



BEFRIENDING GOD

How We Are
Undone,
Changed,
and
Made New

TANYA GODSEY

Befriending God touched my soul and made me want to know God in a way that goes far beyond duty and into deep friendship. As I turned every page with anticipation of what the next line would offer, Tanya's heartfelt stories and biblical insight would often cause me to pause. This is not a book to be rushed but savored. Every chapter is rich and deep and hopeful for anyone who thinks they are too insignificant to make a difference. If you are tired of seeing God as distant or demanding and you are ready to know more deeply the God who sees you, then run, don't walk, to get this book!

Karrie Scott Garcia, founder of Freedom Movement, author of *Free and Fully Alive*, and international speaker

Tanya Godsey's work at the intersection of spiritual formation and worship makes her an ideal guide to finding freedom and connection with our Creator. Her journey through suffering, disruption, and complexity equips her with the wisdom to navigate life's challenges.

Rev. Sandra María Van Opstal, author of *The Next Worship*

Every word in this book is intentional, flows from the secret place, and holds wisdom from the woundings God has redeemed in Tanya's story. It carries an invitation to journey the narrow road that leads to true life. It will cost you everything to accept this invitation, but the reward is an abiding life of love, friendship, and purpose. Come all who are homesick, outcast, burdened, and lonely, and find your true home in God Himself.

Tori Mae Hein, freedom coach and director of marketing for Freedom Movement

In a time when life often feels disenchanting and full of wandering, Tanya's words walk us home to the heart of God. Her use of story, both biblical and personal, invites us to experience an intimate friendship with God in our own lives. *Befriending God* is filled with wisdom, wonder, and direction.

Hannah Wood, Redeeming the Story board of directors

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T A N Y A G O D S E Y

NavPress 

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

God Is Our Permanent Home 1

1

A Family Founded on the Impossible

Trusting in God's Power 11

2

The Undoing

Encountering God in Life's Disruptions 27

3

Redeeming the Story

Translating the Reality of Suffering 47

4

Heart Open, Walls Down

Learning God's Honest Language 63

5

The Freedom of Surrender

Finding Hope in Letting Go 83

6

The Secret Place

Finding God in Obscurity 101

7

Failing Forward

Fully Formed through Disappointment 119



8

The Tomb Is a Womb
Becoming People of Rebirth 141

9

The Returning
Living in the Way of Jesus 155

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 173

NOTES 175

INTRODUCTION

God Is Our Permanent Home

The moment we open our eyes in this post-Eden world, we encounter certain realities. None of us choose where we are born, whom we are born to, and what we are born with (or without). From day one we are each given a certain set of internal and external variables entirely beyond our control: the color of our skin, the presence or absence of a stable family system, the inclusion or exclusion of God in daily living, and the socioeconomic status of our household, just to name a few. As we draw our first breath, we do so in a world that has developed its own fallible systems around the acceptance or rejection of the variables we were born with and had no power to choose. We find ourselves at the mercy of a story we didn't opt into and in a cultural framework where this story makes us either likely or unlikely to flourish in the world. As time passes, we become increasingly fluent in the language of homesickness. Life on planet Earth is far from the perfection of Eden, and we can feel the effects of exile in our bones. We know life isn't supposed to be this way. We long to fill our lungs with the oxygen of home.

Sometimes I close my eyes and imagine Eden: the freshly created imagination of God embodied in a perfect garden, the astounding visuals in a newly created spectrum of color, the freshly born aroma of a new Earth, and the rushing river that watered it all. I imagine the soundscape of our original home, when echoes of a new song rang out in a new world and there was no barrier to original love, original design, and original relationship. What did it feel like when the earth exuded glory from sunrise to sunset? Sometimes I wonder what it felt like to be at the start of a story so pure and unstained. Our beginning, written into life by the Original Artist, the first to make something beautiful out of absolutely nothing. The One who was and is and is to come (see Revelation 1:8), the Love who is in all things and from whom all things came to life.

