

Free from Sin

The Audacious Claim of Gospel Freedom and
What It Means for You

Jonathan Leonardo

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Para Ana Dulvis y Keren.

To the Agreement, it's better together.

CONTENTS

The Gospel Liberates	3
Freed from Sin	9
Always Child	27
A Tale of Two Adams	49
You Are in the Spirit	71
Lawless No More	87
Living by Faith	119
Forgiveness Is... ..	141
Repent and Confess	161
Some Loose Ends	181
Notes	187
About the Author	189

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel Liberates

Let's talk good gospel. This gospel is first and foremost a gospel of freedom. But, what is it freedom from?

And the more important question is, how can we be free?

By the time you finish reading this book, you will have answers to both questions and live free as God intends. So many of us have lived a disempowered life because we haven't understood that freedom is ours now!

Three Rules to Live By

There are three rules we want to be attentive to through the following pages. I apply these rules in both preaching and writing, and they will serve us well as we journey together.

Rule #1: Keep Reading, There Is Resolution

Sometimes I might express ideas that don't seem to reach a clear resolution in the moment. If you find yourself scratching your head from time to time and wondering, "What's the point?"—well, keep reading! Important truths can take time to explore, but I assure you—keep reading, there is resolution.

Rule #2: Please Don't Hear What I'm Not Saying

Have you ever been in conversation and your conversation partner says, "What I hear you saying is, ____" but it's not at all what you said? Sometimes, we put words in each other's mouths, perhaps interpreting what another person says to reflect what we ourselves want to hear. Culture and upbringing, as well as our personal mindsets, can act as a lens influencing the way we hear or read others' words. Be on guard against this, because it can create unnecessary barriers to communication and to understanding the truth. So please, listen carefully and don't hear what's not being said.

Rule #3: Believe the Word of God Over Your Life.

I mean this in two ways. One, be willing to believe the word of God over, above, in, and all around your life. Two, be willing to believe His word instead of your life lived—your experiences, assumptions, and expectations.

Be willing to believe what His word says, instead of how you feel about your circumstances.

The Bible conveys some things you might think can't apply to you, things that you may feel are not true in your life, but it's not about *your* life. It's about His life over you. It's about surrendering your old life and ideas so you can live your new life through Him. It's about accepting that everything true about Him is also true about you. How is that possible? Because you are in Him—and anything *not* true about Him is *not* true about you.

Lies travel with circumstances. What does that mean? It means that lies are introduced via the circumstances of life. The antidote to lies is truth. Don't ever let circumstances, the lies attached to life, speak louder than truth. Remember Rule #3 and let the word of God speak over your life.

According to His word, there is not only truth revealed in this good gospel, but also freedom!

Free Sons and Daughters

Jesus visited a synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth and left the people marveling when He said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... to proclaim liberty to the captives” (Luke 4:18 NKJV). Was Jesus there to finally deliver Israel from Roman occupation? What kind of liberty was He proclaiming?

In an unexpected twist, Jesus declared that He came to deliver people from sin and its enslaving lordship. In John chapter 8, Jesus told the religious leaders they had been

slaves to sin, but believing His word would set them free. The religious leaders refused; we should not. Jesus Christ came to set the lost sons and daughters free. And that is who you are—sons and daughters of God—and freedom is yours now.

Yet, some of us look at our lives and see that it doesn't line up with what the Bible states. So, how can we be free? We try to improve, but we fail. Then we try again with the same result. We begin to believe that slavery to sin is an ever-present reality. If we try to do what the Bible says and we constantly fail, then of course we are slaves, right? Believing this, we conclude that freedom is not really ours but thank God for His grace because one day it will be. (Spoiler: that's not true.)

The reason we don't see our freedom lived out in our lives is not because we are still slaves, but because we have not had our minds renewed according to what is truly ours. By not living the truth of His word (Rule #3), we live in an endless cycle of promises made and failures experienced because we are measuring His word to our lives lived. If our lives lived feel like a series of shortcomings, we then start believing His word must not have penetrated in its fullness. By measuring the word of God through our lives, it can only be true if it "works" for me, but that is deception. The word of God is true because God is true. Because Jesus is alive, every word He speaks is true.

As believers, we live from truth because of one fundamental fact: Jesus is alive. Since He is alive, we can trust everything He said and the freedom He secured, even if we don't feel it or see it.

If you want to live a life of freedom, victory, and faith, ask yourself this: “*Am I ready to believe?*”

CHAPTER ONE

Freed from Sin

In the spring of 2002, I was in Matamoros, Mexico, the border town across from Brownsville, Texas. That part of the world becomes a destination at that time of year because—we know it well—spring break! I was considered an adult here, all twenty years of me. That meant I was free to partake of alcoholic drinks legally.

One night, my friends and I were guests at an establishment that specializes in lights that pulsed in rhythm with bass-heavy music. When the evening drew to a close, we made our way back towards the border to our hotel in Brownsville. As we headed to the border checkpoint, we met up with some other spring breakers, who happened to be from the Caribbean. I don't know if you know anything about Caribbean folk, but they can throw together a certified party out of nothing.

Now, my mind wasn't quite operating in peak condition. Remember, my twenty-year-old self was across the

border for a reason. So here I was, drunk (if you haven't picked up on that by now) and carrying on with my new-found friends. I was caught up in the moment, chanting and singing and basically being a typical drunk person. I was having a great time, but then we got to the checkpoint and things went south (pun intended) quick.

It's worth noting here that before the year 2002, people could cross the border and simply state what part of the country you were from. But in 2002, that was no longer the case because September 11, 2001, forever altered the way the United States secured its borders.

The border patrol agent asked me what my country of origin was. Now, remember, I was singing and chanting with people from the Caribbean. (Did I mention I'm from the Caribbean? This is an important piece of information.) Swept up in a tide of cultural nostalgia and mindless euphoria, mixed in with a growler's worth of beer, I confidently answered the border patrol agent, "I'm from Dominican Republic!" Just to be clear, I am an American citizen and have been for a very long time.

The border patrol agent then looked at me and promptly asked for my papers to prove that I could enter the United States. I got sober quick. "Oh no, I was really just playing. I'm from Boston." He said, "No, no, no that is not what you said. You said you are from the Dominican Republic." Again, I tried to state my case, "I was just playing because we had been partying." He wasn't having any of it and asked for my papers again.

Now, about these papers. My good Caribbean mother had told me never to carry my passport around willy-nilly.

Someone might steal it and then you'd have a good old-fashioned case of identity theft. So I was instructed to keep it in a safe place: the sock drawer! I heeded her words, and that's where my papers were—back in my sock drawer in Keene, Texas.

Now, note this crucial insight: in the moment of decision, at a point when it really mattered, that which was true about me—my American nationality—was not confessed because I was not in my right mind. Again, in the crucial moment, I declared wrongly the truth of who I am (American) because my mind was set on something that was no longer mine—my Dominican nationality. Lost in the stupor of an intoxicating drink, swept up in the emotions of a former identity, I spoke contrary to the truth of who I was.

Back to the border. Given my inability to produce my papers, things escalated quickly. I became angry and started to yell and curse. The truth is, I threw a tantrum. The agents didn't take too kindly to this, but they were very hospitable and put some jewelry on me—the kind that goes arounds your wrists. They placed me in a holding cell with one other guy, named Mohammad. Although we were both drunk, we started talking theology and tried to convert each other. I was making a case for Jesus and he for Allah. I'm certain we both sounded convincing.

As the night wore on, so did my tantrum. I grew angrier, yelled some more, and vented some righteous indignation at anyone who would listen. "This ain't right. I am an American citizen. You can't do this. I know my rights." Later, the border agents took me through processing and

were still unable to verify my nationality. With this, I grew more irate. Finally, they had enough of my tantrum and moved me outside. It was a hot and muggy night, and I smelled terrible. They took the handcuffs off and started walking toward me. I backed up, asking what they were doing. They kept walking. I kept being belligerent, and they kept walking.

Finally, they stopped. I looked at them. They looked at me. Then they looked down, I looked down and realized there was a big yellow line between us. The side where the border agents stood said, “USA,” and the side I was standing on said, “Mexico.” The Mexican border agents then came and escorted me to the Mexican version of a detention room. Here I spent the next few hours getting sober in a Mexican jail.

What is my point here? My point is, I found myself in this situation because at the moment of decision, I did not rightly declare my true identity. I was drunk, my mind was not clear, and because of that, I was in a prison to which I didn’t belong.

Your Purpose

Are you clear on your identity? Do you know who you are? Do you know whose you are? As I travel all over, I ask a question that reveals if people have it right. I have found that it reveals if we have truly considered what we have in Christ. Here it is: “What is your relationship to sin?”

I've had many responses to this question. One of my favorite responses was from a young lady who replied as if it were a relationship status update: "It's complicated."

More sobering was the answer I received at a church in New England. With a pained expression, a gentleman responded, "It's intimate." The way he said it caused me to feel the weight of it. *Intimate*.

So again, I'm asking you to consider your relationship to sin. As you do, let's visit a story in the Bible. In the book of Exodus, the children of Israel were slaves to Egypt. They had been promised a savior who would one day deliver them from slavery. This savior was Moses.

Immediately as Moses showed up, things began to happen: the ten plagues that began with the blood of the Nile River and culminated with the death of the firstborn. The theme of the firstborn made a noteworthy appearance, but why?

Starting in Exodus 4, Moses showed up to deliver Israel. Notice how God framed what Moses would tell Pharaoh, "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me.' If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son" (verses 22–23).

Pharaoh had enslaved God's firstborn, and now God was stating that in the same manner Pharaoh had been treating Israel, God would treat Pharaoh's firstborn. Pharaoh had no regard for the life of God's firstborn, so in turn, God would have no regard for his firstborn.

The promise of an avenging angel was given. The tenth and final plague was pronounced. In Exodus 11, we see

that all the firstborns of Egypt were under the threat of death. However, in Exodus 12, God instructed Israel on how to avoid this death decree.

As promised, the death angel came. If the children of Israel did not want the firstborn of their household to die, they were to take blood from a lamb and put it on the doorposts. What happened to the lamb? The lamb was slain and roasted, and everybody in the home, including the redeemed firstborns, were to gather and eat the lamb along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. They were to do this while fully dressed, ready to flee. This meal would fuel their walk into freedom.

As the death angel passed over the nation of Israel, all those who trusted in what God promised and put the lamb's blood over their doorway redeemed the firstborn within their walls. Those inside who partook of the meal, participated in the death of the lamb. They received the fuel that would energize their move into freedom. Freed from the oppression and slavery under the false god Pharaoh and the oppressive regime of Egypt.

Let's fast-forward in the story a bit, to the children of Israel at the Red Sea. Behind them came the chariots of Pharaoh; before them lay an uncrossable, turbulent sea. Here there was a sudden test of their faith. But God showed up, and the waters parted. The Israelites went through the water, but Pharaoh's army drowned in the sea as walls of water collapsed on top of them. When the Israelites turned around, the once turbulent Red Sea was now calm and looked as though it were made of glass. Again they were free, but still in need of provision.

Let's move forward again in the book of Exodus. As the Israelites went into the wilderness, they were protected from the heat of the day by a cloud that provided shade. In the cold of the desert night, a pillar of fire provided warmth. And, when they were hungry in the wilderness, God sent manna from heaven.

Now that His children were free, where was God taking them? After all the major events—deliverance, testing, water, cloud, fire, and manna from heaven—where was God leading His people? What was the point of this freedom walk on which they found themselves?

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

—Exodus 19:4

God was leading His people to the promised land. The promised land is a symbol representing the true promise, which is liberty through Jesus. He is God's firstborn. The people of God were drawn into the Firstborn by partaking in His death, via the sacrifice of the lambs, in order to be drawn into intimacy with God Himself—the One who is Three.

At what point did the children of Israel become free? Was freedom attained on the other side of the sea? Was freedom attained when they finally arrived to God? Was freedom attained as they received the bread in the wilderness?

Freedom was received when they walked under the blood-stained doorpost and were initiated into a new reality that the slain lamb secured. Freedom came from obedience to partake of the sacrifice and place the blood over your household. Freedom happened when they partook of what the firstborn had provided.

What is it that they were free from? They were free from the stain, the authority, the manipulation, the system, the slavery, and the oppression of Egypt and Pharaoh. As they partook of the lamb, the firstborn were washed and cleansed from all the residue of their former slavery so they could come to a place where they could receive intimacy with God.

So, let me ask you again: what is your relationship to sin? If you are still thinking you are a slave to sin, you haven't seen that what happened in the Exodus story has also happened to you.

Your Worth

Remember, be willing to hear the word of God over your life.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

—Romans 6:1-2

That's us, right? We are those who have died to sin. How can we live to something we are dead to? But, he can't be talking to us, because we know we are sinners, right?

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

—Romans 6:4-7

Did you know that? Through baptism, you are baptized into the death of Jesus so that in the same way He was raised, you are raised out of the water as a participant of the new life.

I used to believe that the resurrection language in Romans 6 was about the second coming of Christ, but no, it is not. The resurrection you and I experience is the new birth in Christ, signified in the baptismal waters. The old has passed away, and the new has come. New life is possible for you right now. The gift of God is that you would receive the liberty which He has already secured through the Lamb and Firstborn of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Consider verse 6:

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Through baptismal waters, we bury the old life and come up new. This is Exodus language. Our old ruler is drowned in the water, and the new life of intimacy with God is ours now. You are free from sin—not in the future, but you are free right now!

Our problem is that at the point of decision, when the circumstances of life come our way, we are declaring wrongly who we are. We believe we are still in Egypt when in fact, we have been transferred into face-to-face communion with God. We are no longer slaves. We are citizens of a new country but acting and behaving like we are still a part of the old.

Our minds have drunk the wine of Egypt. So, we are inebriated, thinking that we are less than what the Father says we are. We're drunk and not speaking in accordance with the truth that is ours in Jesus. We are letting our lives speak louder than the life of the Firstborn who has liberated us. We continue to identify with sin, not realizing that the problem in the New Testament is not sin—for He has condemned sin in the flesh. You and I are free from sin, right now. It is in Scripture.

The problem is that we do not believe it, so we accept bad theology that tells us we must *do* in order to *be*. I don't

do in order to *be* free. Why? Because I am free and have the privilege to walk out the freedom that is mine, full of confidence and truth. The Firstborn has liberated me from my old country and transferred me into the new.

I promise you the gospel gets way better. We can live with power and authority and conviction. I am not saying you will have a life where you never sin again, or that you are going to have incremental victory over sin. The language of freedom is not incremental. Incremental language leaves the impression that this freedom is an arduous, lifelong process of moral growth. Scripture teaches freedom *from* sin, and it's now. I live free because I have been given freedom from sin.

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

—Romans 6:8–11

When you and I die, our body (flesh) is divided from the breath of life and that division is properly called death. Similarly, when Jesus died, and subsequently resurrected, He separated humanity from sin in His body. In His body, God condemned sin (Romans 8:3). He who knew no sin came to be sin for our sake. Jesus died, condemning sin, and then burst forth into glorious day, leaving sin in the

grave and death along with it. He was resurrected with an incorruptible, indestructible life.

Jesus says to us, “If you believe in Me, what is mine I give to you. Live in freedom, for I am the firstborn from the dead. If you are just willing to believe that through my power you have been transferred into a new country, you will live with authority, dominion, and confidence, and with an unshakable truth that death cannot overcome.”

We are condemned sinners when our lives are not in Christ. But if the life I live, I live by faith in Christ Jesus, and sin has no hold on Him, then who am I? Second Corinthians 5:21 teaches that we are His very righteousness. We tend to get tentative about this language because we don’t want to be presumptuous, but it isn’t presumptuous at all. It’s taking God at His word and receiving the gift of a Father to His children.

You need to know this. In Christ we are free! The first move of the gospel is liberty: “He has anointed me to preach liberty to the captive” (Luke 4:18).

There are three areas of freedom that we will cover in the following pages. These are clearly taught in Scripture, and reveal a truth that can change lives.

First, we are free from condemnation. Paul teaches us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Our bondage to sin, its wages, and death has been severed. In Christ the damnatory sentence that is proper to sinners is no longer ours. We are free from condemnation.

Next, we are free from the curse of sin, which is death.

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

—Romans 6:23

We have life in Jesus Christ, and that life begins today. It is ours now! He came so that we would have life, and He has given us that life by faith through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we are free from a guilty conscience. In Christ, by faith, we have had our conscience cleansed from guilt (Hebrews 10:22). God has done what sacrifices and the law could not do, by cleaning our consciences from sin (Hebrews 10:2).

Now that we have been made clean, we have access that does not belong to slaves. This access is not given to sinners. That is why the high priest on the Day of Atonement had to be one hundred percent pure: because he could not come into the throne room of God with any stain of sin. Yet, the Bible tells us that we have direct access to the throne room. Why? Because the Firstborn has liberated us and covered us with His blood, so we can step into His victory, not ours. Jesus makes us free from condemnation and death. Free. *Free*. Free!

I am telling you, this gospel is good. We can run straight to the throne room of grace. Why? Because we have been liberated.

Walking in the Liberty of Forgiveness

I used to be a man who was addicted to lust. I was in ministry at that time, traveling to different parts of the world. I was deep in my sin because I didn't know the truth of the gospel. Having theological degrees did not help. Too often, they served as a mask, a decoy, and a diversion. I could wow audiences with my knowledge, but I had no life to give. So I found myself in the darkness of my own mind. In my life, in the privacy of my home, I ran to that which had me enslaved.

There I was, lost in my darkness and foolishness, and one day the Holy Spirit got a hold of me and said, "Jonathan, there is a Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. You can be free if you receive the Lamb." What? There I was amid my foolishness with the message: receive the truth of the Lamb, Son of the Living God; stand and be free. I don't know how the Spirit did it, but conviction came. I believed.

As I repented, I turned toward the truth of His word over my life and away from the foolishness. I received conviction about the truth of who I was because of what the Lamb had done. So, under conviction of the truth of sin, I finally saw that my ability to sin is not how He identifies me. I was a slave, and He came to set me free!

I was once a slave, dead in my sins and transgressions, but the love of a Father who called me His son who sent Jesus into the world to take away my sin. I was oppressed by a power I could not overcome, but Jesus did it for me. He overcame the power of sin and liberated me from a

prison I hated living in. I know now that my relationship to sin is what He affirms it is: dead! I have the privilege of living free in victory. I know now what to answer when the circumstances of life try to make me believe that I am what I used to be: I'm no longer a slave. I am free! And in Jesus Christ, by faith, you are free too!

