himself.

Recently, I was talking to a high school friend of mine. She and I haven't seen each other since graduation. Back then I was not a Christian. I was sarcastic, arrogant, and often mean. I was a drunk, a college drop-out, and a fool. My life was going nowhere. When she found out I was a pastor, she was shocked. I'm not surprised. So are most people who knew me before I met Christ. You see, God met me in the most unlikely of places on the campus of the University of Colorado in Boulder. I still remember the exact spot where God ambushed me and changed my life. There was nothing redemptive about my life at the time. Nothing good. Certainly nothing godly. Of all the people God could have chosen, I had to be among the most unlikely of candidates. Certainly among the most unworthy. And yet God specializes in using the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. God used Tamar to confound Judah and perpetuate the eventual line of David. God is using Doug Resler to confound those who believe some are just too far gone to save and bring the message of the gospel to the ends of the earth. It's amazing.

What about you? Perhaps you feel a lot like Tamar? You've been abused. You've been mistreated or marginalized. Perhaps you feel like an outsider or an outcast. Maybe you even feel cursed. Maybe you resonate with my story? You've been the abuser. You've been proud and arrogant. You've enjoyed privilege and power but you've squandered it all and now your life is going nowhere fast. God is still at work, friends! In the most unlikely of people. In the most unlikely of places. At a time when you least expect it. That's when God shows up. Don't lose faith. Don't lose hope. Don't lose heart.

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 41-43

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January 20, 2022
God's Plan

Readings for today: [Genesis 41-43](#)

Father, You work all things for the good of those who love You and are called according to Your purpose. Help me to hold fast to this truth even when times are tough or I feel unfairly treated or unjustly accused. Help me to remember You are at work and will complete the good work You've begun in me.

Years ago, the Lord spoke three words to me in a time of prayer. It's one of the few times in my life where I have heard His voice audibly in my mind. I can still remember it as if it were yesterday. These three words were to guide my life from that point forward. They were to become the grid through which I would discern and process every opportunity that came my way. Those words were "obscurity, anonymity, and insignificance." God was clear with me. I was to labor in obscurity. I was to embrace anonymity. I was to pursue insignificance. The words still sound strange to me even as I write them. The way of life God continues to call me to still feels very foreign and yet I am more convinced than ever it is right for me. Why these words you might ask? Because God knows my heart. He knows I am an achievement addict. He knows I have spent so much of my life chasing worldly success. Even in the church. He knows I love being the center of attention. He knows I love being recognized for the work I've done. He knows how much I like earthly rewards. So out of love, He calls me to walk away. To go the opposite direction. To cut against the grain of my natural way of being. In essence, this is what "denying myself" looks like on a daily basis. What does this mean practically for me? It means I will never seek another job nor ask for another raise nor pursue any accolades nor draw attention to myself. It means I will spend my life building up others. Honoring those around me. Using all my resources to make sure those around me find success.

I resonate with Joseph. As a young man, he was arrogant and proud. He was the favored son. He was charismatic and successful. He had dreams and visions of glory. He believed he would rule over his family and clan. And he believed all of this was God-ordained. This all feels very familiar to me. I love playing the hero. I was told from a young age that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to and to a large degree, that was true. I am an Eagle Scout. An honors student. A college athlete. I won the preaching prize at Princeton Theological Seminary. I've experienced great success in ministry. I have a wonderful wife and four wonderful children. But like Joseph, I've experienced hardship and suffering as well. Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers. Joseph was falsely accused of rape. Joseph languished forgotten in a prison for many years. All of those experiences humbled him. Brought him to his knees before God. And you can see the change in his heart when he is finally called before Pharaoh. Listen again to his words...

"Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer...Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt..." (Genesis 41:16, 33) Joseph is clearly a changed man. He attributes all his success to God. He takes none of the credit for himself. He even relinquishes his need to be recognized or honored for his success in interpreting the dream. He lets go and lets God be in control. Joseph is content to return to prison if that is what the Lord wills for his life. Pharaoh, of course, sees what God has done in his life. Even testifies as such to his servants. "And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?" And he raises Joseph up to the highest position possible in the kingdom. What Pharaoh doesn't realize, of course, is that this is all God's doing. God is at work here to give elevate Joseph not because Joseph deserves it. Not because Joseph has earned it. But because God has a plan and Joseph has a role

to play. “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.” And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:16, 33, 38-41)

God still has a plan, friends. You and I have a role to play. It is not ours to seek out that role. It is not given to us to lay claim to that role. Our job is simply to be faithful. To be humble. To embrace the place where God has us and to trust Him to elevate us in His own time and according to His own will and good pleasure. It’s funny. Ever since I went through my own experience of hardship and suffering in Wisconsin almost fifteen years ago and learned to relinquish and let go of control of my life, the more God has entrusted to me. By the grace of God, I am a pastor. By the grace of God, I am a professor. By the grace of God, I am a missionary. By the grace of God, I am a leader in my denomination. None of these things are my achievements. They are gifts. God has raised me up for this particular season and God may lay me low in the next season. My job is not to get caught up or cling to what I have but simply to surrender and let Him use me as He sees fit.