Sometimes I close my eyes and imagine the unhindered love and glory of our original home, and the wonder of it all washes over me like the wild blue mist of a waterfall or the glow of a golden sunset peeking over the Santa Monica Mountains. I remember we were all made from love and for love. We can feel it in the marrow of who we are. We know we were created for so much more and yet we live, move, and breathe in the tension of the *now* and *not yet*, where our longing for home lives somewhere in between the complexity of our post-Eden experiences and our beloved cotton candy sunsets. But what makes home . . . home? I've always believed home is less about the comforts around you and more about who opens the door to welcome you inside and who holds you close once you're there. And so what makes exile a tragedy is not a change of scenery but a change in intimacy, the ache of separation. At the heart of spiritual homesickness is the sting of relational distance and our yearning for wholeness with God as a person.

My earliest memories include having a deep sense that God Himself was the only true home I would ever know. Perhaps for

INTRODUCTION

me, the longing was born out of mounting deposits of feeling “too different to make a difference” as a little brown girl in an immigrant community. Perhaps it was a childhood spent witnessing the plight of a people who were born into a story they didn’t choose with variables society used to dismiss them as damaged goods or bodies only worthy of less-than-minimum-wage work in the hot Texas heat. Roofers in 110-degree heat. Migrant workers covering their entire bodies with clothing for protection from the blazing sun. Women working tirelessly to make food to sell so they could buy food to eat. Weeks when my father, the pastor, was paid for shepherding an entire at-risk community. Weeks when he went without pay. Every day an accumulation, on a soul level, of *It’s not supposed to be this way*. A longing for Eden. A longing for home. A longing for justice, mercy, and compassion for the last and the least. Perhaps it was the result of a lifetime of watching family members lay themselves on the altar of this cause. How could we not? The need was too great. The stories too heartbreaking. The faces too familiar. The bills too heavy to pay. The lost souls too important to look away from.

I believe innocence isn’t just something you lose by firsthand, lived experience. Innocence is lost in knowing, seeing, and feeling too much. Some children were raised with bats and balls and board games. Some of us were raised to save the world. I grew up with a sense that the gospel had chosen me, and I knew it in my bones before I knew anything else. My mom has a picture of me that she has always treasured—I am eighteen months old in a yellow dress. Gold necklace. Pigtails. My hand is loosely holding a croquet mallet, and my eyes are staring into the camera as if I could see through the world . . . because, in fact, I could.

When I look at the photo of the little brown girl in the yellow dress, I can see my line of sight included realities I was far too young to understand.

As a pastor's daughter raised in a Mexican immigrant community, I was immersed in a culture that was beautifully interdependent but socioeconomically disadvantaged. When the community you call home struggles for basic survival, you grow up fluent in the language of impossibility. You become deeply aware this world is dismally distant from God's original design. You are given the gift of second sight to see earthly systems as frameworks created with imperfect regard for the loving intent and design of a relationship-first God who cares for all.

Cultural context is an influential driver in how we process life and contribute our God-given voices to the world. So, as a living witness to the stories of marginalization around me, my heart was uniquely shaped by the experiences I observed in the immigrant community I was raised in. While I was born into American citizenship in the West Texas plains, in contrast to my immigrant community, I counted myself as one who stood in solidarity with the plight of the beautiful, humble people I came to know as family. And although my native tongue was English, I became much too fluent in the dialect of human suffering to resign myself to apathy. The soul-piercing pain of racism, the lack of financial opportunity, the barriers of English as a second language, the desperation that accompanies suffering—these are just a few realities our community was faced with regularly.

As years passed and my understanding of modern culture deepened, my observations led me to the conclusion that unless God Himself intervened, without money, power, or pedigree, I, along with those in my community, would likely never have the resources or opportunities to influence the world with our gifts for the greater good.

And before I knew anything about theology, social justice, or power dynamics, I somehow instinctively knew this reality

could not mirror the heart of a God who created each person in His image with unique gifts and a story to tell. From my earliest moments, I longed for peace, provision, and harmony in a dissonant world, a world that discarded unlikely people born with variables working against them, like me and those in our community.