WORKBOOK

Chapter One Questions

Question: Do you know who you are in Christ? Write a few sentences describing your identity in Christ. Does your life reflect this? What does it reveal about your current relationship to sin? Based on your identity in Christ, what *should* your relationship be to sin?

Question: Describe a time when you allowed your life experiences to speak louder than God's word. Identify the deception you believed based on your experience. What does God's word say in contrast to that deception? What can you do moving forward to place more value on God's word than your experience?

Action: Refer to your answer about your identity in Christ and what your relationship to sin should be. Does this reveal any sin in your life of which you need to confess and repent? What is a practical way you can walk in the freedom of forgiveness? Begin walking it out today.

CHAPTER TWO

Always Child

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

—Luke 15:1-2

Jesus is standing in front of two groups of people: one, a group of tax collectors and other blatant sinners; the second, Pharisees and scribes. Sinners, scribes, and Savior—where would you have been most comfortable in that crowd?

The two groups of people around Jesus did not get along, and there was a reason. The Pharisees believed the tax collectors and sinners were partly to blame for the continued Roman occupation. Let me explain. Israel was under occupation by Rome. The Jewish leaders believed that Israel was occupied by Rome because Israel had not kept the law and failed to honor God. They believed God was punishing them.¹

So to the Pharisees, it was simple: the sinners and tax collectors were at fault. In their minds, these sinners were the sort of people who don't care about the law."

But you also had the tax collectors. These individuals were not simply careless with the law; they were traitors in league with Rome, making money from the suffering of their people. As tax collectors, they enforced exorbitant rates that made them rich and kept their countrymen poor. They stole and skimmed from the people in order to line their own pockets, wreaking havoc on their people and community.

The Pharisees and the scribes saw this group of sinners and tax collectors as the bottom-dwellers of society: law-breakers and traitors. To rid themselves of these people would be doing the nation a favor. To attract their attention in a favorable way was to invite a cloud of suspicion over your own life. What sort of person would attract the interest of this deplorable group? Surely only a person of questionable character, the Pharisees concluded. Enter Jesus and His band of misfits, outcasts attracting tax collectors and sinners. So, imagine the Pharisees and scribes showing up just to see what sort of reprehensible teaching Jesus would present. Noting the presence of these two groups, Jesus began to speak.

Dividing the Inheritance

"There is a man who had two sons. The youngest son goes to his father and tells him to give him his inheritance..." As the Pharisees listened to the story, they must

have scoffed at the idea of young Hebrew man asking his father to give him his inheritance! They knew that by making such a despicable request, the young man is indicating to his father that he wished his father were dead so the son could have his money.

Certainly, the Pharisees expected a reaction proportionate to the offense, according to the law. At the very least, the father should have slapped him on the head, or at worst, would have taken him to the elders of the city to have him punished severely. But that was not the story Jesus was telling, and their offense would be validated.

Jesus continued by explaining that the father did the unthinkable: “And he divided his *property* between them” (Luke 15:12). The word translated *property* in this verse is where we get our word for “life.”² It is the Greek word *bios*, which is where we get *biology* (the study of life). So, this is important to understand because in the story, what Dad is basically doing is dividing all the wealth he has that pertains to his life. His wealth is derived from his land, and his land is intimately connected to his life.

To the Hebrew mind, a patriarch like this father would have a deep intimacy with the land. It is his heritage, passed down generationally from father to son, and from that son to his son. The land was a divine gift, first given as a gift from God, to be stewarded by the head of the family. That a patriarch would so easily give away his property to an insolent son was a shock to all sense of propriety.

The law of the firstborn son required that he receive two-thirds (“a double share”) of all the wealth while the

youngest gets the remaining third (Deuteronomy 21:15–17). The firstborn was always entitled to the double portion. In this case, given that the father divides his property between the two sons, the firstborn would receive 66 percent while the younger son would receive 33 percent. So the young son leaves home, pockets full of money, free from the consequences of this great offense.

As Jesus was telling this story, the Pharisees and scribes must have been incensed at the idea of such a permissive father and a reckless son who was out of control. The young man sets off for a distant country. He goes on to live a wild and wasteful life, spending lavishly on a lifestyle contrary to the way he was brought up in.

I'm certain he has a lot of friends as long as he has money to burn in his pocket. But Jesus revealed the consequences of his prodigious spending. The son finds himself caught in a severe famine, so, he hires himself out to "one of the citizens of that country" (Luke 15:15) and is sent to feed the pigs. When he feeds the pigs, he longs to fill his stomach with the pods the pigs are eating, but no one gives him anything. So here he is, broke and alone, feeding swine. He is a long way from home and quite removed from the wealth he once had. The Pharisees and scribes must have found a small sense of justice in this outcome. But Jesus still had more to say.

Coming Home

But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but

I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"

—Luke 15:17-19

It's stroke of genius really, this plan of his. He is hungry and broke, and it hits him: "I can go home!" He knows he can't return with his head held high as a dignified son of the estate, but maybe, just maybe, he could tell his father he is no longer worthy and then be received as a servant. Why not? The servants have their bellies full, and that's better than what he's presently enduring. So, the plan is to present himself as unworthy of being a son, but in hopes of being received as a servant, and thus leave the life of hunger behind, filling his belly.

Then, it's often explained, Jesus shocked the Pharisees with the reaction of the father, who receives his son back—the repentant prodigal son. But is that so?

I'm guessing that at some point, you have heard a sermon or teaching on, or at least an offhand reference to, the prodigal son. If so, I'm sure that the preacher or speaker emphasized repentance as the key to this parable. The prodigal son comes to his senses and realizes he has done wrong. He "humbles" himself and plans to come to the father as a servant to show his true contrition. Have you heard this? It's one of the popular takeaways.

Another is the idea that you can always go home. No matter what you have done, just come home and your Father will receive you. Or how about this takeaway: the Father is waiting for you; He is always simply waiting. But

the one that really gets me going is this: “God is the God of second chances.” I’m slightly perplexed by this one. If Jesus tells Peter to forgive seven times seventy times, then how can it be good news that God will give you a second chance? I promise, He gives us a lot more than mere second chances.

These are the major takeaways I hear, but the problem is that all of these morals or lessons fall short of the true focus of the parable. Each popular takeaway requires something of the prodigal—repent, humble yourself, come back home—but misses the point.

Let’s consider the repentance angle. Where in the text does the young man repent? We often read this into the bit where the text says he comes to his senses. But coming to his senses is not synonymous with repentance. In fact, the only other time that this phrase is used is when Peter realized that the angel that had liberated him from prison was not something he dreamt up; it was, in fact, real (Acts 12:5–17). In like manner, when the young man comes to his senses, he is coming to an awareness of the severity of the situation. He is realizing this is it; this is his lot in life—and his first concern is his stomach. There is no repentance. He came to his senses because he was hungry. So, he says to himself, “Man, I need to concoct a plan in order to get fed. But I know I cannot go back home as a son.”

Why does the young man know he cannot go back home as a son? This is worth noting because the Pharisees, scribes, tax collectors, and sinners know something that you and I don’t. They know something because they have

been reading the law of Moses. You and I tend to pass over those texts. But there is something in the book of Deuteronomy that informs us about the backdrop of the story, including why the Pharisees and scribes would have been so offended and why the young man in the story knows he can't go home as a son.

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, and they shall say to the elders of his city, "This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard." Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

—Deuteronomy 21:18-21

Our young prodigal fits the description above. So, this young man knows that if he goes back home as a son, he will not receive a standard welcome party. His "welcome back home" celebration would be the proper stoning his father was unwilling to execute in the first place. If he plans to go home and see his dad, he knows he cannot be received as a son, yet he is willing to position himself as a servant so that he can fill his belly. Again, this is not about repentance; his concern is for himself.

Here we are inclined to say more than what the text does, and to take that and make it binding. In reading repentance back into the young man's motives, we set up a

story where the son performs a ritualized act of humility. In this way of interpreting, the story, he's acknowledging that he is not worthy to be called a son, but—we read in—with wonderful grace, the father receives him back as a son. The subtle message is that the act of ritualized humility, in this case our notion of repentance, is the first, necessary step.

This dovetails quite nicely with the idea that “you can always come back home.” Home is always there, but it's on you to come back. Again, this is a lovely sentiment, yet if we read the earlier parables that Jesus used to frame this final illustration, we find that He shared two parables in which the thing that was lost was searched for. The set-up, then, points to how that which is lost is missed—and it is so severely missed that the owner is willing to forsake everything else to seek what is lost. Thus, the notion of coming back home is a sweet sentiment, but it's still not the point of the parable. If we take Jesus' other parables seriously and connect them to this one, the implication is that someone was looking for the son. “Home” was not passively waiting for his humble return. Home would have been looking for him.

Lastly, the father would not be limited to inclining his heart toward a second chance. God is not the God who simply receives you after a mess-up. He is the God whose doors are always open. Not only that, but He is also the one who comes looking. But now, back to the son.

So, the son thinks he cannot go back as a son because the law tells him he cannot be received with open arms. The law demands his life for his insolent behavior, by way

of a proper stoning. Here we find a point that we will return to, later: the law will not position you as a child, but as a sinner.

There is something else that is telling him he cannot go back. Let's take a look at the parable again. We know that each character in the story represents somebody. The father is, of course, God. In the immediate context, the prodigal son represents sinners and tax collectors, while the older brother represents the Pharisees and scribes.

There is one character whom we often overlook, but who seems to play an important role in the mind of the young prodigal. Luke 15:15 tells us, "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs." This citizen of another country is the first one who receives him as a slave. Knowing that the prodigal is under the condemnation of the law, the citizen of the other country receives him in a way contrary to the truth of who he really is: a son.

The Strategy of the Citizen

So, the citizen of the other country would have you believe that you are less than what your Father has said you are so he can keep you enslaved according to a false identity under the condemnation of the law.

When life presses on you, you cannot declare correctly. The citizen of the other country leverages your knowledge of the law and has you agreeing with him that you are no longer worthy to be called your Father's child. That lie

gets in your head, and you start thinking that the only way you can come to God is if you offer yourself as a servant. Because all you want from God is a little bit of forgiveness to live in peace—until the next time you fail, of course. This is a strategy of the enemy to position you in the lie of servanthood so you're only as good as your latest mistake.

Believing the lie that the citizen throws our way, we come to God like this: "I know I am nothing but a sinner, and I'm not worthy to receive the good things that You say are mine. Please receive me as Your servant. You are a good God, and because you are a good God, you are going to give me the goodness you promised if I come as a sinner. So, I come as a sinner, pleading for forgiveness."

I approached God this way for far too long. But inevitably, I'd get back up, go out and live in the world, and commit that act which I had promised I never would again. Then I'd feel condemned, under the law, and once more in need of something—not knowing that the Father had already given me everything I needed. But the cycle persisted, and I lived like I was not worthy to be called a child; so, I lived as a slave. "Daddy, I'm sorry I am here again. If I could just get some forgiveness, I will try to live like You want me to live." Then our Father, being the good Father that He is, reassures me, but I return to that which I had just left.

We go out and live contrary to the confessions that we've just made when our mindset remains on sin. Being under the law produces an introspective conscience that sees itself as a sinner instead of believing the truth of what He speaks over our lives.

A Son or a Slave?

Here is the thing about the prodigal son story. Every time we tell it, we concentrate on him being a prodigal not recognizing the entire time he was always a son. So, let me ask you a question. When the prodigal comes to his father and says, “Give me my inheritance,” is he a son or a slave? When he leaves, takes his money, and spends it all, is he a son or a slave? When he hires himself into servanthood to the citizen of the other country, is he a son or a slave? Certainly, he is a slave to sin. So, from his perspective, he considers himself a slave.

However, if we approach that same set of question from the perspective of the father, a different conclusion emerges. When the prodigal comes to Daddy and says, “Give me the money,” in Daddy’s eyes, is he a son or a slave? When he goes out and takes his father’s *bios* and uses it recklessly, in his daddy’s eyes, is he son or slave? When his daddy sees him in bondage with the citizen of the other country, does his daddy see him as son or slave? Son. Every single time.

And so, the young man returns home not believing the truth of what his father sees over him, positioning himself as less than because the law and the citizen of the other country have made him believe that he is less than what the father has spoken. Because he is believing according to his life lived and not according to the word of his father over his life.

As he makes his way back home, maybe he is returning with trepidation. Maybe he is returning with fear, thinking

he must reach his father, and identify himself, before the elders at the gate see him and throw rocks at his head. Maybe he gets home and sees the silhouette of the elders, and they see him. He thinks to himself, “That’s it. These guys are going to see me first.”

As he draws closer, maybe an elder spots him and remarks to another that this boy “sure has some gall coming back here.” Maybe they lean over and pick up rocks to do what the law says should be his punishment. The young man sees them, but he cannot turn back. He is stuck between slavery and death. Maybe he yells out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

Stuck between slavery and death, suddenly he sees the silhouette of a figure he recognizes. He sees the broad shoulders and the hands that cradled him as a baby. And he sees something he has never seen before. He sees Daddy running. In the first century, in that culture, patriarchs didn’t run.³ But in this story, Daddy is running. Why? Because even though the citizen of another country would paint him as a slave, and although the law would condemn him to be stoned, it is the heart of the father who says, “You are neither a slave nor condemned; you are my son.” So, Daddy runs out with a robe and a ring and puts a robe on him, clothing him in his righteousness. He gives him a ring, meaning all power and authority that belonged to the father now belongs to the son.

And what has the son done? Absolutely nothing. If you read the story, you know that the son begins to try to get his servant monologue out, but to no avail:

And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to celebrate.

—Luke 15:21-24

His father does not allow his son to get the monologue out; he does not allow his son to position himself as other than what the father says. The father receives him, runs to him, and covers him. He kisses the prodigal and gives him the ring and the robe of a son. At no point in this story is the prodigal anything less than what he has always been: a son.

Meanwhile, the older brother sees that there is a party. He has been working in the field, where he heard that there was a gathering back at the home. He said, "How can this be? What is this noise?" (Luke 15:25-26). One of the servants told him his younger brother was back. They were having a party in his honor and had prepared the fattened calf.

We miss something here that's worth noting. If Daddy gave 66.67 percent to the older brother and 33.33 percent to the younger brother, how much was left for the father? Nothing. Now remember, the father divided his property between them, so who did the fatted calf belong to? The older brother! So the father is willing to take that which belongs to the firstborn son and give it to the prodigal.

No doubt, the firstborn son is angry. He believes that he has not been treated fairly—that the father has not honored his labor. But this is not so. The father reminds his firstborn that he was always with him and everything the father has belongs to him. He also reminds his firstborn of the reason for the celebration. “This is your brother. “My son who was lost has now been found. He was dead and now he is alive” (Luke 15:27).

What are you today? Are you a child or a slave? Are you believing the lies of the citizen of the other country that says you are less than? Do you go to church and sell yourself short, as a good-for-nothing sinner? You have been secured through the blood-covered doorpost. You have been seated in high places with the Firstborn. But too often, we fail to receive this. We say we are less than what the Father says we are. And we think we are being humble by positioning ourselves as good-for-nothing sinners, a condition from which the Father has redeemed us. We are no longer enslaved to the citizen of the other country; we are children, and we always have been. In Christ, by faith, we are free.

Let us not fail on this point, thinking that by positioning ourselves in agreement with the devil we are honoring God. Let us not grovel and practice some sort of ritualized act of humiliation, naming it repentance. You are not what the devil says you are! You are what the Father says you are! He says you are blessed, chosen, predestined to stand before Him in love. And He gave His firstborn Son. Take the fattened calf and receive it as yours.

Our Firstborn Brother

A final word on the older brother. In biblical culture, the firstborn son was responsible for bringing a wayward prodigal to justice. So, if a child did what the prodigal did, it was the work of the firstborn to go and get him and bring him to justice. What I mean by justice is rocks thrown at his head—a proper stoning.⁴ This is precisely why the story of Esau and Jacob is so potent, because Esau had the right to kill his brother. But at the end of it, what did they do? Brothers came together in love and reconciliation. According to the scholar Ken Bailey, the prodigal son story is Esau and Jacob all over again, where the firstborn should have killed the wayward second-born. He should have stoned him and brought him to justice.

But in this story, God is Father. You and I are the prodigal sons. We were in the pen with pigs and living under the law, in the slavery of sin. We took the Father's life that He gave us, and we wasted it on being judgmental, on being self-righteous. When we were lost in our transgression and sin, our firstborn brother came looking for us; Jesus, the older brother of our race, came and found us. This is the point of the earlier two parables: someone came looking.

He came and found me while I was neck-deep in my sin. My firstborn brother, Jesus, came to me and said, "Son of the Living God, rise up and go home for your Father calls you His." What did I say? "I can't come before God, because I know I am nothing but a sinner and I am not worthy to be called a son. I cannot be accepted back

in.” But what does my firstborn brother say? “Son of the Living God, rise up and go home for your Father calls you His.”

Notice how the path of the wayward, drunken son ends in Deuteronomy:

And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

—Deuteronomy 21:22-23

This is the same passage that Paul quoted in Galatians when he said:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

—Galatians 3:13-14

While we were wayward, prodigal, condemned by the law, and worthy of death, He sent our older brother to hang on a tree for us and bring us home. The Father says, “Your older brother is on the pole in your stead bringing the justice to you that you never thought you deserved.” That justice is His righteousness. For it was Jesus Christ who hung on a tree and was cursed on my behalf so that I,

while in the pigpen, might be able to go home because my Father poured out all of His riches in the very person of my older brother so that I might understand that the Father says I am a son, not a slave.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

—1 Peter 2:23

So, the older brother entrusts himself to the Father. Look at why in verse 24:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

—1 Peter 2:24

He hung on the cross to redeem us from the lie of the citizen of the other country and from the condemnation of the law. You are sons and daughters right now if you receive the work of the firstborn on your behalf. You are free from the lies of the enemy and from the condemnation of the law. That means you are free from sin if you receive the work of the firstborn in your life right now. The Father speaks better things over your life than that which the enemy speaks.

Think about this. When you think that you cannot come to your Father, who says that to you? The enemy or Jesus? The enemy. When you say that your sin is too great and

that condemnation is before you, whose voice is that, the enemy or Jesus? It is the enemy. When you say that you are less than the price your Father was willing to pay for you, you are in agreement with the enemy.