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 44-46

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January 21, 2022

U-Turn

Readings for today: [Genesis 44-46](#)

Father, open my eyes of my heart that I might see what You would have me see, learn what You would have me learn, and apply to my life the eternal principles You have revealed through Your Word.

Repentance is a deeply biblical concept. It literally means making a 180 degree turn in life. It requires a change of heart. It results in different decisions. Different behaviors. Different actions. When I read this passage today, I see repentance in Judah. Here's the man who first suggested they sell Joseph into slavery. In a very real way, he is responsible for all the hardship and suffering and pain in Joseph's life. Sure, one might argue Judah at least saved Joseph from being killed by his brothers which was the original plan but slavery might be a fate worse than death. And before we give him any credit, it's entirely possible he was motivated by financial gain rather than any altruistic feelings for his brother. As time went on, Judah experienced his own pain. Two of his own sons died and I wonder if this changed him? Is it possible he began to empathize with his father and the grief and loss he suffered when they told him Joseph had been killed? Is it possible he began to look back and reflect on what he had done to his brother and regret the actions he took that day? Clearly something has happened to Judah. He is not the same man he once was for when Joseph seeks to detain Benjamin, Judah literally offers up his own life as an exchange. He repents. He makes a 180 degree turn. He does what he should have done all those years ago.

For years, I struggled with anger. Those closest to me would often bear the brunt of my outbursts. Sure, I could justify my feelings with all sorts of reasons. It's not like I would fly off the handle for no reason. But the damage I did was significant. Finally, a counselor confronted me. He looked me in the eye and asked, "Doug, has anything good ever come from your anger? Does it get you closer or further away from your goals? Does it actually achieve the ends you're shooting for? How's it actually working for you?" I had no answers. Actually I did. I knew this counselor was correct. I justified my anger. I considered it righteous. I felt it necessary to get my point across. To demonstrate my seriousness. I wanted my children primarily to understand how much it hurt when they lied or shirked responsibility or broke the rules we had set for our home. Somewhere down deep, I felt anger was necessary to hold them accountable. I was believing a lie. James 1:20 says, "The anger of man doesn't bring about the righteousness of God." What I wanted more than anything else was for my family to be righteous. I wanted my children to be righteous so when the counselor confronted me with those questions, I knew something had to change. I knew I had to change. I needed to repent and ask for forgiveness. Life in our home is much different now. Sure, my kids still press my buttons from time to time. It's not like my teenagers have suddenly become angels. ;-) At the same time, I am a different person. God has transformed my heart. Anger is no longer my primary response. In fact, it is a very rare occurrence. My relationships with my kids has never been better and I am thankful for the grace they have shown me. I am just a broken man and a broken dad trying my best to follow Jesus.

What about you? Where is God calling you to repentance in your life? What relationships are broken and in need of restoration? Are you willing to let God do the deep work in your heart and soul to bring you to a different place? To make you a different person?

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 47-50

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January 22, 2022
When Saints Suffer

Readings for today: [Genesis 47-50](#)

Father, Your Word literally reveals Your heart for Your people. It gives me wisdom and understanding into what it means to walk with You and before You. Teach me today how to think like You, speak like You, act like You, and ultimately, love like You.

Jacob is a broken man. When asked by Pharaoh to sum up the “days of his life”, he describes them as “few and evil.” He acknowledges he has not lived up to the standard of his fathers and forefathers. It seems clear he’s talking about more than longevity here. More than wealth. More than power. He has suffered. His losses have been grievous. The consequences for his sins have cost him dearly. He’s estranged from his twin brother. He defrauded his uncle. He’s buried both his wives. He thought he lost two of his sons. His oldest son shamed him deeply by sleeping with a member of his harem. Two of his other sons put his clan at great risk when they massacred a village. The famine he’s just survived has taken its toll. Now he stands before Pharaoh. He’s asked to sum up the years of his life. He’s asked to give an account of all that has happened to him. But rather than thank God for all that He has done for him, including restoring Joseph and Benjamin to his embrace, Jacob despairs. It’s terribly sad and heartbreakingly.

Life for the faithful can be hard. Some of the difficulties we face are the result of our own actions or inactions. They are the consequences of our behavior, both the good and the bad. Some of the challenges we face are completely outside our control. Natural disasters. Crippling disease. Violence and war. There is a myth out there that those who truly believe will always experience blessing. They will be wealthy. They will be powerful and influential. Everything they touch will turn to gold. This is patently false. There is another myth out there that those who are faithful to God will never experience depression or deep sadness or despair. Again, this is patently false. The sufferings of this present life often take us to the end of ourselves and beyond. The sufferings of this world are often too much for us to bear. Despite what you may hear, God often gives us more than we could ever handle so that we will learn to rely on Him. I have seen this in my own life. I know many other saints who have experienced this as well.

Consider the example of Mother Theresa. A literal saint of a woman who dedicated her life to serving Christ among the poorest of the poor in Kolkata. She was revered for her work. She won the Nobel Prize. She was recognized and honored the world over for her sacrifice. But after her death, her private memoirs were published and it was revealed that she had experienced the absence of God for the last half-century of her life. She felt like she was wandering in spiritual darkness. She was deaf to God’s voice. Blind to His presence. She didn’t experience Him in worship or in the Eucharist or as she served Him alongside the broken. And it wasn’t because of her sin. She was experiencing what many Christians have experienced throughout history. It’s called the “dark night of the soul.” A terrifying walk through the valley of the shadow of death where everything is stripped from us, including the sense of God’s abiding presence. Does this mean God has abandoned us? Not at all. Did Mother Theresa’s experience mean that God had abandoned her? Not a chance. Just as God never left poor Jacob, He never leaves us. He is with us even when we cannot sense Him or see Him or feel His presence. Be encouraged by the words of the Psalmist, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear for Thou art with me.”

Readings for tomorrow: None

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January 24, 2022
Suffering

Readings for today: [Job 1-5](#)

Father, the devil prowls about like a lion looking for someone to destroy. The accuser of my soul is always alive and well seeking to devour all that is good in my life. Teach me to resist the devil that he may flee. Help me to place my confidence in the One who is stronger. The One who is Savior. The One who holds me in the palm of His nail-scarred hands.

“Does Job fear God for no reason?” It’s a haunting question. Job not only feared God, he revered Him and held Him in awe. Job respected God and honored God. Job loved God and devoted His life to Him. To fear God in the Old Testament means giving God His due. Treating God as He rightfully deserves. Humbly acknowledging the infinite gap that exists between us. Job did all these things and more but the Accuser (this is what “satan” literally means in the original Hebrew) comes before God to test that loyalty. Some wonder if this book is literal or allegory. Did a man named Job actually exist or is this a book written to help God’s people process the problem of evil and suffering in the world? It is the oldest book in the Bible. The first one to be written. And that makes sense to me for it deals with one of the foundational – if not the most foundational question of our existence – why do we love God? Why do we honor God? Why do we fear God?

Satan argues Job fears God because of the blessings he’s been given. “Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” Satan believes if everything Job has is stripped away he will curse God and renounce his faith. It doesn’t work. In response to the loss of all his possessions and the tragic death of all his children, Job responds, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Satan’s next tactic is to attack Job’s physical health and mental well-being. “Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” Again, his plan fails. His accusations don’t stick. Job contracts a terrible disease. He is a physical horror. Terrifying to look at. He sits in the ashes, scraping his sores with the broken pottery of his former life. Still he holds fast to faith, “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

The rest of the book is a litany of Job’s anguish and anger at God. He yells. He screams. He weeps. He is bitter. He is resentful. He is demanding. He refuses to accept easy answers. Refuses to settle for superficial theology. He plumbs the depths of unimaginable pain and suffering. And the most amazing part of the story comes at the end when he finally comes to the end of himself and finds God waiting for him there. I don’t know if Job was a real person but the question this book raises is one of the most real a believer can possibly face. Do we fear God for no reason? Do we love God for who He is or because of the blessings He has poured out on our lives? Will our love stand the test of suffering? There are no easy answers. One only faces this question when one comes face to face with the end of themselves and there in the darkness, they find God.