I am challenging you right now to understand the love of God that would give us Jesus Christ the Firstborn so that you and I might have life now! Not in the future, but now! You are free from sin in Christ Jesus *now*! I am willing to live according to the truth of that statement. I am free right now.

Are you free? Are you a son or a slave? You need to settle that. Don't let the enemy rob you of your inheritance.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Two Questions

Question: Who do you relate to most in this story of the prodigal son? The son who is off doing his own thing, wasting what is given to him, who agrees with another's definition of who he is? Or the son who, although a son, does not make use of what is already his? Are you living like a son or like a slave? Does your lifestyle and the posture of your heart communicate that you have received what the firstborn of creation—Jesus—did for you?

Question: What are some thoughts or beliefs that make you feel like you can't come to the Father? Where do those thoughts come from? What does God's word say in contrast to those thoughts?

Action: *The Father speaks better things over your life than that which the enemy speaks.* Create a list of Bible verses that reveal what God says about His children—

about you. Every day look in a mirror and read those statements God speaks over you in His word. Make them personal (using first-person pronouns or your name where you can). Do this exercise daily until those truths start to shape your identity and become the primary truth you believe about yourself. And if you ever start to doubt who you are, come back to this exercise. Here are some examples to start you off:

- I am God's child (John 1:12).
- I am God's friend (John 15:15).
- I have been justified (Romans 5:1).
- I am united with God and one with Him in Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17).
- I have been bought with a price and I belong to God (1 Corinthians 12:27).
- I am a member of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:27).
- I am blessed with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3).
- My life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3).

CHAPTER THREE

A Tale of Two Adams

Let's play a game. It's a favorite of mine, and it is one I play with audiences all over the country. The name of the game is "Which Adam is it?"

The rules are simple. We will read a particular passage from Paul. You'll find it in his most famous letter, the letter to the Romans. We will read together and ask ourselves a simple question: "Which Adam is it?"

In Romans 5, you'll find that Paul described two men. One is the Adam of Eden. The second is Christ, who in 1 Corinthians 15:45 Paul calls "the last Adam." Adam One was the Adam of Genesis, who had dominion over the earth. This Adam is called the son of God (Luke 3:38). He lost the dominion of the earth because of disobedience. Sin and death came into the world through Adam One.

Adam Two is from heaven. He was the promised Firstborn found in the book of Genesis. He was the promised seed come to restore what Adam One lost. This new

Adam would restore dominion; He redeemed that which was lost.

You may want to use a pen to circle the correct Adam after every question. One distinction worth remembering as we proceed is this: Adam One is of the flesh, and Adam Two is of the Spirit.

Adam One or Adam Two?

Turning to Romans 5, we will begin with verse 12 and work our way to the end of the chapter. Here Paul laid out a clear distinction between what Adam One brought into the world and what Jesus, Adam Two, has brought. Now, let's get ready to play "Which Adam is it?"

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

—Romans 5:12

Sin—where does it belong? Adam One or Adam Two?
Death—Adam One or Adam Two?

...for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.

—Romans 5:13

Law—Adam One or Adam Two?

Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

—Romans 5:14

Transgression—Adam One or Adam Two?

A quick word on a word. When Paul said that Adam was a “type of the one to come,” by “type” he meant that Adam was a shadow or a symbol representing something that was coming later. Adam prefigured another coming, of one who would truly bring dominion.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

—Romans 5:15

Free gift—Adam One or Adam Two?

Grace—Adam One or Adam Two?

Notice, the free gift is not like one man’s sin. Paul concluded that sin, death, and transgression have all come through Adam One. This leads to condemnation and death for all. But the free gift overflows; it superabounds. It overwhelms and overcomes all that Adam One introduced.

And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

—Romans 5:16

Condemnation—Adam One or Adam Two?

Justification—Adam One or Adam Two?

What does it mean to be condemned? Jesus remarked, in John 3:16–18, that the one who does not believe is condemned already. We often have a notion that condemnation is the consequence of rejecting Jesus, but for Paul condemnation is the consequence of being born into Adam One. Why? Because through his trespass, the many were plunged into the curse of sin and ultimately death. There is no person who does not emerge into the world destined for death. We are all born, and we all die. According to Scripture, that was not God's original design for humanity. Death is an unnatural act. It is common, and it has afflicted us all, but it is not proper to our nature. God did not design and create us for death. It's an enemy that was not meant for us, yet we exist in its grasp; this is condemnation.

We are all destined for that end, death, unless someone saves us. That is precisely what Jesus has done for us. He has stepped in and broken the power of death by condemning sin in the flesh, so we now stand justified. Yes, we were once in condemnation, but because of Adam Two, we no longer stand condemned; we are justified freely. To

be justified is to stand before God in face-to-face communion without a spot or wrinkle. You have the privilege of standing blameless, holy, and without reproach because Jesus has establish you in a heavenly reality through His death and resurrection. To stand justified is to stand before God with the righteousness of Christ, given to you as a free gift, without a veil between you and God, because Jesus had made a way. It means to stand with a pure conscience because Jesus has cleansed us from the deceitfulness, the stain, and the curse of sin.

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

—Romans 5:17

Righteousness—Adam One or Adam Two?

Where did death reign? Through that one-man Adam One. As long as we remain in Adam One, we remain in the domain of death. Paul masterfully painted a dual picture: one Adam is trapped in the dark of night; the other is the image of the glory of God. Righteousness is a free gift given by Adam Two. It is His grace and His gift-giving that overcome the realm of death that Adam One introduced. It is not the work of a lifetime; it is simply a gift freely given because God is a gift giver. But the free gift is important, because this free gift is how we reign in life.

Righteousness restores the dominion, that Adam lost, returning it to us in Christ. Now Christ is King, and for those who partake in His righteousness, they also reign with Him.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

—Romans 5:18-19

There was one man who brought all this death on us, Adam One. It was through his disobedience that the many were made sinners. Notice that it was not through your actions. This is a crucial point to understand: we become sinners not because we sin; we sin because we are already sinners through Adam's disobedience. So in like manner, through one man's obedience, the many will be made righteous. How is it then that we become righteous? Through the obedience of Christ Jesus. It is not your obedience that makes you righteous; it is not your obedience that keeps you righteous. It is Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. His one act made you righteous, and His life in you keeps you righteous. Sinners are made in Adam One while the righteous live through Adam Two.

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin

reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

—Romans 5:20–21

Which Adam Do You Live By?

Now take a look at the words we have discussed so far. If you record the Adam One words and the Adam Two words in separate columns, under separate headings, can you see which word shows up on both sides? Look carefully and you'll see that the only word appearing in both columns is the word *Adam*! This is noteworthy because of the way that Paul continued to make the argument for what has been accomplished for us in Jesus.

From his two Adams in Romans 5, Paul moved into declaring that we have died to sin precisely because we have taken part in the life of Adam Two. In Romans 6:10, Paul said:

For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.

—Romans 6:10

When Jesus Christ died, what did He die to? It's important to remember that death is division. It is a separation, a disintegration of sorts. When you and I die at the end of our lives, our bodies are divided from the breath of life. The breath of life leaves, and what remains is our body. It is properly no longer us because we are not simply

a body; we are body and breath. So death divides. However, when Jesus died, what did He divide? Look at Romans 6:10 again: it tells us He died to sin, once for all. Jesus died to sin! He cut off the relationship between humanity and sin by laying down His life. He made a division between humanity and sin.

All of us who were born into Adam One have an intimate relationship with sin. Jesus did not. However, for our sake, Jesus at the cross became sin, went to the grave, condemned sin, divide humanity from sin, and united humanity with Him in His resurrection. In doing so, He made a break between humanity and sin. He divided sin from humanity. He did it once and for all.

This is the thrust of Paul's argument. We are in Christ and, thus, dead to and free from sin. Why? Because Adam Two was able to do what Adam One could not.

As Paul built this idea out, from Romans 5 into Romans 6, he tied it all together in the first four verses of Romans 7:

Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

—Romans 7:1–4

What About the Law?

Now, it's important to know the role of the law. What was it for? Why was it given? To whom was it given?

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

—Romans 3:19

First, we see that the law was given so that “every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable.” That is pretty inclusive. “The whole world” means everybody; so, the law speaks to everybody under it, which seems to include us all. But notice to whom the law was given, or said in another way, notice whom the law is for:

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

—1 Timothy 1:6–11

The law is not made for righteous people! The law is made for those listed in verses 9 to 11. The law is given to sinners. Why? Because it reveals their sin so they might recognize that they are under condemnation and run to that which can liberate them.

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more

—Romans 5:20

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it....

—Romans 3:20–21

So, the law is illuminating transgression and sin. However, the righteousness of God is manifested apart from the law. This is very important to understand. Why? Because the law and the prophets bore witness to the righteousness of God. They taught and preached about the righteousness to come. Embedded in the narrative and teaching of the law, the righteousness of God is prophesied. The twist that Paul illuminates here is that although the law had this prophetic function, it was not itself “the righteousness of God.” No, that came by way of Jesus! The law spoke about the righteousness that is to come, but it was not the righteousness itself.

Notice how Paul spoke about the law:

Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

—2 Corinthians 3:7-11

Now, we know that it was the Ten Commandments that were carved in letters of stone. Paul's argument here is one of contrast; he was not diminishing the Ten Commandments, but he was framing them properly in light of the ministry of the Spirit.

So do the ten commandments have glory? Yes, the law had so much glory that Moses' face shone. However, that illuminating glory would not last. Moses would talk with God and his face would be illuminated with the glory of God, but that illumination would slowly fade until he spoke to God again. Using this illustration, Paul drew a contrast between the role that the law plays and the role of the Spirit.

The Spirit, or the ministry of righteousness, is a permanent ministry. It cannot fade, and it will not go away. So if the law brought condemnation, but was fading, how much more will the ministry of righteousness that does not fade bring with it a permanent reality? Once you are in the

glory that surpasses the law, you do not go back to lesser glory.

For example, when my wife was my girlfriend, we had limited intimacy. But when we were married, we shared an intimacy that was proper to being married (wink, wink). I'll never go back to the girlfriend stage, because of the superior intimacy of the marriage covenant.

You see the contrast? The law could only point to the intimacy that the ministry of righteousness could bring. The law prophesied about this righteousness to come but could not give it.

For if a law had been given that would give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.

—*Galatians 3:21*

I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

—*Galatians 2:21*

The law was never intended for the righteous, because it could not give righteousness. But it could prophesy of a righteousness to come. It could highlight transgression. It was also able to restrain lawlessness by creating a boundary establishing what righteousness should be like.

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

—Galatians 3:23–24

Scripture, in this case, is the law. It imprisoned everything under sin. All those to whom the law spoke (the whole world) are under the law and thus sold under sin. The law did this so that the promise by faith in Christ Jesus might be given to those who believe. Before faith (that is, Jesus) came, we were held captive under the law. You and I were slaves under the law before faith in Christ came.

A Note Regarding Faith

Faith is not merely belief. Faith has belief in it, but it is much more than belief. For example, everyone believes that exercise is a good thing. But merely believing exercise is a good thing does not produce the lasting effects of exercising. Faith is both the belief and the exercise.

Let's extend this metaphor just a little more. Before Jesus came, there was no one who "exercised" the complete right way—before He who knew what righteousness was came and worked it out. There was no one who worked and walked it out before He who knew the workout plan actually manifested it. Righteousness comes by faith himself coming. Faith is first and foremost a person.

When Jesus came, He authored the workout plan and then worked through it Himself. The Bible says, "Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

Faith is not just belief. Faith is something that Jesus authored and perfected and gives to us as a gift. That gift comes by hearing the Word.

The Law Fulfilled

Now back to the law. We are under the law and kept under the law until He who worked out righteousness comes in and frees us. The law was our guardian until Christ came in order that we might be justified by faith. Faith is something He did. It is not merely our belief. It is the walking out of the belief, and He first authored it and then walked it out. Now He gives it to us as a gift so that we can follow the exercise plan and we can walk it out too. We can get fit in the righteousness that He has given to us as a gift. For in Christ Jesus, you are all sons and daughters through faith. The righteous in fact live by faith.

But the law is not of faith, rather, "The one who does them shall live by them."

—Galatians 3:12

The Bible says no one is justified by the law. Additionally, we are not justified in order to keep the law, but we are justified and, so, freely receive the gift of righteousness that God has freely bestowed to us. God's grace is the way we receive the gift. His grace empowers the reception of the gift of righteousness. Thus, we live by faith in Jesus to live according to the righteousness that is ours.

We have to understand clearly that the law wanted righteousness for us. The law wanted to give life, if it in fact could. Again, and it is worth saying, the law prophesied unto righteousness. It, however, is not the righteousness that would come. More importantly, it cannot give the sort of righteousness that is required to stand before God. Only Jesus gave us that.

So, the law was there to keep you illuminated that you were in need of something. You were constantly aware that you did not have that which the law wanted you to have. But the law could not give it to you because it was written on stone. Therefore, the law was echoing that there was one who was to come—the author and perfecter of our faith. If the law could speak, it would say, “It is not me, but I am testifying of Him.”

In light of this, consider John the Baptist, who is the greatest of the prophets, saying the same thing: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). This is why the law and the prophets lasted until John, because grace and truth came through Jesus.

Then Jesus climbs up a mountain in the same way that Moses had climbed up the mountain where he received the law. But Jesus is way better than Moses. Moses spoke a law he received; Jesus speaks and it *is* law. So you see that the law and prophets prophesied from Moses to John. Why? Because the law as a prophetic revelation of God was first codified by Moses and lastly stewarded by John the Baptist.

Then Jesus comes as the righteous one who is the fulfillment of the law. Jesus did not come merely to fulfill

the law as though He were subservient to it. No, Jesus, the incarnate second person of the Trinity *is* the fulfillment of the law. He is who the law and prophets prophesied about. This is why it is He who could say things like, “You have heard that it was said, but I tell you....” Jesus spoke with true authority because He is the one who can give life and righteousness. The one about whom the law and prophets prophesied about has finally come.

Righteousness Beyond the Law

Again, this is why Jesus spoke with an authority that went beyond that which Moses or John the Baptist had. For instance, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’” (Matthew 5:27). But according to Jesus, the one who commits adultery is anyone who looks at another with lust. In speaking this way, Jesus was revealing the righteous intention of the law, but a righteousness that the law itself is incapable of giving. In this way, the glory of the law is of one kind (the declarative kind), but the glory of the ministry of righteousness is another (the life-giving kind). While the law prohibits you from committing adultery, the ministry of righteousness will, in fact, free you from lust.

Think about it: when the law says you shall not commit murder, it’s prohibiting an act. But it fails to empower righteousness. What does it take to commit murder? A plan, a plot, and executing the plan. But Jesus has raised the stakes and said, “If you say your brother is a fool, you are guilty of murder” (see Matthew 5:22). The threshold

of righteousness according to Jesus is much higher than that of the law. The law cannot reach what the embodied glory of the divine is saying about what righteousness looks like.

Finally, Jesus has said that our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). But thanks be to God that the righteousness we have received does not falter in light of what the law says, for it far exceeds what the law could ever give.

I imagine that the righteousness of Jesus, that goes beyond the law, would sound like this: “I am going to demonstrate to you what the law wanted all along. I am going to a cross, and even though you are My enemies and are killing Me, I am going to show you what righteousness looks like. Even though you want Me dead and gone, I am going to love you until death. I am going to speak righteousness over you.

“I am going to let you know that there is nothing you can do that can change My heart for you because my heart is not made of stone. I am a life-giving Spirit, and I am going to pour My Spirit out upon you. Even while you are My enemies and condemned under the law, I am going to give you the righteousness and life that I designed for you to have. When I rise through the Spirit, I will give you a brand-new heart. You will not live in condemnation. You will no longer be slaves of sin, but you will be sons and daughters of God. Because you are sons and daughters of God, you will receive the righteousness that the law prophesied.”

The role of the law does not reach the righteousness of Christ. The righteousness of God comes by the gift of Jesus Christ. As I receive His righteousness, I am no longer under the law, but under grace.

However, let us be clear about grace. Grace is not permissiveness. Grace is not doing something you know not to do and saying, “Thank God for forgiveness.” That is not grace. That is permissiveness. That is leveraging the grace of God as permission to sin. To this we must say: no, no, *no!*

Grace empowers you to live righteously, because the Holy Spirit is within you and rivers of living waters are coming out. You now live in a reality and life that the law could never give you, but that Jesus has given you through the Holy Spirit.

His grace is an etching tool revealing more and more of the righteousness that is yours now. Grace without transformation is a perversion. Don’t ever let someone tell you that grace is the permissiveness of God. Grace empowers us to live according to the righteousness that Jesus Christ has freely given us.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

—Romans 6:12–14

So here is the question for you: which Adam are you under? Are you in Adam One, under the law? Or are you in Adam Two, under grace? Are you living by faith in Holy Spirit righteousness, or are you living in the false gospel of a downtrodden, broken down believer who will never be better than their last mistake? Believe His word over your life so that you can live the righteousness that is yours in Jesus.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Three Questions

Question: Have you ever felt like righteousness—having nothing between you and God—was something you had to plead for, or maybe something you had to work to earn? Do you approach God as someone who has been fully justified before Him? If not, what belief is holding you back?

Question: What is the difference between Adam One and Adam Two? Where does the law fit into that paradigm? What place has the law had in your life? What does that communicate about your understanding of grace?

Action: Create a chart with three columns. Title the columns “Adam One,” “Adam Two,” and “[Your Name].” Put the different characteristics (such as law, death, and grace) discussed in this chapter. Based on this chart, by which Adam are you living?

CHAPTER FOUR

You Are in the Spirit

A cell phone rings in a full men's locker room at an upscale gym. The man answers the phone, "Hello?"

"Hey honey. I was calling because I was driving by the dealership and you know that I really wanted that brand-new Mercedes G wagon."

"Um huh."

"And baby, I just really think now is the time to get it."

"How much is it going to be?"

"Well, I think the new model is going for about \$130,000."

"\$130,000! You want the new wagon for \$130,000? Go ahead. Go ahead baby and get it."

The wife continues, "Baby I was also driving by the little cottage we were looking at and thinking about getting it for Mom. I think we should get it now."

"Well, how much is that going to be?"

"I think they dropped it down to about \$2.4 million."

“\$2.4... \$2.4, you want the little cottage for \$2.4 and the wagon—today?”

“I think we could do it. I think we can swing this.”

“Yeah, that is fine, babe.”

“You know I love you. And listen, just one last thing. I stopped by Tiffany’s. And I saw that bracelet again! Do you think I could get that bracelet?”