Andrew Brunson is a missionary and pastor. He was imprisoned for his faith in Turkey. For two years or more, he languished as his fate became a subplot in an international standoff between the United States and Turkey. Everything he had was taken from him. Twenty years of faithful work in country was flushed down the drain. He was barely allowed access to his family or the outside world. The

charges he faced were untrue. The trials he endured were unjust. He suffered from terrible bouts of depression and despair. After he was released, he spoke at a national meeting I attended. He relayed all he had endured. He made no attempt to glorify his persecution. He spoke humbly and authentically and powerfully about how he reached such a low point, he lost faith. But in that moment when he had nothing left. In that moment when he let everything go. In that moment when all hope was literally lost. All he found himself saying over and over again was “Jesus...Jesus...Jesus.”

You and I may never suffer like Job or Andrew but we are all familiar with pain. We all know heartache. We all know what it's like to feel bitter disappointment. We've all tasted suffering on some level. We all probably know what it feels like to come to the end of ourselves. The question we will all have to face in those moments – if we haven't had them already - is this..."Do we fear God for no reason?" When everything is stripped away, is God enough? Is He sufficient? Is He worthy of our love and devotion simply because He is God?

Readings for tomorrow: Job 6-9

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January 25, 2022
Compassion

Readings for today: [Job 6-9](#)

Father, so often I get anxious in the face of suffering. I want to rush to solve the problem, relieve the pain, find some reason or rationale to explain it. Help me to manage my own anxiety so that I might truly sit with those who are hurting in the ashes of their lives and love them in the midst of it all.

“Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, 'A man is conceived...Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire?...Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul?’” These are just a few of the gut wrenching questions Job asks. After experiencing so much misery. So much tragedy. So much pain. He finally reaches the point of utter despair. His friends are at a loss. They don’t know how to help. They are afraid for their friend. And as they sit with their friend in the ashes of his life, an anxiousness begins to grow within them. Every word Job speaks only increases their anxiety. Their feelings of helplessness. Their feelings of hopelessness. Finally, they can’t take it anymore and they begin to respond.

How do I know this is what Job’s friends are experiencing? Because it’s what I experience every time I walk into a similar situation with people I love. I have been in the emergency rooms with parents as they said goodbye to their children. I have been in the neonatal units watching infants struggle for every breath. I have sat at the bedside of those dying from cancer and tried to bring comfort to their loved ones. I have been in the developing world and seen life-threatening poverty. I have prayed over men and women whose condition is utterly hopeless because they simply do not have access to the resources they need to survive. In EVERY single case, I feel helpless. Inadequate. Afraid. Frustrated. These anxious feelings threaten to overwhelm me and, if I am not careful, can cause me to say things more for my own benefit than for the good of others. This is what we see playing out in Job’s conversations with his friends. They are experiencing all kinds of emotions as they sit with Job and eventually reach a breaking point where they feel they have to respond.

Eliphaz is the first to speak. “Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope? Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off?” (4:6-7) Now this is a theologically true statement. The fear of God is our confidence. Walking in integrity with God is our hope. God promises to protect the innocent and the upright. These things are all true. At the same time, speaking these words to a man who has lost all he holds dear and who, even now, suffers from sores and wounds that are infected with worms is insensitive and superficial. What Job needs is not an answer to why he is suffering but friends who will simply sit and listen and let him process his pain for however long it takes. Yes, it is true that “man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.” (5:7) But for Eliphaz to suggest to Job that if they could exchange places, he would “would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause, who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number” (5:8-9) is patently absurd. Eliphaz simply has no idea how he would respond were he in Job’s condition and that’s why his words fall on deaf ears.

Job responds with a stinging rebuke. “He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty. My brothers are treacherous as a torrent-bed, as torrential streams that pass away...They are ashamed because they were confident; they come there and are disappointed. For you have now become nothing; you see my calamity and are afraid.” (6:14-15, 20-21) He clearly sees their fear. He clearly sees their discomfort. He clearly sees their anxiety as they sit helpless before him. He knows they are struggling with how to respond. But he also knows Eliphaz’s answer is to far too simplistic.

Suffering and sin do not exist in a one to one relationship. This situation has nothing to do with cause and effect. Eliphaz's theology is far too superficial to explain why some people suffer in extraordinary ways when they have not extraordinarily sinned. Nor is it adequate to explain why some people prosper in extraordinary ways when they clearly are extraordinary sinners!

Once again, Job cries out to God. "What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him, visit him every morning and test him every moment? How long will you not look away from me, nor leave me alone till I swallow my spit? If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind? Why have you made me your mark? Why have I become a burden to you? Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be." (7:17-21) This is raw. This is real. This is the kind of honest emotion God invites from His children. We can talk to God about anything. Nothing's off limits. Nothing scares God. He's a big boy. He can handle even the deepest of our emotions. And Job's words here in this passage invite us to share our deepest, most intimate thoughts and feelings with God.

But such raw emotion is too much for Bildad. He feels he has to rush to God's defense. (As if God ever needs us to defend Him!) "Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression. If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful habitation." (8:3-6) Brutal. Harsh. Unloving. Uncaring. Your children died because they sinned? Chalk that one up to "things never to say to people who are in pain!" But Bildad goes even further, insisting Job has clearly sinned and therefore deserves what he has received. If only Job will seek God (as if Job hasn't!!!), then he will be healed and restored.

Job clings to his faith. He continues to acknowledge the sovereignty of God. "Truly I know that it is so: But how can a man be in the right before God? If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times...How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser...If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him? Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse...For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both." (9:2-3, 14-15, 19-20, 32-33). Though Job is not "guilty as charged", he understands his position before God. This really isn't about guilt or innocence because again, suffering and sin do not exist in a one to one relationship. This is about Job's pain not his purity. This is about Job's suffering not his sanctity. This is about Job's heartbreak not his holiness. He is hurting and out of his hurt, he cries out to God.

Where are you hurting today? What heartbreaks have you experienced in your life? Where have you found yourself crying out to God? Or perhaps struggling to cry out to God out of fear of judgment? Know He is there for you. He is waiting for you. He is sitting with you now even in your pain. Where have you been like Job's friends? Struggling to find the right words to say when all you want to do is escape the situation? Have you ever said things more to ease your own conscience than to help the one in need? Repent. Confess. Ask for forgiveness and then ask God for the courage to have compassion. To sit with those in pain. To stand with those who suffer. To mourn with those who mourn.

Readings for tomorrow: Job 10-13

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January 26, 2022
Facing the Darkness

Readings for today: [Job 10-13](#)

Father, in the darkest moments of my life, I have found You faithful. You met me in my depression. You met me in my despair. Help me to remember You are always with me despite what I may be feeling or experiencing in a given moment or season of life.

Fear. Anger. Depression. These are familiar feelings. The fall of 2009 was a dark period in my life. My ministry lay in ruins all around me and I was utterly broken. I had resigned. As far as I knew, my career was over. I had a little severance but no idea what was next. How would I provide for my family? How would I feed my four children? My wife worked but it wasn't near enough to cover the bills. I was desperate. Alone. Afraid. For several months, I averaged about three to four hours of sleep a night. The rest of the time I would pace up and down in my living room, crying out to God. Fighting with God. Yelling at God. Weeping before God. The experience was deeply humbling. It took me to the end of myself and beyond. I was stripped. Laid bare before the Lord. Much of what I held dear was taken from me. My life shaken to its foundations.

“Why did you bring me out from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me and were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave. Are not my days few? Then cease, and leave me alone, that I may find a little cheer before I go—and I shall not return—to the land of darkness and deep shadow, the land of gloom like thick darkness, like deep shadow without any order, where light is as thick darkness.” (Job 10:18-22) I resonate with these words from Job. In the darkest time of my life, Job was my counselor. I spent hours with him, pouring over his words. Job gave me permission to acknowledge the darkness. Job gave me courage to face the darkness. Job helped me understand that it is in the deepest darkness of our lives, our lowest point, that we finally come face to face with God. It’s a terrifying experience. To come before the Lord naked. With empty hands. With nothing of our own to cling to. To walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Shall we accept good from God and not evil? Those were Job’s words to his wife when he was stricken with disease. For me, it was the words of the prophet Isaiah, “Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” (Is. 53:10) Yes, I know these words refer primarily to Jesus but the Spirit impressed them on my heart as well. What if it’s God’s will to crush me? To put me to grief? Is my theology big enough to include the temporal suffering of the righteous? Clearly, for Zophar and the rest of Job’s friends, it is not.

“If you prepare your heart, you will stretch out your hands toward him. If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not injustice dwell in your tents. Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not fear.” (Job 11:13-15) Zophar takes the knife from Bildad and twists it deeper. Job continues to defend himself against his well-meaning but misguided friends. He rejects their superficial understanding of God. He continues to press his case against the Almighty. Job is processing his faith out loud as it were. He has reached the point of despair and the open question that looms over this entire book is this - will God answer? Will God respond? Will God meet us in our despair?