“How much is that bracelet, girl?”

“It’s going for \$250,000.”

“So, you want a bracelet that costs more than the vehicle! You know what honey, go ahead. Go ahead and live your life.”

He ends the call and casually turns and says, “Whose phone is this?”

The Importance of Access

After Jesus was resurrected, He encountered Mary in the garden His tomb was in. She saw Him and was thrilled, exclaiming “Rabboni” (which means teacher). Jesus instructed her not to cling to Him, and to tell the disciples that He was ascending “to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17).

Then Jesus appeared to His disciples while they were hiding together in fear of the Jews. He greeted them in the name of His Father and breathed on them, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” He then commissioned them to go into the world and preach forgiveness of sins.

Consider for a moment the change between these two encounters. In the first instance, He refused to be clung to,

and departed. But later, He entered a space controlled by fear and freely gave from His fullness. What happened?

Before we answer, let's look at the book of Acts. Sometime after the two events mentioned above—Mary in the garden and Jesus breathing on His disciples—we find Peter with John going up to the temple to pray. On their way, they encountered a beggar who asked for money. Peter, knowing that he had something of more value, looked the beggar in the eye and said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” (Acts 3:6).

Now, back to the question of what happened. Upon His resurrection, Jesus secured good gifts for all of humanity. He redeemed what was lost and, so, could freely give the benefits of His victory to His brothers and sisters. He does this in the form of the Holy Spirit. Notice how Paul put it in Ephesians:

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

—Ephesians 4:4–8

In the opening story, the wife is confident that all her husband has is hers and that the phone call is direct access to all the benefits of the relationships she is in. (I know

that, ultimately, the man was not her husband, but the illustration works. Just work with me here.)

In a similar fashion, Jesus is the good husband to the church. He is the faithful older brother to His siblings, and through Him they have access to all the gifts that belong to Him. “For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:18).

What changed for Peter, in Acts 3, was that he believed and had received the good gifts Jesus had given him. He was empowered according to the access to divine power he now had. Through Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, he could give that which he had received.

It’s the same for us. Because Jesus is alive, we are free to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through Him, we have access to this grace in which we now stand. We are no longer in the realm of death in Adam One. We are alive in the reality of Adam Two because we have believed on Him. We have died with Him through baptism and are now under grace, empowered through the Spirit with access to heavenly gifts.

Just like the woman in the story, we can call on our heavenly Father and receive everything that belongs to Jesus. He is our Father, too!

Understanding Our Being in the Spirit

In Romans 7:1–4, we have an illustration of our being transferred from one reality to another. This reality happens in the person of Jesus. He puts Adam One to death by dying the death that belonged to all of humanity, and

He is raised to life as Adam Two, giving to humanity the benefits of His victory: the Holy Spirit. We transferred from death to life by way of Him becoming Adam One, dying to Adam One and resurrecting as Adam Two.

Notice the way the woman relates to the two men in Romans 7:1–4. If she tries to be with the second man while the first is still alive, she is an adulteress. However, if the first one dies, she is free to marry another. This is what happened in Christ. We have died to the Adam One reality and now belong to another. This all happened through Christ.

Think about it like this: the way the husband goes, so does the wife. The way that Paul framed these realities, he was attaching the reality that the woman lives in relation to the man with whom she is in covenant.

Flesh or Spirit

There is an ongoing point of difference in the interpretation of Romans 7. Some folks think Paul was talking about his life in Christ and saying that within that life, he was constantly doing the things he did not want to do. He tried, but failed. In exasperation, he concluded: “For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:15). Others see this as the life of Paul before his conversion; once he was in Christ, however, there was no condemnation.

Those are not the only interpretations. One that is often overlooked is, I believe, the very interpretation Paul him-

self was framing. Whether you think that Paul was speaking about himself or about someone else, the point was not about the difference between pre- or post-conversion. The true issue is whether this person in Romans 7 was living in the Spirit or in the flesh.

In Romans 7:1–4, we can see Paul framing what would follow by drawing a distinction between the two Adams. Now remember, Paul’s thinking has followed a few key lines so far:

1. We are in Christ, justified by faith (Romans 5).
2. We are free from sin through Jesus (Romans 6).
3. We are not under the law; we are under grace (Romans 6).

In Romans 7, he brought all of these points together in a “before and after” picture. Look at Romans 7:5:

For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

—Romans 7:5

Paul identified that our sinful passions were aroused by the law (more on that later) while we were living in the flesh. So our sinful passions aroused in relation to the law are a phenomenon of fleshly living. Look at Romans 7:14:

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

This person Paul is describing is, again, “of the flesh” and not only that, but “sold under sin.” Now, one must ask, how can a person who has just been freed from sin, a person who is now in Adam Two, still be sold under sin? Well, let’s keep considering Paul’s argument.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

—Romans 7:18

Again, Paul’s description is in relation to the flesh. Nothing good is found in this person while in the flesh. They are missing a key element that would allow them to live in righteousness. While in the flesh they are unable to live in agreement with the righteousness that the law speaks, because while in the flesh, they do not have what’s necessary for righteousness. This is about a life in the flesh:

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

—Romans 7:24-25

The conclusion here is yet another distinction based on living in the flesh. While there is a place where someone in the flesh can agree with the law of God, they still see within them a continual falling short. This is life in the flesh.

It's all over the place; flesh, flesh, flesh. A life in the flesh is sold under sin. A life in the flesh is given over to sinful passions. A life in the flesh always see how they can't meet the expectations of the law of God. It's all a life of flesh with a flesh mindset.

However, as many of us know, if we read on into Romans 8, we find these liberating words:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

—Romans 8:1-2

Here I might say, “Ah! Praise the Lord, sweet relief. No condemnation, no judgment for those in Christ Jesus. We know that there is nothing good in us and we are always vile and wretched people, but thank God for His mercy and for His grace” (I say this facetiously). This is certainly one way to look at it, but it is most certainly not the way that Paul intended for us to understand what he was saying. It is clear that the life in the flesh outlined in Romans 7 is not meant to be the life of the believer.

Some would call this confidence arrogance given the long stand-in interpretive history of Romans 7. I would agree that if we read Romans 7 with the mindset of Adam

1 we will never see anything other than the “wretched man that I am” interpretation.

However, if we read just a little further in Romans 8 we will come to the rest of the story. If the person in Romans 7 is clearly in the flesh (and they are), Romans 8 makes clear what Romans 7 leaves unresolved:

*You, however, **are not in the flesh but in the Spirit**, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

—Romans 8:9–11

However, *you are not in the flesh.*

Let that sit. Let it land. You are not in the flesh and destined to live like somebody who is constantly falling short in light of the law. You are not under the law. You have the righteousness of Christ because of the Spirit. You are no longer sold as a slave to sin. You have access, so every single blessing that belongs to Christ also belongs to you. This is received by faith, and it’s true not because your life is demonstrating it through effort—no! It’s true because He is alive!

Just like the woman at the beginning of this chapter, you have the rights to the riches that belong to Christ because you are His bride. You are in Adam Two! You are not in condemnation; you are not under judgment; you are

not in the realm of death. You are in the Spirit. How do I know? Because Jesus is alive and you believe in Him.

Peter received the Holy Spirit, and he was empowered to live as somebody who had something to give. He received by faith because he saw the risen Lord and because, in the same way that Jesus was alive, Peter was now alive, too. In the same way Jesus shared with His disciples, so do we. Because by faith in Jesus, several things are now true about us:

1. We are, in Christ, justified by faith (Romans 5).
2. We are free from sin through Jesus (Romans 6).
3. We are not under the law; we are under grace (Romans 6).
4. We are not in the flesh; we are in the Spirit (Romans 8:9–13).

You have access. You are in the Spirit, and you have something to give, because Jesus is alive.

Our Source of Hope

Have you ever been in a hopeless situation? I was in Hartsfield-Jackson Airport in Atlanta, Georgia, on my way home from serving for two years in Australia as a missionary. I was on a ministry wage, so I had no money. I got to the counter at the airport in Atlanta to retrieve my boarding pass. I had a flight to Boston to see my mama. I

had around \$80 in my bank account at the moment and was looking forward to my mama's homecooked meals.

I was told I had a ticket and given the ticket information. However, when I went to the counter to check-in, the agent said, no, there was no reservation for me. I asked her to check again, but no, there was no reservation.

There was a plane on the other side I was trying to get to, but the agent was telling me my name was not on the list. After checking three times, she said, I am so sorry, but you just do not have access.

I was twenty-three-years old and the first thought in my mind for getting access was (and I am ashamed of it), I thought maybe if I cried hard enough, maybe she'd let me in. I decided not to follow that course of action.

I called a friend from a pay phone, and she came and picked me up. Not only did she pick me up, but she was nice enough to pay for my ticket home a couple days later. Suddenly, I had access. Previously, I didn't have access, but there was someone who gave it to me. When they gave it to me, I didn't have to keep coming back asking for access because I already had it.

Let me show you something about the law from Hebrews 10.

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

—Hebrews 10:1

The law will not give us what we are in need of; it offers but a shadow of what we receive in Christ.

Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?

—Hebrews 10:2

So, if the law worked in the way we often treat it, our keeping of it would cleanse our conscience to such a point that we would no longer be living in any sort of guilt. We would never return to that which we had been delivered from. Yet, this is exactly what Romans 7 undermines, saying that while we are in the flesh, our sinful passions are aroused by the law. Hebrews continues by noting that the sacrificial system of the Israelites was intended to remind offenders of their sins:

But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

—Hebrews 10:3–4

However, there is one who does in fact take away sin. He liberates us, moving us from Adam One to Adam Two. He delivers us from the realm of death and establishes us in the realm of life. He does this all in His own body, so that the way the Husband goes, so does the wife.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me...."

—Hebrews 10:5

It was the will of God to offer Him up to die for the sins of many, so that those who would believe in Him would inherit all that belonged to Him.

Then I said, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book."

—Hebrews 10:7

Jesus read "the book"—the Old Testament—and believed the book revealed His identity. From this book, He knew He was the one who would have His blood spilled as the perfect sacrifice in order that He might transfer us from Adam One into Adam Two.

Jesus has done what the law could not do. He has freed us from sin and given us a standing that we could not merit on our own. We are now established in life through the Holy Spirit, with access to all the riches of heaven through Jesus. We are in the Spirit. Receive it, believe it, live it!

WORKBOOK

Chapter Four Questions

Question: Do you approach God with a scarcity mindset or an abundance mindset? What does this reveal about your understanding of who He is and His heart toward you?

Question: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...” (1 John 1:8). Who do you relate to more? Do you think you are doing enough, that you are good enough in your own works? Or are you the person who thinks you are prone to sin and a slave to it? How do these perspectives fall short of understanding what Christ accomplished on your behalf?

Action: Draw or print out a poster with the words “Access” and “Freedom.” Place the poster somewhere as a reminder and let those words become the meditation of your heart. If you stumble and fall in a moment of weakness, remember you are *kept* clean. Let that revelation affect the way you approach the throne of God. If you find yourself

struggling with sin, come to the Father and pray something like, *“I see it for what it is, but I thank You in Jesus’ name that the Book tells me I have access because He who was the perfect sacrifice has gone in so I might stand in the liberty and identity of what and who He says I am.”*

CHAPTER FIVE

Lawless No More

At this point, you might be thinking, “All of this talk of freedom is well and good. I have faith in Christ and try to walk in it. But sin doesn’t seem to want to let me go that easily.”

That is a fair point, but before we really pursue what to do with continual, habitual sin, let’s consider where we’ve been up to now.

We have talked about four main ideas thus far. The first idea we have covered is that you are free from sin. The second point we covered was that we are always sons and daughters. That is how the Father looks at us, that is why He is called Father. Then we talked about us being in Adam Two through Christ Jesus. The last thing we talked about is that since we are in Adam Two, we are in the Spirit. We have access. We now stand in this grace.

Held Together by Christ

I want you to hold all those ideas in mind as you read the following verses from Colossians 1:15–23. This passage is what some see as a Christological poem. It is an expression about Christ and His Supremacy.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

The reason He is called “the firstborn” is because He is the firstborn of the dead, so that all of creation is recreated in Him. This is mind-blowing! Jesus died the death of Adam, and when He was resurrected, He came to life as a new sort of man. He was not simply a man of the earth, but He is a life-giving Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45).

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

So that if you are a new creation in Christ, you were created through Him and for Him. That is what your life is about. You take part in the new creation that He has initiated. You are new, because He is new.

And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

That means that in Him, all we are or ever hope to be is held together. This is key: what we are begins with Him. We do not look at ourselves to see if we are transformed; rather, we see that He is alive and new, and in seeing Him correctly, we see that we are alive and new, too. Because He is the head of the body, and the way the head goes, so goes the body.

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...

Think about that. The fullness of God dwells in Jesus bodily. The body that He lives in is the fullness of God—not one wrinkle, not one stain. He has overcome, and He is glorified. But that's not all:

...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

The reconciliation that God intended through Jesus has been secured *in* Jesus. He is both God, in fullness, and man. Peace between God and man, in deep intimacy, is secured in His person—literally, in His body.

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by

his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him...

So, what He accomplished was a reconciliation through and in His body. In His body, He condemned sin, and in His body, He redeemed humanity. He can now present us holy, blameless, and above reproach in Him. That is good news!

Do you know *what* you need to do to be presented before Him holy and blameless?

...if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

What are you not shifting from? Is it the shifting of your behavior? No, not behavior. Paul was admonishing us not to move from the hope of Adam Two. As you stand fast in the hope, it transforms you so that you live out the righteousness given to you by this gospel you have received.

But What About Sin?

You may say, “But Jonathan, you say I am free from sin, but if you look at my past week, trust me, I am not.”

That's a powerful argument. I can appreciate the logic. Additionally, we've been so conditioned to be fruit inspectors to determine whether or not we are actually righteous. We use passages like Matthew 7:16, "You will recognize them by their fruits," to beat ourselves up when our life is not manifesting this freedom we supposedly have.

It's worth noting that this passage about fruits is talking about false prophets: it begins, "Beware of false prophets." It's not about how a believer is to inspect themselves. Quite to the contrary, Paul was teaching that we have been cleansed and washed and that being dead to sin is how we must think about ourselves (1 Corinthians 6:9–11, Romans 6:11). But I digress.

We have to think of sin differently. The cross of Christ reveals the truth about what sin is. When we think about sin as simply an act, we feel a certain amount of cognitive dissonance because we can see in ourselves habits and acts that go against the declaration of freedom. If sin is an act, then when we act out, we are not free. When we conclude we are not free, we interpret Scripture via our experience and begin to modify its clear teaching in order to make it agree with the life we are living.

I've heard some say that we are not free from sin, because we know that we are sinners. Instead, they say, Paul taught us we're supposed to *think* as if we're free from sin, even though it's not true. Please don't listen to this type of double-minded thinking. It locates the "truth" in our experience while positioning the good news of the gospel as theological "wishful thinking" that will only be true one day. This is a false gospel. Run away!

Sin as Lawlessness

So, on to sin. The common definition of sin is that it's the transgression of the law. "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Now, other translations say that sin is the "transgression of the law." The difference between "transgression of the law" and "lawlessness" is substantial. But before we get into that distinction, let's quickly survey a couple more New Testament definitions.

But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

—Romans 14:23

Notice that the force of this idea is in the negative. By this I mean, this scripture establishes what sin *is* in terms of what it is not: it is *not* proceeding from faith. This is important. Take a look at the next definition:

So, whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

—James 4:17

Again, we find that the force of the idea is in the negative. What I mean by "the negative" is that whatever sin *is*, it is the *absence* of something else. So in Romans

14:23, it is something that *is not* of faith, and in James, it is when something known to be the right thing *is not* done.

With this in mind, turn back to 1 John:

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

—1 John 3:4

Interesting that the actual word here for lawlessness is *anomia*.⁵ This word carries a prefix, which is fairly important because of how this particular prefix functions. Watch how it works: The root noun of this word is *nomos*, which means “law.”⁶ However, when the Greek letter alpha is prefixed before a noun, it negates what follows. We have words that function with this prefix that we actually derive from Greek. For instance, *theism* means belief in God, but with an *a-* in front of it, the root noun is negated and it becomes *atheism*, or belief in the absence of God. The same is at work with *anomia*. Law becomes lawlessness, not transgression of the law. Sin, properly understood, is lawlessness. It is the absences of law, not merely its antagonist.

The Anthropology of Adam One

Adam One has an anthropology. He has parts of his body that correspond with him. Three of them are spoken of in Scripture: body, soul, and spirit. This is not an exhaustive list. Also, I am not suggesting that these three

parts account for the whole of the natural person, but they are the biblical language that Paul uses. If we follow his usage, it will lead to fruitful insights into how Scripture frames sin and freedom from sin.

Body is pretty self-explanatory. It's the physical body that we are familiar with, the body that we live in. The *soul* encompasses all of our consciousness, including our character, emotions, will, and personality. It is the sum total of my person. It is my psychological self. It is my mind, which is distinct from the brain. The brain is the material thing; the mind is consciousness.

This is Adam One. This is humanity. But there is one more part: the spirit. What is the spirit, and what spirit does Adam One have?

It seems that the spirit is the animating element of life. It is in a body and allows for a soul/ psyche/ mind. It is the necessary element that brings us to life. Without the spirit, a body is dead (James 2:26). Look at Ephesians 2 and you will see what kind of spirit Adam has.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

—Ephesians 2:1-2

The spirit of disobedience is the spirit that animates all those that follow the prince of the power of the air. We know that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). All those who have sinned are of the

flesh, sold under sin; thus, they are following the course of this world via the spirit of disobedience. Notice, disobedience is the absence of something. In this case, it is the absence of obedience with righteousness.

Sound familiar? Where have we read this before? We saw this back in Romans 5, when Paul taught us that through one man's disobedience, the many became sinners. Disobedience is lawlessness. It's the negative of not complying with law. But notice where this happens. It's not merely an external act. It seems to be something that has a hold of us inside. This is exactly what Paul was highlighting in Romans 7: 14–25. He was of the flesh, carnal and sold under sin, so that he could not do what the law required. The fault was not, properly, his mind, because his inner self delighted in the law of the Lord (Romans 7:22), yet he saw something else at work within him. It was the spirit of disobedience. It was lawlessness!

"It's Sin, Not Me"

I have a friend whose wife makes some delicious cookies. One day I went to his house. My friend said to me, "Jonathan, my wife made some cookies. Have as many as you want." I politely declined. "I'm trying to keep my beach body looking right," I said. "I live in Hawaii, after all."

What did I just demonstrate? Self-control, albeit motivated by vanity. But why did I demonstrate self-control? Because I was given an option. My vanity kicked in and helped me make a choice in keeping with my goal.

However, I come in the next day and the same friend said, “Jonathan, my wife made some cookies. But they’re for someone else. You can’t have any.” All of a sudden, all of my vanity was overcome with a deep desire for cookies. Watching my weight had gone out of the window. My vanity took a back seat, and it seemed like a cookie monster had arrived to take its place. Why? Because there is something in me, or better yet, an absence of something in me, that rises up and makes me desire something when I’m told I can’t have it.

We all know this experience. We want that thing we can’t have. If we can have it, the desire for it wanes. You may have seen a popular social experiment video on YouTube in which kids were given the chance to have one marshmallow now or two later. The struggle on those kids’ faces! They were having an existential crisis at the age of five. The proctor told the kids they were leaving the room for a second but not to touch the marshmallows if they wanted a second one. Most of the kids couldn’t wait!² Some kids sniffed around the marshmallow. Another put it in his mouth then put it back on the table, saliva and all. Another just gave it one good lick. But my favorite was a kid who played it cool, then calmly popped it in her mouth the minute the proctor left.

There was something at work in the kids. It was the same thing at work with me and the cookies. It’s what is so often at work in all of us at one time or another. It’s the spirit of disobedience. It is lawlessness. It’s the inability to comply naturally with righteousness.

A standard illustration for transgressing the law is a speeding analogy. If you're going 60 miles per hour in a 55 mph zone, are you transgressing the law? Yes. However, this illustration reduces sin to an act. It's an act that goes contrary to the posted law, but as long as you don't disobey the law, you're not lawless—right? Wrong.

Let's take a look at the speed analogy again. (Note, we're assuming here that the legal speed limit is truly the ideal, safe speed limit.) When you are going 54 mph in a 55 mph zone, are you transgressing the law? No. But if you're doing 54 mph in a 55 mph zone yet *wish* you could go 75 mph, and you're only unwilling to do so because you don't want the ticket, then you are lawless. Why? Because while complying with the law, if you could, you'd break it. You stay within the bounds because it's safe. You comply because someone has told you that you must. But if you had straight roads and were absolutely guaranteed that you would not get a ticket, maybe you'd speed a bit—or a lot!

We all know this feeling, wishing we could do a thing we are unwilling to do only because the punishment would be too severe or more than we're willing to deal with. That is lawlessness. It's lawless because the righteousness that the law is actually pointing at, love itself, does not find full agreement in our hearts.

Our unrenewed hearts carry a whole lot of lawlessness. The heart often agrees and complies with the external restrictions while on the inside we would like to do something else. We have ulterior motives for complying. Maybe somebody is watching whom we want to influence

a certain way. Maybe we believe that we have to live up to a societal role or some other sort of expectation. This is lawlessness. This is sin—the absence of righteousness operating within us, when we are moving outside of faith, apart from the Spirit.

The Law of Love

You might think to yourself, “Jonathan, that might be someone else. I comply because I care. I keep the speed limit because I want people to be safe.” You very well might. But then, that’s not really the law that we are talking about.

When Jesus highlighted the righteousness necessary to meet God’s threshold, He said that our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. Now, the Pharisees were intense. They were exacting with their compliance with the law as they understood it. So, first, you must be exacting with your compliance in relation to the law; but then, Jesus moved beyond perfect compliance. His next requirements relate to what is happening in our inner person. He taught that adultery begins in our thoughts and that murder exists in a word we speak. He concluded by teaching that we ought to first do to others as we would have them do toward us. That is wild!

Jesus’ teaching on the law is not only compliant, but it is also pro-creative because it reproduces in keeping with the character of God. That’s right—perfect law-keeping is manifesting the very glory of God’s character. That was always our intended purpose; that’s why we were made in

His image. But when we fall short of that glory, we are correctly labeled as lawless. That's how it works.

Since we fall short of reflecting the very heart of God, we fall short of His glory. We sin. We lack the glory for which we were actually created. (Why do we lack that glory? I'll explain later.). Jesus taught that the law is to love like He does: "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). But that sort of perfection, perfect love, is not something we can fabricate, because while we are in the flesh, it is impossible to please God in the way we were intended to please Him—by loving the way He does.

The reason we cannot love in a perfectly godly way is that we are of the flesh, sold under sin. We are disobedient via one man's disobedience, and we are lawless because we are slaves to sin. So sin is not simply an act; it is a condition of slavery, the lawlessness of disobedience—of a life in the flesh apart from the Spirit. Sin is the absence of righteousness. Sin sees what is right to do and yet does not do it (because it is incapable of doing it); it encompasses all that does not proceed from faith. We need righteousness. We need the Spirit

Of the Flesh, Sold Under Sin

The question then is, how do we live in the righteousness if in this body we do not have that something? I see the problem. But what is the solution? There is this war in my body that when I am told not to do a thing, something rises up within me because I want to do the thing they tell

me I cannot do. My brain is telling me not to do what I am told not to do, but I want to do it.

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

—Romans 7:7

Notice how the law is not the problem. The law is good, but the problem is sin within me.

But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

—Romans 7:8

What was Paul saying? He was saying that as soon as he saw that the law told him not to covet, he wanted to covet. He was saying that before he was told not to covet, he was alive apart from the law. But when the commandment came, sin came alive and he died. Why? Because he now saw himself powerless in that moment. He'd very much like to not covet, because he wanted to keep the law of God. But what was he discovering? He found that in his body, he could not, because he was lawless and under the law. His lawlessness came first, and then the law spoke in order to reveal his lawlessness and his slavery. This is why the law is for the unrighteous.

As Adam One is under the law, what is implicit in his anthropology? What is it that he does not have? He does not have righteousness in him even though he agrees with it mentally. So, you can agree with a thing mentally and see something at work that is missing.

For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

—Romans 7:11-12

So, Paul was saying, it is not a problem with the law. The law is good, but the problem lies elsewhere.

For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

—Romans 7:5

While you are living in the flesh, the law in fact arouses the sinful passions of your flesh. Here is a crucial move that Paul set up. We may be tempted to think that “sinful passions” are anything and everything that arises from us because we are wicked and evil with dark hearts and will be for all time. Paul, though, did not put the blame for “sinful passions” on us:

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known

sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

—Romans 7:7-8

Did you see it? It is *sin* that seizes the opportunity. It is some wild, unordered lawlessness to which we are slaves that moves us in directions we would rather not go.

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

—Romans 7:13-14

Sin is the culprit that enslaves us. Sin is the task master that leads us to death. And we are in the realm of death precisely because the spirit that animates us is one of lawlessness and rebellion. Disobedience leads to death.

Our minds can apprehend the beauty or righteousness found in the law of God. The Old Testament is full of deep recognition of the power, beauty, and majesty of the law. However, the problem is the carnal person, the disobedient spirit that is under the power of the enemy and sold under sin. Sin is the lawlessness that is the state of all those who do not have the Spirit of God—that's all of us, outside of Christ. We are all lawless; we all fall short of

the glory of God. We all fall short of His love. We can read the law and apprehend with our minds that it is good, yet still see another law at work in our bodies.

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

—Romans 7:15–20

Paul did not find fault with himself and his mind. Instead, he found fault with sin. He said that sin was what was at work in his body. He was a slave to it as long as he was in the flesh, because he had a desire to do something other than what sin was leading him to, but he did not have the ability. Paul was teaching us that he did not have the power to animate what he saw in the law. He did not have the energy necessary to do what was right. He could not proceed according to the law because he lacked the ability, or the power, to fulfill what the law required. The fault is not ours; it belongs to sin.

This insight is incredible. Paul was drawing a line between humanity and sin. Humanity is not synonymous with sin; it is enslaved by it. All humans emerge into a

slavery because of Adam One. The spirit of disobedience enslaves us all, even while we desire to do good.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

—Romans 7:21–26

The wretchedness that Paul cited is not some complete depravity of the person that is incapable of any good thought. That is not at all what Paul was teaching, for how could Paul actually see the goodness of God’s law, and long to keep it, if he were totally evil? Paul could see the good; he longed for it. But of himself, he could not accomplish it. Thus, the wretchedness of which he spoke is a pitiable condition of inability. He wanted to do good, yet he couldn’t. He wanted to walk, but he was lame. He wanted to reach the pool to find healing, but he had no one to help him. So he cried out, “Son of David! Have mercy on me!”

Paul saw in Christ the ability he longed for; he saw in Christ a righteousness in full agreement with the law. In Christ he found a reprieve, a respite, and a redemption from a spirit of disobedience. In Christ he saw freedom from sin.

To summarize: for Paul, humanity has a body of flesh, soul, and spirit. The body is the body we live in. The soul is the inner self where the personality, will, and emotions are exercised. The spirit is a spirit of disobedience; it is the lawlessness that 1 John 3:4 names. It is sin, or the absence of righteousness where it ought to be. Because of this lawlessness, we transgress the law. From our state of lawlessness, we disobey. We transgress the law because we emerge into the world with a spirit of lawlessness.

So, how did Paul solve this conundrum? How did he solve this wretched, this pitiable condition? By Jesus, of course.

The Spirit of Adam Two

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

—Romans 8:1-2

In Jesus we have been delivered from the law of sin and death. To make sense of this, you have to have some imagery in your mind that Paul presented earlier. Think about the night when the firstborn of Egypt died—when the angel passed over and brought judgment on Egypt. All those outside of the homes that had doorways with blood were destined for death. This was the great freedom that Paul has in mind. In the same way that the blood of the lamb initiated the freedom of Israel, so those in Jesus are ushered into a liberty from the law of sin and death. And

the law of sin and death is this: you sin, you die. And that is true of all those who come short of the glory of God. Death is the destiny of the lawless, for they (like all of us) were born into it.

But in Christ there is something else at work. Death cannot have the final word because we have been freed from the law of sin and death. The reality of lawlessness is no longer our reality, because we have been transferred from death to life.

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

—Romans 8:3–4

Sin has been overcome in the body of Jesus. This is world-changing! The lawlessness that enslaved our bodies was brought to nothing in Jesus, by way of His death. He laid His body down in the ground and resurrected in a new body, one that is incorruptible. The new body is not prone to lawlessness or disobedience. It is free from sin. In His death, Jesus has judged sin as lawlessness and a threat to life. He put it to death via His own body. The body that was enslaved in Romans 7 has been brought to nothing because Jesus brought it to nothing. He took the curse of sin and the sentence of death upon Himself and redeemed humanity through it.

Now, as resurrected Lord and King, He freely gives the Holy Spirit to us. He takes the old body and puts it to death, raises a new body through the power of the Holy Spirit, and then gives us that Spirit so that He can animate our bodies here and now, while we wait for our new bodies that He has promised in the resurrection.

Do you see it? This is why we are free from sin: because Jesus is alive. And if we believe His good report—if we believe His testimony that He is the Son of God who takes away the sin of the world—we will be saved. If we renounce our lawlessness, He will freely give us the Holy Spirit to lead our lives and steward our bodies. We participate in the death of Jesus through baptism, and we participate in the life of Jesus through the same baptism. We receive the Holy Spirit and are led according to the righteousness that we have received as a gift.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

—Romans 8:5–9

We have been transferred into the reality of the Spirit in Jesus. We live by the Spirit, and we no longer live according to the lawless flesh. We set our minds on the Spirit because the Spirit is within us and teaches us all things (1 John 2:26–27). He is the Spirit who reveals the truth to us, and since we have Him, we can be sure that we have the promise of new bodies—because He is the down payment of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13–14). We are no longer in the flesh, because through baptism in Jesus, we have been transferred from death to life.

The Romans 7 man saw that the law was good, but he could not meet its requirements because he was in the flesh. Since we are not in the flesh, the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us. Life, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit are ours in Jesus' name. Righteousness and grace are ours because of Jesus' obedience and His giving of good gifts to humanity.

The Romans 7 man saw the things he wanted to do but did not know how to claim it for himself because he was still thinking according to his flesh. But that is no longer us, because we set our mind on the Spirit (we'll develop this concept later). We no longer have a mind that sees righteousness yet waffles in the doing; we no longer have a mind clouded in deception. Here you might object, "Yes, I do, Jonathan. I certainly have a mind that cannot apprehend truth." In response, I would encourage you to practice Rule #3 and believe the word of God over your life:

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

—1 Corinthians 2:12–14

Do you see how we are instructed and how we now live? Through the instruction of the Spirit whom we have!

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

—1 Corinthians 2:14–16

Far too many people fail to understand that Spirit living is their birthright. They see themselves through the flesh and judge themselves unfit for God's kingdom. But it is not your life that counts toward righteousness; it is His. If you look at Him, you will see that through Him, Spirit living is yours. In Him you are free because you have been crucified with Christ, and this was His doing for you, on your behalf. You get to believe it!

Here is the lie of the devil. We continue to perform according to a person we no longer are. Let me write that again: we continue to perform according to a person who, in truth, we no longer are. We, as believers, are not in the flesh. I will not tire of saying it: you are in the Spirit if, in fact, the Spirit dwells in you.

Do you know how you know the Spirit dwells in you? If you've read these pages and you say to yourself, "I believe what is written here. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God who takes away the sin of the world. I confess that I have fallen short of the glory of God, that I have been a slave to sin, but in Jesus I am a slave no longer. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you are in the Spirit. It is that easy. Believe it, receive it, and walk it out.

Jesus is Lord, and He has put the spirit of disobedience to death in His body. Jesus is Lord, and He has condemned sin in the body of flesh. Jesus is Lord, and we are under His lordship.

If He is Lord, you are free from sin. If Jesus Christ is Lord, you are always a son or daughter and therefore have access. If Jesus Christ is Lord, you have no condemnation. If Jesus Christ is Lord, you are in Adam two, no longer in Adam one. If Jesus Christ is Lord, you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit. If Jesus Christ is Lord, although you are in this body, His Spirit will give life to your mortal bodies.

But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

—Romans 8:10-11

So why are our bodies dead? Because of sin. But when we are baptized and come to life confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord, what is it that animates our life? The Spirit. So, this body of flesh, I am still in it. But I do not live according to it. Why? Because my mind has been renewed and I put my mind on Spirit things. I live from Spirit.

Verse 11 is a powerful verse! It means that the very power that resurrected Jesus Christ from the dead is alive in you now if you are willing to believe. That is what the Romans 7 man cannot get to. He doesn't know how to speak by faith and live in grace. He is longing for agreement with righteousness, but in himself cannot find it. Only in Jesus do we have it. You live in grace through faith.

So, you set your mind on the fact that Jesus Christ is Lord. You don't set your mind on your feelings. Do you feel condemned? That's fine, feel the feeling, but then let it pass, because it is not true. Jesus is Lord, and in Him there is no condemnation. Feelings of shame, guilt, and condemnation are the tools of the enemy. They are not true in Jesus, so they can't be from Jesus.

People of the Spirit

What does setting your mind on the Spirit look like? It looks like a life of thankfulness in Him for what He has done. Paul has taught us that the minds of fools are darkened because they do not give thanks (Romans 1:21–23). By contrast, we should “pray without ceasing” and always give thanks (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

When I began to believe that what the Bible said was for me, my prayers changed from primarily requesting things of God, from a place of not having, into offering Him a song of thanks because in Jesus, I have everything I need.

Pray as though you have already been brought from death to life. Pray as though you are in the Spirit. Pray as though your life is now secure with God, in Christ. Pray as though He has adopted you as His. Pray as though you have been given a Spirit of power, love, and self-control.

Father, I thank you for grace today. I thank you that I have the privilege to live as your child. I thank you, Father that because of Jesus, I know your Spirit is within me. I know that I have the privilege of beginning my day positioned as your child, and I thank you for that.

I also know Father that whatever will come my way today, I am more than a conqueror through Christ Jesus. Even though there will be difficulties, I am so glad that you have given me the key to conquer them because I know how to count it all joy when I am tested. Even in the testing, I know that you are good and that you will provide a way out. And Father, even if you do not provide a way out, I put my trust in you because you are good to me. Jesus lives in me, so I always live in the way.

So, Father, I will not allow any circumstances today determine who I am, but rather I will cling to who You say I am. I receive the truth of who you say I am today and as I receive this truth; I know Father that you have forgiven me and that I walk in forgiveness. And Father because I walk in forgiveness, I now liberally extend that forgiveness to others in this world. Father illuminate my mind so that I might continue to shine the light in this world because I am your righteous child who is free from

sin and stands before you blameless because of the blood of Jesus.

So, I access the throne room right now. Not because I have earned it, but because I am your child. I put this truth on right now because you have called me holy. You have called me blameless. You have presented me before you without reproach, so Father I thank you. This morning as I start my day, I go knowing I am your child and am secure in your arms and that no weapon formed against me can prosper.

Father I wanted to take this minute at the start of my day by simply thanking you for your goodness and your deliverance from the kingdom of darkness and now I am in the kingdom of light. I rejoice that I have the Holy Spirit within me and that I can set my mind on the things of the Spirit. Thank you for your love. In Jesus' name, amen!

That is intimacy with God. That is setting your mind on the Spirit. We are people of Spirit and grace, not people of flesh and sin. Will you believe it?

In the Struggle, Believe

There will be times when we think we are being hypocrites because our life lived does not match our confession. But hypocrites are those who put on a mask in hopes of being seen as something other than what they truly are. Hypocrites intend to be duplicitous and malicious. Hypocrisy is playacting; in fact, *hypocrite* literally meant being an actor.⁸

But we are not being actors. All we are being is very sensitive to the fact that the lives we are living do not

match up to Jesus' life. That is not hypocrisy. That is a tender, sensitive heart. And the fact that your heart is sensitive to this perceived distance is the very evidence that your heart is qualified to receive that which He says is yours. But the enemy has taught us to see the distance and then name ourselves as something other than what God said.

We must flip our mindset. Renew the mind! We must believe that He is as good as He says He is and that He has done what He says He did. By faith, let us receive the fact that we are who He says we are and then live from that received truth. As believers, we don't first live from how we feel and then come to Him with all the life we have lived, from our feelings, and ask Him to change us. No! The life of faith is not one that continually brings failure to God. Through Christ Jesus, we put off failure because by faith, we live in His victory.