Job seems to believe so. “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him...” (Job 13:15) Does our faith transcend even death? Does our hope and trust in the Lord extend beyond the boundaries of this life? In

our darkest moments, do we believe “even the darkness is not dark to You? The night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with You.” (Psalm 139:12) This is what I discovered. When things were at their most desperate. When life was at its most uncertain. When everything I held dear was slipping through my grasp, this one truth remained. God. And when that realization came flooding in, everything changed. Not my circumstances. Not my fortunes. Not my future. Those things were still very real and very scary and it took a long time to fully recover. No, what changed for me was the orientation of my heart. The orientation of my soul. My faith moved from my head to my heart to an even deeper place. I received from God a foundation not made with human hands that continues to sustain me to this day.

Suffering is never without purpose. Not with God. In fact, it's often where He does His best work.

Readings for tomorrow: Job 14-17

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January 27, 2022
The Problem of Pain

Readings for today: [Job 14-17](#)

Father, help me attend to the pain of the world. The pain of those I love. The pain of those I live among. Help me to find the courage to walk back into pain even when everything in me wants to run or avoid or close my eyes or shut my ears. For there is where I will find You.

“Pain won’t kill you.” Miss Sarah shared those words with me when I first visited her. She was 95 and living at home by herself. I was all of 29 years old and a freshly minted pastor just out of seminary. As I listened to her story, my heart just broke. She had been battling a host of diseases for decades. She had fought off various cancers. She could barely walk due to her COPD. She had a degenerative back condition that left her in excruciating pain. She was also one of the meanest, nastiest people you will ever meet. She treated the home health nurses that cared for her terribly. Constantly cussing them out and calling them names. She did the same to her family to the point where they hated coming around. I visited her about once a month to serve her communion since she was one of our homebound members. There were many times I left without serving her the elements because she refused to confess her sins before the Lord and I refused to make a mockery of the sacrament. During those times, she would cuss me out as I headed out the door. But she always welcomed me back the next month and along the way there would be these breakthroughs. Moments of grace where a window would open into her soul. She would weep. She would confess. She would repent. Those were sacred moments where God’s Spirit rushed in.

The pain Job feels is relentless. It is ruthless. It is excruciating. With no end in sight. He longs for death. Longs for the release of the grave. (I cannot tell you how many times I prayed with Miss Sarah for the Lord to take her as she slept. This was her most heartfelt prayer request.) The way Job describes his experience is almost painful in itself...

“But the mountain falls and crumbles away, and the rock is removed from its place; the waters wear away the stones; the torrents wash away the soil of the earth; so you destroy the hope of man...He feels only the pain of his own body, and he mourns only for himself.” (Job 14:18-19, 22)

“Surely now God has worn me out; he has made desolate all my company. And he has shriveled me up, which is a witness against me, and my leanness has risen up against me; it testifies to my face. He has torn me in his wrath and hated me; he has gnashed his teeth at me; my adversary sharpens his eyes against me...I was at ease, and he broke me apart; he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces; he set me up as his target; his archers surround me. He slashes open my kidneys and does not spare; he pours out my gall on the ground. He breaks me with breach upon breach; he runs upon me like a warrior.” (Job 16:7-9, 12-14)

“My spirit is broken; my days are extinct; the graveyard is ready for me.” (Job 17:1)

Job’s pain is an endless cataract, cascading down on his body, mind, and soul. There is never an end to it. It is so terrible and horrifying, I’m sure it made Eliphaz want to squeeze his eyes shut and close his ears. He simply cannot handle what he’s seeing and hearing. So he opens his mouth again and this time one can hear his frustration. “But you are doing away with the fear of God and hindering meditation before God... Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; your own lips testify against you... Why does your heart carry you away, and why do your eyes flash, that you turn your spirit against God and bring

such words out of your mouth?” (Job 15:4, 6, 12-13) I cannot tell you the number of times I got frustrated listening to Miss Sarah. Over and over again, I felt compelled to rebuke her. Correct her. Challenge her. Her racist rants were offensive. The way she spoke of her kids disrespectful. Even the way she talked about God made me angry. I cannot tell you the number of times I threw up my hands and walked away. And yet, God’s Spirit kept bringing me back. Forcing me to walk into her living room where she lay in her hospital bed and engage her once again.

C.S. Lewis once said, “Pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” The reality is God was trying to “rouse” Miss Sarah. In the midst of her suffering, He reached out for her over and over again. His love never wavered. His faithfulness never failed. His grace never reached its limit. As dark as things have gotten for Job - and they will get darker still before the dawn - God is present. Always there. Hovering in the background for now but by the end of the book, manifesting Himself in all His glory. And for centuries, He has used Job’s pain as a megaphone to rouse our deaf and dying world.

Readings for tomorrow: Job 18-21

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January 28, 2022
Hearing Job

Readings for today: [Job 18-21](#)

Father, my only hope in life and death is that I belong body and soul to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He reigns sovereign over my life. He is good and righteous and faithful and true. He will never leave me or forsake me. This is my hope. Help me to hold fast to what I believe even when everything around me seems to be falling apart.

In the midst of his terrible suffering, Job holds fast to three fundamental convictions...

God is sovereign.

God is good and just.

God is faithful.

These convictions give him the strength to resist his friends when they offer their simplistic, superficial, and ultimately heretical explanations. They also give him the courage to stand before the judgment seat of God, trusting the Lord for vindication. We see this reflected in what are perhaps the most famous verses in the Book of Job, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!” (Job 19:25-27) Job, of course, has no idea who Jesus is. The life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God will not be revealed for many centuries. But Job does have faith. He looks forward, as do all the Old Testament saints, to a future yet to be revealed, trusting in a God who will make all things right and all things new.

Job’s suffering resists all logic. It resists any and all attempts to make sense out of it. It resists the formulaic notions we have about cause and effect. Blessing and curse. Health and wealth. It forces us to grapple with the hard truth that the righteous do suffer. The unrighteous do prosper. Bad things happen to good people. Good things happen to evil people. There is no rhyme or reason to these things. Time and chance happen to us all as the writer of Ecclesiastes once wrote. The world we live in is broken. Utterly. Completely. It is a world enslaved to the power of Sin. A world ruled by the tyrannical fear of Death. If things happen to go well for us in this world, it is not because we are good or because we earned it. It is far more likely that it is random chance. This is why we cannot set our hearts on the things of this earth but on things above.

A friend of mine recently watched a show where the Book of Job was featured. The conclusion of the character who was wrestling with the text was that ultimately all Job received in the end was new children and a case of PTSD. That’s actually a common interpretation of the text both in our culture today and in many churches. Like Job’s friends, it’s a far too simplistic approach to the text. It betrays our unwillingness to really sit and take the time to “hear” Job. To marvel at his courageous faith. To wonder at his steadfast, some may call it stubborn, refusal to let go of the goodness and justice and sovereignty of God. Why doesn’t Job ever throw in the towel? Why doesn’t Job do what his wife suggested at the beginning? Why doesn’t Job curse God and die like so many have throughout the centuries and like so many do today? Because Job believes. Job has faith. He knows his Redeemer lives! He knows he will meet God face to face after he dies! He trusts God to be faithful! Trusts God to be sure! Trusts God to be true! Trusts God to be good! And though it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God, Job ultimately trusts God for his vindication.

Readings for tomorrow: Job 22-24

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January 29, 2022
Doubling Down

Readings for today: [Job 22-24](#)

Father, above all, I long to place my trust in You. Far too often I place my trust in myself. My ability. My wisdom. My resources. My desires. They almost always fail me. Help me to learn to look beyond the temporary pleasures of this world to that which is eternal.

I remember vividly the last time I gambled at a casino. It was in the late nineties before I became a pastor. I was on a business trip to Las Vegas and a friend of mine and I decided to play craps. We had a good night. When it came time for me to roll, I hit a hot streak. Rolled for almost an hour without hitting a seven. It was crazy. People were cheering. Money was being made hand over fist. Frankly, I've never experienced anything quite like it. In the middle of all the chaos, a homeless man shuffled in. The lines in his face told the story of a hard life on the streets. He hadn't showered in days. His teeth were almost gone. His eyes were blurry and unfocused. He held a crumpled up \$20 bill he'd found in the gutter somewhere. He threw it down on the table. I promptly rolled a seven. The board cleared. The run was over. Everyone turned on this man. They cursed him. They jeered him. He just turned and shuffled away, never saying a word.

I sometimes think about that man when I pray. I wonder where he is? Where life took him? If he ever got any help or if he just continued to barely survive on the streets? Doubling down each chance he got when someone gave him some money? I think about my own life. In so many ways, I am just like him. Doubling down on the sin in my own heart rather than humbly submitting to God. As I read Eliphaz's words this morning, I can feel his frustration boiling over. The general theological principle he's held to his entire life - the righteous prosper, the unrighteous are punished - has failed him. But rather than humbly recognizing the failure and taking a step back, he doubles down. He attacks his dear friend Job. He accuses him of crimes against God. "Is not your evil abundant? There is no end to your iniquities." (Job 22:5) You have robbed your brothers. You have stripped the naked. You have withheld water from the thirsty. You have not fed the hungry. You have treated widows and orphans with disdain. Over and over again, he verbally assaults his friend. Some have asked why Satan is not more visible in this story? Do we not hear him in the accusations Job's friends lob over and over again?