Our access to God is via the Lamb of God, and here is the good news: the Lamb has already come for you. So, if the Lamb has already come for you, you have access. You enter confidently by the blood that has already turned the key. We often think we must bring a bag of sins in order to get through the doorway, not understanding that the doorway is already smeared in blood and on the inside is liberty.

Our minds must be renewed. They must believe this good word and live from it. The mind transformed believes in the transforming power of grace that renews and empowers us to walk according to the truth of who we are. We offer up our lives as a sacrifice to the obedience of

faith so that we can then walk according to the truth that has already been spoken.

We start from where He finished. If He finished in resurrection power, and He has authored and perfected our faith, then that faith is already ours. We have a measure of it that is complete in Him. Therefore, we walk according to faith. Will you believe that this is your reality? That in Christ, by faith, you are no longer lawless—that you have the privilege of living according to everything that Jesus has? It's a great life, and it is free!

WORKBOOK

Chapter Five Questions

Question: What is your mindset about what is necessary to come to God? How much of your mindset is focused on what you have to do? What does this reveal about your understanding of what He has *already* done for you and who you are in Him? Do you need a shift in your mindset?

Question: What things are no longer true about you since you are in the Spirit? Thank God that Jesus has brought these things to nothing through His body!

Action: Read the prayer under the heading “People of the Spirit.” Write your own prayer which reflects your identity in Christ and your intimacy with God. Make it personal yet also rooted in the truth of the Bible. Make it a goal to pray this or a similar prayer every morning as the overflow of your heart. As you pray, thank God for at least three to four things. Concentrate on thanksgiving rather than request. And then confess lies, and any participation in them, that try to make their way back into your life. So, thank Him, confess, and then thank Him again for His grace in Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER SIX

Living by Faith

When I was around nine or ten years old, my sister had a brand-new flip/flash camera. Now, I'm dating myself here, but when I was young, you had to buy the flash separate from the camera. That was a struggle. You would buy the film to go in the camera and the flash necessary to provide enough light for a good photo.

Back in the early '90s, my sister got a camera that had the flash on it. No more buying the flash separate! This blew my mind.

One day I asked my sister if I could borrow the camera. She, being a good sister, said absolutely not. Me, being a good son, went to my mama and complained. "Mom, she won't let me use her camera." Being a good mom, she told my sister to let me borrow the camera or else. My sister, begrudgingly, let me borrow the camera.

So I took the camera to a church event where a number of my friends were. I wanted to take some cool pictures

with us in suits. It wasn't like today when you can take thousands of pictures. We had to be very judicious because I only had one roll of 12-shot film. We took a few pictures, put the camera in the bag, and took off upstairs to the church event. At the end of the event, I came back downstairs, opened the bag, reached down into the bag and—no camera. Immediately, panic set in because my sister had promised she would kill me if anything happened to the camera—and I believed my sister. She always came through on her word. I remember thinking, “I’ve had a good life, didn’t quite make it to thirteen years old, but it’s been a good run.”

That week on television, I had been watching *Back to the Future*, the time-travel movie where Marty McFly goes back in time by driving a DeLorean at 88 miles per hour. So, in that moment, with the camera being gone and *Back to the Future* on my mind, I had an idea. I prayed for Jesus to take me back in time so I could see who took the camera. Or, better yet, take me so far back in time that I hold onto the camera and it doesn’t get lost. That sounds like a stupid prayer request, but at ten years old, I literally believed it could happen. I believed so strongly it would happen, I put my hard-praying face on so that it would happen, begging the Lord to please take me back in time. I opened my eyes, and nothing had happened. So, I thought I needed to make the face harder and pray with more fervor. Then I made this promise: “Please God, give me this thing and if you do, I promise I will ____.”

This sounds silly, but as adults we do the same thing. We make promises regarding work, home, and finances,

and then we say: “*God, if You will do this, I will never stop tithing.*” “God, if You do that, I will never, ever ____.” Fill in the blank. We do that, and it amounts to the same theology.

And at ten years old, I was praying, believing in faith, but I did not go back in time. The prayer I was praying didn’t come to pass—why not? At ten years old, I thought I did not go back in time because I lacked belief. I believed the problem was that I didn’t have enough faith. We do this still. When something we are praying for doesn’t come to pass, we may conclude any of several things. Either God is not powerful enough, or He doesn’t care about me, or I have done something wrong. Then we make promises in prayers—“If You will, then I will”—and it does not happen. So we conclude, either God is not powerful enough or He doesn’t care about me, yadda yadda yadda.

I remember that at ten-years old, I was heartbroken, and I thought something was wrong with my faith because God didn’t do what I thought He could do. He says all things are possible to those who believe. At ten years old, I concluded the problem was me. Too often, that sentiment carries into adulthood.

The doubts and the questioning emerge. We position ourselves to try harder because the fault lies with us and that’s why our prayers have not been answered. All the while, what we have misunderstood is the very nature of faith. I’ve misunderstood faith. Faith is not what I thought it was.

Faith and Substance

The best-known definition of faith comes from Hebrews 11:1:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

—*Hebrews 11:1*

Faith is at least two things: it is the assurance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. This word translated as “assurance”—or, ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*) in the Greek²—can also be translated as “substance.” The definition for *assurance* or *substance* is two-fold. It can be understood as “trust” or “confidence,” or alternatively, as “essence” or “nature.” What unites these two different expressions of *hypostasis* is the concept of a foundation that you build on. In other words, you may be confident, assured, and trusting because the foundation has substance—it is real, solid, and sturdy. Much like a house built on a solid foundation is trustworthy, so a life built on faith is trustworthy—because faith is the solid foundation.

Substance, put simply, is the thing by which all other things become things. If that didn’t clear things up for you, think about it as a grammatical subject and predicate. If I say, “The tree is tall,” “the tree” is the subject, and “is tall” is the predicate. We don’t say “Tallness is instantiated in the tree.” We say the tree is tall. The tree is the

subject, and then *tallness* makes sense because the tree is the object (substance) of where tallness is found.

Could we talk about tallness? Yes, we could in the abstract. But you can make sense of it when it is demonstrated in something. So, first the tree, then tallness. Without the tree, we probably don't have anything to point at for "tallness."

So you have substance, it is the foundation of all other things. And by all other things, I mean everything that was created. Every thing! Substance thus underwrites all of material reality. In the same way that we can't make sense of tallness without the tree, things can't exist without substance. All other things are the predicate. Everything that is, is based on substance. All things exist because of substance. But substance, as a thing itself, doesn't need anything else for it to be a thing (exist).

Let's say it another way: substance, or *hypostasis*, is the thing by which all other things become things. Substance holds everything together but does not need something for it to be held together. Look at Hebrews 1; it begins to frame this reality:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

—Hebrews 1:1-2

The word for “world” is *aiōnas*. It includes more than just planet earth. It extends to encompass an ordered network of reality. It includes all that which encompasses life.¹⁰ (See Hebrews 11:3 and John 1:1–3.)

Through Him was created the ordered network of reality so that all things that exist are built on Him.

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

—Hebrews 11:3

John explained this same thought in John 1 when he said:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

—John 1:1–3

Do you see that all things were made through Him? So no thing that you see that is made has not been made without Him. If it is made, it is through Him. And He is the Word. This is such an awesome concept because the Word is who creates things. It is this Word who spoke human beings into existence so that they became flesh and had breath.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

—John 1:4

So the Word creates. In the Word is life. This Word is the Word who created the heavens and the earth. This Word is the Word who became flesh. The Word who has life is the light of men.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

—Hebrews 1:3

When I first read that verse, I thought it was worded wrong. I thought it should say “by the power of his word” because it is held together by power and the power is via His word. But no, what the text is trying to tell us is that His very power is His word. The conclusion is this: whatever God speaks is what is. His word is the substance, foundation, and assurance of reality. If He didn’t speak it, it can’t be.

Let’s say a man is wearing a beautiful forest-green jumpsuit. If I look at him and tell him he has on a good-looking red suit, he’ll look at me and think, “*What is he talking about?*” Why? Because when I speak, there is no creative power behind it. My words don’t have the very underlining thing that creates things. They’re not creative; they do not command the material world to agree.

However, if Jesus were standing here and He told the man with the beautiful forest-green jumpsuit that he had a

nice red suit, what do you think that man would suddenly be wearing? A red suit! Why? Because His very words carry the ability to effect things—to bring into being what they say. If He says, “Let there be light,” the universe begins to shine. So at the heart of faith is the substance that underwrites all things. That substance is His very word; it is the thing by which all things are things.

Faith is when you and I come into agreement with what His word says simply because He said it. His word is the power to accomplish that which He speaks.

When I was ten years old, waiting for the camera, I was hoping to get carried back in time, thinking that faith was believing on the preposterous, because somehow, I thought God was capable of it. But it was all wishful thinking based on my own self-seeking desire.

What Faith Looks Like

There is a moment in the life of Jesus that encapsulates this notion of faith. In Luke 7, Jesus was approached by some Jewish elders, who had been sent by a Roman centurion with a specific request. They asked Jesus to come and heal the servant of the centurion, adding, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue” (Luke 7:4–5). Without hesitation, Jesus obliged them. When Jesus was not too far from the house, the centurion sent some friends to tell Jesus not to trouble Himself with coming:

Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, "Go," and he goes; and to another, "Come," and he comes; and to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.

—Luke 7:6–8

Notice the reason that the elders gave for the centurion receiving this favor: they believed him to be someone who had done good things, in particular good things for the nation of Israel. Now contrast this with the reason that the centurion gave for believing that his servant could be healed. On the one hand, you had a merit-based idea of belief: You do, and you are rewarded for so doing. You act according to the principles and rules that are laid down, doing the right thing, and then when you ask God something, you can expect good things. If you do not receive good things, the fault probably lies with you for doing something wrong.

However, this passage gives a window into the nature of faith according to what the book of Hebrews presents. The elders positioned Jesus as a miracle worker who could do things for people who asked correctly, or who behaved correctly. Yet the centurion requested because he believed Jesus to be Lord over the malady from which his servant was suffering. It had nothing to do with him doing good, or building a synagogue. Instead, he believed that Jesus had authority over the material world in such a way that,

if He were willing, He could simply command healing and healing would happen. It was about Jesus, not him.

The elders believed that Jesus had power as a miracle worker. The centurion correctly understood that the word of Jesus was power because of His authority. Do you see the difference? One believed that Jesus should do certain things in light of merit, and when God grants you something, it's because you "had faith." That is, if you have "done well," He can grant your requests, since He has the power to do so. The other perspective sees Jesus as the author of life, the Lord of the material world, whose word has the authority and power to accomplish what it speaks.

When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

—Luke 7:9-10

Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion because the faith of the centurion was grounded in what he recognized about Jesus: His word underwrites the material world. The word of God does not simply work within the material world; it certainly does that, but more importantly, it authors and underwrites the material world—all of creation. The centurion perceived that the words Jesus spoke were more authoritative than the sickness of his servant. Jesus marveled that there was someone who apprehended the truth and reality of His authority.

If you return to Hebrews 11, you read the same dynamic at play. All of the characters in Hebrews 11 built their lives around the word of God and lived like what He spoke was true. Faith is moving based on the certainty of God's word, not simply believing on the impossible. It's believing as absolutely true—because God spoke it—what others would call impossible.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household.

—Hebrews 11:4–7

Did Abel please God? Yes. What happened to him? He died. Did Enoch please God? Yes. What happened to him? He lived. By faith, Noah stayed 120 years and preached.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

—Hebrews 11:8

Notice that Hebrews 11 has a certain rhythm. It's an exercise in contrast in order to foreground the most important feature of faith: the word of God.

By *faith* Abel died. By *faith* Enoch lived. By *faith* Noah stayed. By *faith* Abraham went. Why? Because they all lived their lives according to what His word spoke. But what His word spoke was walked out differently than the person who was before them. Faith is not determined by you first believing, but by what His word has spoken. Faith is not believing on the preposterous, as in, "One day I'll be an astronaut," or "Name and claim it. Gotta have faith!" No! Faith is ordering your life according to the word that God *has* spoken, because His word is more sure than the world we live in: "Heavens and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). What seems impossible is absolutely certain because His word has spoken it.

This is what the centurion saw—that if Jesus just spoke the words, they were authoritative, because faith begins in God's word. That word, when believed, received, and lived from, is a life of faith.

Let us consider the second aspect of faith: evidence. Evidence is the information that tells you whether an assertion is true, or at least reasonable. Simply put, the evidence of faith is that God spoke it. Because He spoke it, we have all the indication we need to know that it is true. But if Him speaking it were not enough, His word always accomplishes that which He has spoken. It will never return empty (Isaiah 55:11).

Early in the scriptural narrative, God promises that He will redeem humanity by way of a “seed” (Genesis 3:15). Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, this promise is reiterated again and again. The law and the prophets testify and prophesy about the coming “seed” who will reconcile humanity back to God. The promise is sure because God has spoken it.

However, while the world awaited the long-expected seed, it required a restraint against its propensity to sin, since sin leads ultimately death. In the story of the flood, we have a prime example of what humanity would do given enough leeway: corrupt and destroy the earth (Genesis 6:11–12). So God gave them a law intended to restrain, while also prophesying about the one who was to come. In this way, the law was a guardian o tutor the people of God. The instruction they received through it would restrain their sinful tendencies while also teaching them of a righteousness to come. This righteousness would come in the form of a “seed,” a child, who would reunite God and humanity, freeing the world from true slavery to sin and death.

That righteousness appeared according to the promise spoken. That righteousness is Jesus, and the life He lived was one that was always in full surrender to every word that His Father spoke. In this way, Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith. He lived His life subservient to the word of His Father, even when all seemed lost and His death was imminent. He trusted the word of God above all else. This is why Paul could say:

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

—Galatians 3:23–27

The author and perfecter has come. He who in His own body is the agreement between God's word spoken and God's word obeyed has fulfilled His promise.

Let's take a moment to consider that: Jesus, in His very body and person—through the incarnation—is the agreement between the word of God spoken and the word of God obeyed. He is both the speaking God and the obedient man. He is the author and perfecter of faith. Do you see it? The evidence that the word of God is sure is the very person of Jesus. The fact that He became and accomplished what was prophesied, and that He arose to new life and sits enthroned as King, is all we need to live a life of faith. He who promised is faithful; His very person and being is the evidence of the word of His power!

In Christ, by Faith

In Christ, by faith, you are free from sin. In Christ you have standing in the second Adam. In Christ, by faith, you have been transferred from death to life. In Christ, by faith, the law no longer speaks condemnation over your

lives. How, then, do you live when the voices in your head tell you things to the contrary? By faith!

Faith is the agreement between His word and reality. The centurion believed that the word Jesus spoke determined reality. In like manner, we believe that God's word determines our reality. We see what He speaks. We do not live according to the circumstance of life. We live according to faith.

If His word has spoken the universe into existence, then His word:

- calls me beloved son
- tells me I have been chosen
- and never forsaken,
- that nothing can separate me

What do we do when the circumstances of life speak condemnation? What do we do when the enemy tempts us to doubt the certainty of what He has spoken by pointing out our failings and shortcomings? We don't live according to those circumstances. We live according to faith.

The enemy will use circumstances to position us in shame, guilt, and condemnation. Guilt says, I am not forgiven. Condemnation says, I am living a life worthy of judgment. Shame says, this is what I am. But the word of faith says different. This word that we have received says something else about our lives!

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

—Colossians 3:1–2

The word “if” is understood as a conclusion, like “since.” So we are to seek the things that are above *since* we have been raised with Christ. God’s word is true in Christ. Since He is resurrected, He has elevated us with Him. This all by faith. Since I have been raised with Christ, I set my mind on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. That means my life begins where He is.

Look at Ephesians 1:3. This is one of my favorite verses. When I first believed the gospel, I spent so much time in this one verse. I remember I read this verse and suddenly realized I was reading the truth about me. The Word was revealing the truth about who I was! I was not reading something I was hoping for. The Holy Spirit had come into my life and made this verse true. It had always been true, but I was finally reading it by faith. I was reading with the assurance that these words were the bedrock of reality. Believing this, I learned how to set my mind on things above.

Every morning, I would wake and open it to Ephesians. There was a season in my life when this was all I had permission read.

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

—Ephesians 1:3

Living by faith meant believing these words as truth, believing that every spiritual blessing was mine because God said so. If God has spoken, it is true. So I would speak it out audibly by faith. I'd grab my Bible and pray, thanking the Father that I had every blessing in Christ Jesus:

I thank you Father that I have the privilege of these moments, setting my mind on the truth of who You say I am. I can think about being there with You because You tell me that through Christ Jesus, I am there with You, and that every single blessing You can give in heaven is absolutely mine.

So, Father, right now, by faith I speak in agreement with this word. And I receive the truth that every blessing is mine. I agree with Your word, Father, not because I have done anything, but because I am listening to Your word and I am believing it.

Father, You tell me in this passage that You chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, and that we should be holy and blameless before You. So, Father, I receive that I have been chosen. Father, I know my name, and I know that You know my name, so I receive that You know me and have blessed me with every spiritual blessing. I believe that You predestined this for me so I could stand blameless and holy before You right now.

I know I have righteous standing, blameless and holy before Your sight, not because I have done anything to earn it, not because I have done anything to merit it, but because, through Jesus, I am speaking by faith to put on the

truth of Your word. I receive it by faith, and I know as I speak it and come into agreement with You, I can walk out this grace because You say it is mine. So, I receive it in fullness in Jesus' name—amen!

Walk It Out!

This is how you come into agreement with God. You believe His word, and you walk it out by faith—intimacy with your Father via the word. Because if His word has spoken it, it is absolutely true. His word is the very word that created things and it is substance. Once you believe Him via His word, your life lived becomes the evidence of things not seen. Christ in you, via the word, becomes the hope of glory. The Bible teaches us to be thankful in all things. So, as I read the book, I come into agreement with what it reveals about Him and says about me, and I am thankful.

Here is what this is not. This is not wishful thinking that I might win the lottery because I have “crazy faith.” That is not faith. That is wishful presumption. His word has never told me I am going to win the lottery. This is not “name it and claim it.” Faith is standing on the promises.

His word has told me that I already have victory over and above the need of winning the lottery. Because I have that victory and it is sure in the Word, I speak and live in agreement with the promises He has spoken. I don't try to wishfully presume regarding things that will align with my needs. I speak in agreement with that which gives me

life and has given me life. I live by faith according to the promises. This is our privilege.