How does Job respond? He doubles down on God. "Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would pay attention to me. There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge." (Job 23:3-7) Job is confident in God's justice and righteousness. Confident God will hear his prayers. Confident God would pay attention to him, unlike his friends who seem so bent on contending with him.

The problem, of course, is Job can't seem to find God in the midst of his suffering and pain. Though he's assailed the heavens, they seem shut up. Though he's cried out, all he's received so far is deafening silence. Job has done his best but to no avail. "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him." However, he does not despair. Why? Because he trusts God. "He (God) knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold." (Job 23:10) Though Job can't seem to find the way to God, God knows the way to him. And at the end of all the trials and

all the trauma, Job is confident God will make things right. Job is confident he will emerge better than before. Refined. Purified. Sanctified as God separates the gold from the dross in his life.

Admittedly, I am partial to these verses. When things have been at their darkest in my own life. When I've struggled with uncertainty and doubt and fear. When the trials I've faced have taken me to the end of myself. The end of my resources. The end of my plans. Job 23:10 has been my comfort and my hope. I know what it's like to double down on sin. I know what it's like to double down on self-destruction. I know what it's like to double down in my pride and arrogance. And in those moments, God has broken me utterly and completely. Humbled me in so many ways. He has laid me low to teach me about His sufficiency and grace. He has used the trials of my life to refine me. Purify me. Sanctify me. And His work is not done. Not until I reach glory.

Readings for tomorrow: None

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January 31, 2022
The Danger of “Worm” Theology

Readings for today: [Job 25-28](#)

Father, help me to see myself as You see me. Created in the image of God. Set a little lower than the angels. Crowned with glory and honor. Fallen? Yes. Sinful? Undoubtedly so. Broken? Without a doubt. Loved? Beyond all measure.

I found myself getting tears in my eyes today as I read these words from Bildad. “How can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure? Behold, even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not pure in his eyes; how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm!” Tragically, I’ve known far too many Christians who’ve believed such lies. I’ve heard far too many preachers who’ve proclaimed such lies. I am quite sure I myself fell into these lies when I was young and foolish. Before I became acquainted with grief and suffering. The Bible is clear. Human beings are made in the image of God. (Gen. 1:27) Human beings are crowned with glory and honor and made a little lower than the angels. (Psalm 8:5) Human beings are loved beyond all measure. (John 3:16) As such, we must reject any theology that declares us to be something we are not. We are not maggots. We are not worms. We are not despised or rejected or scorned or shamed. We beloved.

Now I know why the Bildads of the world believe such things. The Bible is just as clear that we are conceived in iniquity and born into sin. (Psalm 51) All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) None of us is righteous and even are good deeds done with the best of intentions are not pure. (Isaiah 64:6) Yes, the gulf that exists between us and God is vast and immeasurable. He is the very definition of holiness and purity and by comparison, one might indeed conclude that we are like maggots or worms. But this is not a helpful comparison! In fact, it’s not even a biblical comparison! Over and over again, the Bible declares the utter uniqueness of God. “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” (Ex. 15:11) God is wholly other. He stands alone without equal or peer. He is always separate and distinct from all He has made. He exists on a level we cannot fathom or understand. Nor are we intended to. Our role is to worship. Our role is to obey. Our role is to serve. We are not to seek to be like God. That was the original temptation in the Garden! Instead we are to seek to bring God glory. To honor God with our lives. To bear His image with humble and glad and obedient hearts.

C.S. Lewis once said that humility is not thinking more highly of yourself than you ought or less of yourself than you ought but simply thinking of your “self” less. We see this dynamic play out throughout the Bible. There are times when God’s people think more highly of themselves than they ought. Adam and Eve in the Garden. Many of the kings of Israel and Judah. The false prophets who claim to speak for the Lord. It never ends well. God’s judgment puts them in their place. Then there are the times when God’s people think less of themselves than they ought. I think of the despair of the people in Egypt. Those moments when God’s people felt forgotten in exile. Jeremiah’s laments. This too is not good. In these moments we see God encourage, confront, and exhort His people to remember who they are and, more importantly, whose they are! You see, the key to humility is taking our eyes off ourselves and keeping them fixed on Jesus. He is the author and perfecter of our faith! He will bring to completion the good work He has begun in everyone who believes in Him!

Readings for tomorrow: Job 29-32

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