Challenge of Faith

Here is my challenge to you. Tomorrow morning when you awaken, I am challenging you to speak by faith Ephesians 1:3–6. Pray through and give thanks for every element that passages speak about you: that you are chosen, that you are predestined, that you are blessed. Begin your day this way, believing the surety of the Word. See if it doesn't make a change. See if it doesn't make a difference.

As you begin to set your mind on the truth of these words, you'll be renewing your mind in the image of your Creator (Colossians 3:8–10). Do you know why? Because you are setting your mind on the truth above, agreeing with the words that created the universe. This is powerful! When you come into agreement with the very words that created the universe, that put the sky in order; it will set your mind to think from heaven to earth and not from earth to heaven. Believe it and be thankful.

If you do not have the habit and practice of this, it will feel super-awkward. We so readily call ourselves less than what the Father says we are. We think we are positioning ourselves correctly when we make ourselves low. What we fail to understand is that when we receive, we are the beneficiary of a Benefactor. We are acknowledging the superiority of the Giver when what we need for this life is given to us. True humility receives freely because it recognizes its dependence and is not self-centered. Pray those

three verses from Ephesians in thankfulness; humbly receive the word that calls you blessed. Receive it by faith.

The Word became flesh. The Word authored and perfected faith. We live this by faith; the righteous live by faith. It is only by faith that you stand in righteousness. You speak this faith; grace comes to empower the fact and make it a reality. Live this way. Agree this way. Position your heart and mind this way and the fruit will blossom.

WORKBOOK

Chapter Six Questions

Question: Can you name some ways God is faithful?
What are some promises that are hard to believe but must
be true since God has spoken them?

Question: *Faith is not determined by behavior first, but by what the Word has spoken and a life that follows. What is faith? In what ways have you misunderstood or misapplied faith? What was the result of that? How did that experience reveal what faith is or is not?*

Action: *I learned how to set my mind on things above and live by faith. This is how you come into agreement with the Word. You put it on, and you walk it out by faith. In the morning, read Ephesians 1:3–6. Pray through it and give thanks for every element those passages speak about you—that you are chosen, predestined, and blessed.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

Forgiveness Is...

I was once owed three hundred dollars by a friend of mine. It had become an uncomfortable situation. The loan was past due, and every time we saw each other, the money was the elephant in the room. I tried not to bring it up for the sake of the friendship, and I'm sure he didn't feel good that he couldn't pay me, either.

It was during a season of prayer with the Lord that I learned to let it go. I remember going back and forth with Jesus. "He owes me, Lord! You have to convict his heart and have him pay me!" Silence. So I would try again. "Lord, it's unethical what he's doing! It's unbecoming of a Christian! For the sake of Your name and honor, the wrong must be corrected!" Not my proudest moment.

The Lord was kind and drew my attention to Matthew 18. There He unpacked the truth of forgiveness to me. He framed it according to the gospel of freedom, and it freed

me to understand the privilege I have in being a forgiven person.

Forgiveness That Absorbs

In Matthew 18, forgiveness is front and center. Peter had a serious inquiry as to how to live out forgiveness:

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"

—Matthew 18: 21

Jesus responded by calling him not to limit himself to just seven times. In fact, He exaggerated the number to a point that would have seemed beyond Peter:

Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."

—Matthew 18:22

I'm certain that Peter was stunned at this response. To be willing to forgive somebody seven times is already quite the gracious offer. Think about that. If somebody borrowed money from you once and didn't pay it back, would you lend them money a second time? We have a saying for that: "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." To be willing to forgive *seven* times

is quite the generous move—so, what Jesus offered was truly astounding!

Jesus then launched into a parable about what the kingdom of heaven is like:

Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

—Matthew 18: 23-27

So the king is willing to forgive, but what about the money? What happens to it? If the king is willing to forgive the debt, that means that the money is never returning. The ten thousand talents are gone, never to return.

Here is the first thing we learn about forgiveness from Jesus: forgiveness requires that the offense be absorbed. The money was loaned out; the money was spent. It's not finding its way back into the coffers of the king. To forgive, the king must be willing to absorb the loss.

We've all experienced offenses, whether as the offended or the offender. But for forgiveness to happen, the offense must be reckoned with, acknowledged, and processed. Without reckoning with the hurt, the trauma, and

the effects of the offense, forgiveness becomes the granting of a status that our bodies and person are resistant to giving.

Often, we are taught to “just forgive” because “it’s the Christian thing to do.” But without the conscience reckoning with the offense, we do ourselves a great disservice. The gospel speaks a better word: Jesus is our healing. Jesus absorbed the offense for us.

Let me say that again: the person of Jesus is our healing. By His stripes, we are healed. He absorbed the offense for us!

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

—1 Peter 2:24–25

Healing from offenses that have occurred resides in the person of Jesus. The healing of offenses that we have committed is found in the person of Jesus. He has endured the offense of our sin in His body, and redeemed humanity in His body, so that the life He lives can be given freely to us, too, through the Holy Spirit.

Have you experienced betrayal in your life? Jesus experienced the same. He was betrayed by those closest to Him. He experienced this betrayal, endured the depths of it, and arose victorious beyond it, all so that He could break its power and give us His victory. Through His

Spirit, He communicates the truth of His love. He illuminates the truth of our lives to us, since our lives are hidden in Christ, secure with God. Through His Spirit, He rewrites our story in Him! In doing so, He heals our minds and promises to give us new bodies that are completely safe from corruption and sin. In this way, He is our healing. He absorbed the offense for us.

He knows the depths of abandonment. He knows what it's like to have your body violated when it should have been protected. He has experienced the weight of trauma and the deepest darkness. He endured it all on our behalf so that we might know we have a God who understands our human experience well. Our God absorbed all that this life could send our way, and still He was victorious. He absorbed the offense, becoming sin so that we could be His righteousness.

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.—
2 Corinthians 5:21*

When it comes to forgiveness, Jesus is the King who absorbed the offense of sin in His own body so that He could set the captives free. In the parable, the servant never asks to be forgiven. He does not ask the king to absorb the loss; he only requests more time.

So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of

pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

—Matthew 18:26–27

The king offers forgiveness freely because he takes pity on the servant, not because the servant asks. How could he ask? He's a servant. His duty is simply to pay back what he owes. The amount is too large, but how could he know that his king is so benevolent? How could he know that his king would be willing to absorb the loss?

Here we have a direct parallel with the revelation of Jesus at the cross. How could we know? How could we have anticipated that the God of heaven would be willing to absorb the offense of sin on our behalf? That He would bestow such compassion because He loved us in our pitiable condition?

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

—Isaiah 53:1

Jesus becoming sin, on the cross, for our sake, was the revelation of the righteousness of God. It was His act of judgment and justice. Sin was condemned in His body, and we are freed from liability for the offense.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith

in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

—Romans 3:21–26

Forgiveness Releases

The king of the parable absorbs the loss; this much is clear. Then he releases the offender. He lets the previously indebted servant go and does not hold him accountable according to the debt. This is the second part of forgiveness: it releases the offending party from the identity of the offense. When the king lets the servant go, the servant is no longer under the burden of the offense.

Often we may “forgive” someone but, from time to time, we remind them of the offense. We use it as leverage to get what we want. That’s not forgiveness. Or, we might have received forgiveness without *fully* receiving it, so that every time the thought of the offense we committed comes back, we apologize over and over. That’s a mind that is not living forgiven.

This is not the way Jesus forgives. He forgives in such a way that He will never bring it up again. He remembers our sins no more; they are gone (Hebrews 8:12).

Forgiveness absorbs and then releases. This sort of release does not mean that the offender does not suffer consequences for their actions, particularly when the action is illegal. That sort of situation is determined by the laws of the land, and if judicial consequences are to be had, then so be it. But from the heart of a believer in Christ, we are to no longer identify others by their offense. We don't position people as the sum total of their offenses. Instead, we release them from the identity of their offense and position them in the Spirit.

This is what Jesus did for us. He did not see us through eyes of flesh, He saw us through the Spirit. He did not condone our sin; He did not simply permit us to continue living in sin. No, He made a way of escape for us. We have the privilege of receiving and believing that forgiveness is for us and that by faith in Jesus, it is ours now.

Let's return to the parable. There is a second aspect to this story, with which we must reckon. So far, we can see that forgiveness requires absorption and release. You We must absorb the cost of the other person's offense and then release, or separate, that person from their identity with respect to the offense. Jesus framed the latter aspect in the second half of the parable:

But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, "Pay what you owe." So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

—Matthew 18:28–30

The forgiven servant goes out and is unwilling to extend to others the forgiveness that he received. His fellow servant owes him a fraction of what he would have owed his master. The comparison is laughable. It's like the difference between a lifetime of wages versus a day's wage.

However, there is an interesting wrinkle embedded in the parable. To us, the unforgiving servant seems morally deplorable and ethically bankrupt. But to make that assessment requires us to believe something about the way he should've responded because of what he received. We intuitively recognize that to be forgiven such a great amount should naturally motivate someone to forgive those who are less fortunate than you. If you we have been forgiven \$10 million, then yes, forgiving someone \$250 is a no-brainer.

But what we can miss is that the unforgiving servant is well within his legal right to require the money he is owed. Legally, he is owed the five hundred denarii, and legally, he is afforded the right to imprison his fellow servant because he is owed. Is it morally right? Maybe not, but is it lawful? Absolutely. Yet, now comes the twist:

When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.

—Matthew 18:31–34

The actions of the first servant are reported to the king, who finds them to be reprehensible. He cannot fathom that someone who has been forgiven so much could be so unforgiving. To have received such a gift yet not extend the same gift to others seems to be a high offense. It demonstrates that the servant is unworthy to steward the forgiveness he has received. Notice the conclusion:

So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

—Matthew 18:35

The desire of God is for us to reflect His character—for us to project His image in the world by offering what we have received. We have the privilege of stewarding the life of God in us because we have been forgiven, and that is why we can forgive others. We can offer and freely give that which we have freely received.

But the unforgiving servant is not willing to do that. He is unwilling to give freely what he himself has received, and so he nullifies the power of his liberty. Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer that our trespasses are forgiven in the same way we forgive those who commit trespasses against us (Matthew 6:12). In short, we are to forgive in the way we have been forgiven. That sort of forgiveness flows from us because we have *become* what we have received. We live and offer forgiveness because we are forgiven.

So the forgiven servant lawfully holds his fellow servant accountable—but there seems to be a greater law at work. The law of righteousness goes beyond the law of equitable right. The law of righteousness calls us to manifest what we have received. We are to be what He has given us and to freely extend the same to others. If we do not, we are choosing to remain under judgment.

The Law of Liberty

James drew out this lesson in James 1:

...therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

—James 1:21-25

We put away what we used to be, because we now belong to Christ. We are forgiven and have been freed by the law of liberty that set us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-3). Now that we see ourselves correctly, as those who have been forgiven because Jesus absorbed and set us free, we can truly live free. James admonished us

not to forget what we have seen in the mirror, or what our true identity is now in Christ.

Paul echoed James' point about seeing ourselves in liberty when he contrasted the ministry of condemnation with the ministry of righteousness that reveals the truth.

But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

—2 Corinthians 3:16-18

Now that we have been forgiven and we see with an unveiled face, we have the privilege of looking in the mirror and seeing one who has been created in the image of God, empowered to reflect His character in the world. Notice how Paul framed it to the Colossians:

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

—Colossians 3:9-10

It's there again: we have put on the new self. We have been released from the old, which means that we live in the reality of forgiveness. The old man who was cursed under sin and destined for death has been absorbed by Jesus, who absorbed the curse of Adam One. He became sin

so that we could become His righteousness, and so we are. Since this is true, we are being renewed in knowledge after the image of our creator.

Our renewal is in the new image. Jesus is the new man, and as we behold Him, we are growing in the new image that is ours by faith. The admonishment of James is to refrain from behaving in the image of the old. We're all done with the old! Since we are forgiven, there is no reason to live according to what we no longer are.

James illustrated how this works, in James 2. First, he admonished believers not to practice the sin of partiality by preferring the rich over the poor when they met together. To make distinctions is to treat people on a scale or hierarchy that is not in keeping with the law of liberty. Then he explained:

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

—James 2:8-11

The law to which James appealed here was the royal law, and this is distinct from the law of liberty. He cited it in verse 11, concluding that to fulfill royal law, you must

keep all of it, but if you violate it in one aspect, you violate the whole of the law:

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

—James 2:8-9

The point is, you have been liberated from the law that condemns you. You are forgiven because Jesus has absorbed sin and released you. But now you ought to treat others in the way you have been treated. Don't treat them according to the old way that seemed reasonable, but treat them according to righteousness that is yours.

The very reason you can treat others with this freedom is because you yourself have received it. When you looked in the mirror of the law of liberty, you saw it! You were forgiven and made new, so don't walk away and forget, continuing to treat others according to the old way of doing things. The conclusion of James is similar to the conclusion that Jesus offered in the parable.

James' conclusion:

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

—James 2: 12-13

Jesus' conclusion:

Then his master summoned him and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

—Matthew 18:32–35

Do you see it? You are forgiven. To be forgiven means to have the curse of Adam One removed and taken away. Jesus did this in His flesh when He became sin. We receive this word from God by faith; this is the word of faith that is implanted in us and is able to save our souls (James 1:21). When we receive His word, the veil is taken away; the law of liberty calls us free and calls us children. We then have the privilege of living in the Spirit and treating others in the same way that we have been treated. So we no longer require the five hundred denarii that the law demands, but we no longer demonstrate the sin of partiality, either—because we have been forgiven, and we forgive others. And do you know the first person who needs to receive this forgiveness? You.

Forgiveness Before Repentance

Paul clearly taught us when we were forgiven. For Paul, our forgiveness is in the person of Jesus. In Jesus we

were delivered from the curse of death because Jesus has spoiled the domain of death. Through His incarnation, Jesus took the body of flesh, brought it through death, and raised it up in Spirit power. He has released it from sin, and from being in the flesh, and has established it in the Spirit. This was done before you believed. It is already true; you received it by faith. Notice the language:

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

—Colossians 1:13–14

The forgiveness of sins is not simply given by Jesus; it's in Jesus. We have it *in Him!* Since Jesus is alive, the body of flesh has come to nothing and we have been released. Notice again:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

—Colossians 2:13–15

It's all located in Jesus. The absorption of our "trespasses," or lawlessness, is in Jesus; the release from slavery to sin is in Jesus. That's the cross and the resurrection.

It's all in Him! So our forgiveness is secured in Him, and we receive it by faith if we hold fast to the confession:

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

—Colossians 1: 21-23

To receive the word of the gospel—to believe what God has done—is to recognize that humanity was cursed. They were destined for death, but Jesus released us by absorbing the curse, experiencing death and resurrection in power. He did this for us before we could ask for it. We were forgiven a long time ago, but it's only effective in our individual lives if we receive and believe.

Can you speak this over your life? Can you, as a believer, look in the mirror and say sincerely that the person looking back at you is a child of God? Forgiven. Free from sin. Alive in Adam Two. Released from the curse. Free to love and give love, because you have received love. Can you, by faith, look at that person and say that there is no condemnation because you are in Christ Jesus? Will you believe that you have the mind of Christ and that you have a new heart by faith in Jesus? It's all there. It's ready to be believed and received. You are forgiven and free!

WORKBOOK

Chapter Seven Questions

Question: What things has Jesus experienced that you have experienced? In what ways can you see that He has absorbed the weight of those things?

Question: Describe a time when you were believing that you were not forgiven. How did that cause you to relate to God? How did it cause you to relate to others?

Action: Thank Jesus for all the ways He has forgiven you. Name the ways in which understanding that you have been forgiven in Jesus impacts your life. Thank Him for His forgiveness!

CHAPTER EIGHT

Repent and Confess

So, what about repentance? If we are free from sin, freed from the curse of death, and freely forgiven before repentance, then what role do repentance and confession play? I have long found that for many people, repentance comes before forgiveness because, they believe, in order to be forgiven, we have to ask for it. Forgiveness then becomes a favor granted upon repentance. The conclusion is that we repent and, so, He forgives. We request; He grants.

When it comes to biblical repentance, we often confuse repentance with what Acts 2 calls being “cut to the heart,” i.e. sorrow. When Peter stood up to preach to the gathered crowd, he told them the story of what God had done in Jesus. He explained that what they were witnessing was the fulfillment of prophecy and this was always God’s intent, so that the seed of Abraham might receive the promised Holy Spirit.

Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

"The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'"

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

—Acts 2:29–36

When Peter was done sharing about the fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus, and unveiled the finality of what Jesus had accomplished, those who were listening were “cut to the heart”:

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

—Acts 2:37

It is so important for us to note that here Peter invited them to repent. Repentance is an offer in light of the love

of God unveiled in Jesus. This is so important to understand: repentance is offered (by God) via the unveiling of the story of Jesus. Repentance is only possible when Jesus as Lord is proclaimed. It is not a matter of you first feeling bad about your sin and its consequence. No, you are empowered to repentance because the love of God has been presented through the gospel of Jesus. It is then, and only then, that you can truly begin to apprehend the enormity of sin. Only when the love of God is magnified in what He has done can you correctly see what love has done for us—that it has gone to such great lengths to release us from the curse. God offered up His own Son to freely give us all these things! Would He who did not spare His Son withhold anything from us? Would He withhold forgiveness until we feel bad enough about our sin? Absolutely not!

Repentance is the turning from our former life, the life that was stamped and formed by the deceitfulness of sin. It's renouncing the work of Adam One, who is in the flesh and a slave to sin. Repentance is empowered by the illumination from heaven that clearly demonstrates how vile and deceitful sin is. This is all revealed as Jesus is proclaimed.

The people who were listening to Peter on that day faced the fact that sin had led them to participate unwittingly in the death of God. This is the recognition that troubled their hearts; this is what “cut” them. In a state of bewilderment and astonishment, they sought a reprieve—they had to do something! What was offered was the opportunity to turn from the deceitfulness of the old way, to

renounce their ideas and instead receive Jesus as Lord. Then, and only then, could they really receive what God offers us in Jesus: forgiveness of sins.

Peter preached this message constantly. In Acts 5, he had been arrested, along with the other disciples. In the middle of the night, an angel freed them from their chains, and the disciples headed back to the temple to preach. Upon being found again at the temple, they were brought before the council and high priest to be questioned about their continued persistence to preach Jesus.

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

—Acts 5:29-32

Again, Peter taught that repentance is given by God via the proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus. Repentance is empowered via the illumination of what God has prophetically accomplished in Jesus. Why does this matter?

Repentance is too often framed as feeling bad about sin. This idea has a long history wherein old meanings of repentance are collapsed with "regret."¹¹ It leads to the equation "regret = repentance." Regret entails sorrow about a state of affairs. It is saddened about the conditions of life, whether or not that sorrow is accurately perceiving truth. A thief can be sorrowful that they were caught by

the police, but this is not the sort of godly sorrow that leads to repentance. It is sorrow that gives way to a lament: “I should’ve done _____ [fill in the blank].” This is worldly sorrow; this is the sort of regret that leads to death (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Godly sorrow is the sort of sorrow that emerges in light of the illumination of truth. It is reckoning with a condition that’s based on a falsehood, seeing your participation in it, and renouncing any affiliation with it because the thought of having participated in such deception is sickening. It “cuts” the heart. It produces godly sorrow. What makes it godly is that the sorrow is in light of redemptive truth that offers a way out. The proclamation of Jesus brings home the deceitfulness of sin in light of the cross, but it also provides a way of escape through the cross.

The cross is the end of sin, because at the cross we see what sin does: it leads to death. But in the mystery of righteousness, God condemns sin at the cross in the body of Jesus while simultaneously providing a way of escape for the sinner through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is why, when Peter preached that Jesus was crucified and resurrected according to Scripture, the sorrow of the people constituted astonishment at their own foolishness, but coupled with the hope that God had done something for them they could never have done for themselves.

Repentance, then, is available—turning from the deception of sin to the new and living way. In John 3, Jesus presented this to Nicodemus when He said:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

—John 3: 14–15

The New Testament definition for repentance is “a change of mind which results in a change of life.”¹² It’s turning from one way to another, in mind and in life. However, you cannot turn from a given way of being and living unless there is an alternative. This is what Jesus offered Nicodemus. Jesus drew attention to the story found in Numbers 21 where the children of Israel were dying from the bites of snakes God had sent. Under God’s direction, Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a pole, because God had instructed him:

Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.

—Number 21:8

Jesus likened His death to that of the fiery serpent on the pole. He would die, but those who would look, receive, and believe would live! To look at the fiery serpent on the pole, the children of Israel had to turn their gaze from themselves. They had to receive the simple truth that the afflicting serpents had been overcome. On the pole, they could see the condemnation of things that had previously brought death. In a similar way, the death of Jesus on the cross brought condemnation to sin but also illuminated our participation in sin. The children of Israel knew

the serpent was there because of their sin, in the same way the unveiling of Jesus on the cross illuminated our participation in sin—but in doing so, it has also provided the way of escape, by faith in Him who is on the cross.

This alternative is only possible because Jesus died according to Scripture. He was resurrected according to Scripture. He is at the right hand of God and has given repentance and forgiveness of sin to us through what He has accomplished. When we see this revelation of the love of God unveiled through gospel teaching, we experience a sorrow that leads to repentance. We turn from the deceitfulness of sin and receive by faith the Holy Spirit, because through the victory of Jesus, we are forgiven in Him freely.

So we see that repentance does not precede forgiveness. Repentance is offered because *in Christ* we have been forgiven. It is through the preaching of Christ that we receive it as true in our lives. *In Christ* forgiveness is accomplished, but only those *in Christ* experience the truth of this reality: repentance is the turning from the deceitfulness of sin and our participation in it, renouncing our identity in it and slavery to it, and receiving the victory of Jesus over the powers of sin and death. We receive all of this by turning and being baptized.

If you follow the proclamation of the gospel by Peter, Paul, and the other apostles, you'll notice that they continually presented Jesus as Lord. Jesus is not presented as an option among other gods. Jesus is not a viable alternative to the insufficiency of other masters. He is always presented as Lord. He is Lord. He is the risen and rightful

King, and there is no other. The gospel becomes the proclamation of a conclusion realized *in Him*. Repentance follows, as we turn from the lies and deceitfulness of anything that would elevate itself against His Lordship. In Jesus we are forgiven; through the gift of repentance we receive it as our own.

True Confession

We can now turn to a passage that has been used all too often to present a picture of repentance that makes it seem like a work we originate:

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

—1 John 1:9

When repentance is framed as feeling sorrow for the sins you commit, versus turning away from sin itself and our participation in it, then confession becomes a required admission of guilt.

Let's make sure that this distinction is clear. When repentance is synonymous with regret, it's built on a framework of sin as a bad act. So if you commit a bad act, you should feel sorry for it because it's wrong and you are guilty for having done it. This leads to repentance (defined as regret). However, as we have covered already, sin is not merely transgression of the law; sin is lawlessness. It is the absence of law (love, righteousness, and the character

of God) where lawfulness ought to be—on the inside of God’s image-bearers.

Repentance, then, is the turning to a new and living way wherein you receive the Holy Spirit through Jesus. The turning (repentance) empowers us via the revelation of Jesus, which shows us that we were not merely participants in sin but enslaved to it. We participated in sin *because* we were slaves to it, but now, through Jesus, freedom has been secured. Forgiveness (the absorption and release that is our freedom) has been offered to us because it is true *in Him*.

Therefore, when Peter preached to the Israelites in Acts 2, the sorrow they felt was in light of, not simply the act of, killing Jesus. Their collective role in His death was certainly part of it, but more important still was the recognition of their belonging to a slavery that would lead them to participate unwittingly in the death of God. They became aware of their participation and slavery and, thus, were stricken with a guilty conscience.

But here comes their confession. When they turned from their deception, they did so in light of God’s goodness and in recognition of their slavery to sin, while simultaneously believing that Jesus, through His death and resurrection, was the revelation of the righteousness of God and could, in fact, take away their sin.

They saw hope in a new and living way that could deliver them from the condition that they were in. This condition had led them to kill Jesus, but they did so unwittingly, precisely because they were slaves to sin. In Acts 2, you see a grief-stricken heart that is offered a hope

of life because the death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus made a new and living way. Confession thereby moves from being the simple admitting of wrongdoing to being the actual recognition and realization of our condition—and what saves us from it.

Think about it this way. Back in the story of the Exodus, the tenth and final plague was the angel of death, discussed earlier in this book. Only those who were physically inside a home that had blood smeared on the doorpost were saved from the coming destruction. The condition of all of Egypt, including the Israelites, was condemnation, meaning they were headed toward death. The only way out was to receive what was freely offered. If you did not confess, by way of your body actually entering into a house via a doorway covered in blood, you could not receive the freedom from the wrath that was to come. You had to physically move your body from the outside realm of darkness (night) into the domain of light (inside homes), because in doing so, you were confessing the truth of the situation. You were recognizing that you were the sort of person who was in need of redemption because you were headed toward death.

Without your agreement with this state of affairs, you could not receive what the blood on the door offered. It was there to be entered into, but if you did not confess your need for it, it was ineffectual.

Here it is worth speaking a word about a word. The word “confession” in 1 John 1:9 is the Greek compound word *ὁμολογῶμεν* (*homologōmen*).¹³ The compound construction is made up of *ὁμο* (*homo*), meaning “same,”

and λογῶμεν, from “logos,” which means” word.” So the compound construction means “same word.” This word that we translate “confession” does not need to mean some sort of judicial confession that requires you to speak your guilt and admit your wrong before you can be forgiven. No, quite to the contrary, confession is a declaration of agreement with the reality of the world as revealed through Jesus.¹⁴

Consider this. Any firstborn son who was unwilling to see the final plague as the truth of God, as revealed through His servant Moses, would perish. If they did not go into a home that had the blood over the doorpost, they were calling God a liar and denying the efficacy of that blood to save them. They were not in agreement with the reality of the truth God revealed, and the wrath of God remained on them. However, if they confessed that they were in need of what the blood offered, they could enter a house, in which the blood on the doorway cleansed them from the curse of death and kept them clean.

With all this in mind, consider how John framed the opening verses of his letter:

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all un

righteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

—1 John 1:5–9

Notice that there is a back and forth going on in this passage. John was talking to people who belong to the light as well as those who don't. He was sharing a message that he himself had lived. He had seen the Master. He had walked and talked with Him. He saw Him resurrected and knew Him to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

So he was inviting his listeners to consider that if they said they had fellowship with Christ (if they said they were in the house), but still walked in darkness (like they were outside of the house), then they surely were liars. They were not practicing truth, because if you are truly in Christ, you would live like it: living faith.

Then he offered a contrast, saying that if you are in fact in the light (in the house, as it were), then you have fellowship, and the blood of Jesus cleanses you from all sin. Now, the Greek tense for this cleansing indicates not only that we have been clean, but that we are kept clean continually. So those in the light (those in the house) are cleansed when they walk through the proverbial threshold, and they also remain clean because they are inside!

Notice how John pivoted here: if we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves. Whom was he addressing? Surely not the person who is in the light, because the reason the person is in the light is because they have acknowledged their need for a Savior. They have seen that

they have had fallen short of the glory of God and, so, happily turn turned to the alternative that He has had provided—a new and living way of living. This is the way of the Firstborn who has been sacrificed for our sins.

The person in 1 John 1:8 is the person who would hear about the revelation of Jesus and still deny that they had any part to play in sin. They are the blind guides who refuse to acknowledge that they need to be in the light. They are the ones who, upon hearing the proclamation of Jesus, refuse to come in, because they won't admit they have sinned; they are "not that bad." They resist the Lordship of Jesus. In so doing, they fail to confess their sin. They are not speaking in agreement with the truth as it is in Jesus. They say they have no sin that needs cleansing.

What to Do If We Sin

What about confession? First John 1:9 is not teaching us that our forgiveness from God is dependent on our admitting guilt and then requesting forgiveness. It is of such great importance to remember that forgiveness is a reality in Christ. It is not conditioned on our asking for it! Remember the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18: he did not ask for forgiveness; he was simply granted it. The same is true of David and his great sin. Nathaniel assured him his sin had been put away and he would not die (1 Samuel 12:13). The same is true for us. God forgave us in Christ while we were dead, and He made us alive with Christ and forgave us (Ephesians 2:1–7, Colossians 2:13).

What about when we do sin? It's of great importance to follow the instruction of John in his letter:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

—1 John 2: 1-2

John clearly taught, here and in the rest of the letter, that continued participation in the deceitfulness of sin is not something that is part of the Christian life. I challenge you to read 1 John and see if you can come away with a theology that says you're going to forever participate in sin. The challenge is, and forever will be, that if you define *sin* as "transgression of the law," as opposed to "lawlessness," you will forever see yourself in the grip of sin just because you mess up. However, if you come to understand that the deceitfulness of sin leads astray those who are under the law and disobedient, you will learn to correctly see that this does not include you. In Christ, by faith, you are not the disobedient kind. So, if you do sin—if you make a mistake—don't let yourself be identified with that passing moment of weakness. Look at how Peter framed this:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as Father

who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

—1 Peter 1:14–19

Peter encouraged us not to allow the desires of the body to lead us astray or rule over us. This is in agreement with Romans 6: we are now slaves to righteousness. Be holy, like your Father in heaven is holy, because you look like your Daddy. Be mindful that you were ransomed from the futile ways of your former life. The blood of Jesus has cleansed you and is keeping you clean. If you fall, don't you let a moment of failure cause you to forget what you have in Jesus.

This is why John taught us that if we sin, we have an Advocate. This Advocate should not be reduced to a lawyer who is merely pleading our case; that is much too human. Jesus is not in heaven begging the Father to reluctantly forgive us because of His sacrifice. If that were true, how could Scripture say that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them”(2 Corinthians 5:19)? It was God who forgave us in Christ!

Jesus as our advocate is the language of mediation. His mediation is of a particular kind. The human race is safe and secure because Jesus lives. Since Jesus lives, He will always be faithful to those who belong to Him, and this is all from the Father. So Jesus as advocate is the Father's

appointed representative for the human race, which was the will of God—that He could dwell with His people.

Consider this: in Christ, God dwells with man. Jesus is a man, and He is God, so in His very person, humanity dwells with God. Humanity cannot be overcome. When we sin—when we partake in the patterns of our former ignorance—we’re taught to remember Jesus. He is our representative in the celestial courts, but He is God Himself. As long as He is, we cannot be overcome, provided we hold tight to our confession and don’t waver in our hope. My dear friends, don’t let sin reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions!

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

—Romans 6:13–14

The conclusion is this:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

—Romans 8:31–34

Does that mean we have permission to sin? By no means, but it does indicate that *in Christ*, a moment of failure does not remove us from Him. It can't. What can remove us is unbelief. This is what discounted the children of Israel in the wilderness: unbelief. They had been set free by God. Pharaoh was no longer their master, but they continued to think and behave in the old way even though they were free. While they were in the wilderness, unbelief made them stumble and fall, not taking God at His word.

This is John's call in 1 John 2: it's a done deal! You have an Advocate in Jesus the righteous one, and don't you forget it! As long as Jesus lives, so do you, provided you hold fast to your confession. Even in your suffering, His promises hold true. He is faithful, and He will not deny you. So, confess correctly, confess his goodness, and renounce your participation in sin.

Receiving What He Has Accomplished

The heart of the matter is this: Jesus has done what He promised He would do. He has freed us from our sins. He has seated us in heavenly places. He has become wisdom and righteousness to us and for us. It is all ours by faith. There is nothing more for us to add; there is only receiving. We receive what He has accomplished by faith. He applies His life in us through the Holy Spirit and causes us to do and work according to His pleasure.

We agree with what He has done via our confession in Christ. We agree and receive the forgiveness that is ours

in Him. We need to add nothing. We need to earn and merit nothing. It would be impossible to do so! Our asking and pleading do not release gifts from heaven. It is faith that receives it in Jesus' name. God released every blessing when He gave us Jesus.

I pray that you learn to confess correctly—that you confess that you have received in Jesus' name. I pray that if you find yourself in a moment of failure, you remember His faithfulness and know that it is His life that moves us forward. I pray you confess that you are *in* Christ and that you are in the light because the blood of Jesus has cleansed you and keeps you clean. I pray you know that as a believer, you have received the gift of repentance and have been transferred from death to life. In Jesus' name!

WORKBOOK

Chapter Eight Questions

Question: How have you understood repentance in the past? Does this new way of thinking change some things for you? If so, name some of them.

Question: What are the different aspects of the good news of all that Christ accomplished in His death, resurrection, and ascension? What do each of those aspects of the good news provide for you right now? Confess these here and hold fast to them.

Action: Have you been living in the fullness of God—the fullness of who He says you are and the fullness of what He’s provided for you—or are you settling for a lesser measure of what’s available to you? Or maybe you’re not living in Him at all? If the Holy Spirit has touched your heart on any of these points, now is the time to make a declaration that you are a child of God. Accept all He has done for you and made accessible to you and receive it by faith.

CONCLUSION

Some Loose Ends

I'd like to use this space to tie up a few loose ends. In particular, I've found that there are several all-too-common objections to the gospel of freedom. I'll address a few of those here.

"Is This 'Once Saved, Always Saved'?"

This question is underwritten by a concern about licentiousness. The fear here is that if salvation is this easy, and Jesus has already done it all, then there is nothing to keep people from pursuing every sinful desire. This concern fails to comprehend the goodness of the gospel and the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit causes us to walk in power and purity, for the kingdom of heaven is about "righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). Since we are now slaves to righteousness, hating the very sin that

previously enslaved us, why would we be looking for ways to sin and get away with it? The gift of righteousness, with freedom from sin through the reception of the Holy Spirit, empowers our lives in such a way that we live by truth. This means that the old desire might not have died down in the body, but since we now know the truth, we know that the old desires do not rule us. They are no longer lord over us, so we don't yield to them.

It is true that a person can reject the grace of God in their life. You can absolutely choose not to receive the benefit of the freedom that has been accomplished in Jesus. The Israelites rejected their God-given freedom when they chose to walk in unbelief in the wilderness. In doing so, they rejected the grace of God, and they died. We, too, can reject our salvation from God, but it is still there, and it is still for us.

"Don't We Have to Die Daily?"

When Paul used the above phrase in 1 Corinthians 15:31, the immediate context of his discussion was the resurrection. He was admonishing the Corinthians to remember that we preach Christ precisely because He is alive. Without the resurrection, the proclamation of the gospel is absolute foolishness. Paul wondered why anyone would endure persecution and hardship if there were no resurrection. He framed his argument like this:

Why are we in danger every hour? I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die

every day! What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

—1 Corinthians 15:30-32

Paul's point was that he faced death daily. He was willing to have his life come to an end each and every day because he was so confident in what he preached. Jesus was (and is) resurrected, and if that meant Paul would possibly die, then so be it.

When it comes to the life of the believer, we have died in Christ (Colossians 2:20). We are co-crucified, and we are raised to life, with Him (Galatians 2:20). In the same way that Christ died once, so have we.

Some may ask: what about taking up our cross daily? It is certain that Jesus has taught us to take up the cross daily—the privilege of self-denial and taking up the cross of Christ to labor with Him. The challenge is when some interpret this through a highly religious idea of penance and self-castigation, as though our flesh rises up every night and we have to die all over again with Jesus in some substantive way. To frame the Christian life this way is to undercut the sufficiency of Christ's death at the cross by adding our daily death to His death. This is anathema! May we look to the cross and see that we have died with Christ, and may we look to the tomb and see that we are resurrected with Christ. This is the meaning of our baptism.

Always His Child

There are many more things that could be said, but for the sake of brevity and modesty, I'll conclude here. I encourage every person who reads this book, search the Scriptures and see for yourself if these things are true. I pray you would consider that as a believer, you are in fact free from sin. This is not wishful thinking; it's absolutely the truth, precisely because Jesus is alive. I pray, along with Paul,

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

—Ephesians 1:17–21

Remember, you are:

- free from sin and
- always His child.

You are:

- alive in Adam Two,

- in the Spirit
- by faith,
- freely forgiven, and
- confessing His goodness in all things.

God bless each and every single one of you.

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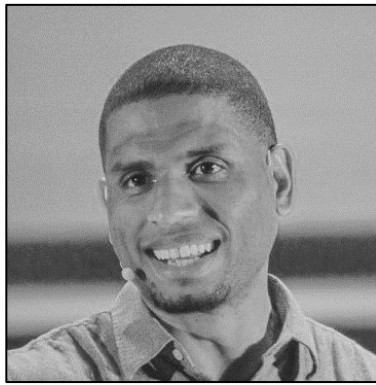
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About the Author



Jonathan Leonardo is the speaker and director of Love Reality. The most pressing question of his life has been “How does God relate to me?” God was kind enough to reveal the answer. This book is that revelation in Jonathan’s own words. It is his first book.