Despite my early sobriety toward (awareness of) the world's brokenness, I was given an unexpected gift. I somehow inherently believed God had His eye on our community, on me, because the last was first in His Kingdom. I couldn't understand it then, but being raised in this humble setting would become the doorway to a deeply personal journey of befriending God. My soul-level friendship with Him would give me the greatest treasure I could be given on this side of heaven: the safety, security, and belonging of finding and abiding in my one and only true home. Seeing God's relationship-first nature illustrated through the pages of Scripture reinforced my faith in the reality that God has a special place in His heart for the unlikely. I risked my heart on friendship with God based on the fathers and mothers of our faith who needed nothing more to live meaningful, purpose-filled lives in intimacy with Him and destiny through Him. And in moments when I feared the finality of the variables the world used to label me as unworthy, I would remember the kinship I felt with every person in the biblical narrative chronicled in this book.

From a young age I believed that whatever or whomever I put my confidence in would define me. So my confidence was in God Himself—and it continues to be. I am not a statistician, but I would venture to say that a little brown girl raised in a marginalized community might have very low odds of being perceived as having been born with the “right” variables to be granted a voice in the world. The fact that you are reading a book penned

by someone like this is nothing short of a relationship-first God demonstrating His power to redeem a story.

No one would argue against the fact that we are all formed by the stories we are born into, and yet, when we befriend God, these stories become the wick that is lit to shine God's brightness in the dark room of a homesick world. There is no doubt Moses' upbringing in Egypt was preparation for his destiny to free God's people from Pharaoh's oppression. It's clear David's intimacy with God was cultivated in the solitude and silence of sheep pastures. There's no question John the Baptist's dependence on God was developed in the obscurity of a wilderness relationship. But ultimately the power that flowed through their lives to change the world was not cultural or circumstantial; it was relational and therefore providential. God befriended these men personally in the landscape of their stories to produce a depth of intimacy that fully formed their character and then changed the world.

I suspect it was no accident I was immersed in a community that allowed me to view the gospel through the lens of the immigrant and the stranger. I suspect there was providence behind becoming a pastor's daughter exposed to 3:00 a.m. crisis knocks on the door. I believe the sovereignty of God was at play because these were the experiences that shaped the lens through which I see the biblical narrative and the world. This is why I lie in bed at night thinking about people experiencing homelessness, those facing suicidal thoughts who need just one person to watch and pray with them for one more night, children orphaned by parents battling addiction. I am not a theologian. I am not the lead pastor of a well-known church. I am a little brown kid whose life was profoundly marked by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in a poor, marginalized immigrant community, in the company of mis hermanos y hermanas . . . in a hundred different community

INTRODUCTION

enchilada fundraisers, in one-hundred-degree sweltering heat as the paletero rung his bell when our five-hour, Spirit-filled services let out. In too many baby showers for unwed mothers raised in unstable homes and too many funerals for at-risk teenagers gone far before their time. A Trinitarian God met me on the back side of Avenue A in a small Texas town, and though I've been many places in the world since, this same God has become my one true, permanent home.

As we begin our journey together, I want to aim our hearts upward toward one important truth. You and I have a soul, a soul set on an eternal trajectory. In a world of transience, our souls are designed to dwell securely in our permanent home, the sanctum of a deeply personal friendship with God. Psalm 139 reveals that all human life begins underneath His gaze, as we are fearfully and wonderfully woven and spun. John 15:5 invites us to dwell in Him through Christ, the Everlasting Vine. John 14:2 reminds us, "My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?" His presence is where we began, where we're invited to abide, and where we are going. Our wildest blessings and our light and momentary afflictions can and will be taken away from us, but God is the mountain who will not be moved. He is our permanent home, and the invitation into personal friendship with Him is the foundation of every word of this book, no matter which corner of the world you come from.

In the midst of stories we didn't choose, with a set of external and internal variables entirely beyond our control, I want to offer some truth and consolation: The story the world wants to use to dismiss us, the enemy wants to use to destroy us, and the flesh wants to use to discourage us is the same one God wants to use to draw us into deeper friendship with Him.

He is a God who can be trusted and a permanent home safe enough to settle into. I've always loved this description of God's attributes, and I invite you to gaze upon the wonder of His qualities as we stand on the precipice of knowing Him more deeply through the invitation of this book.

God is an invisible, personal, and living Spirit, distinguished from all other spirits by several kinds of attributes: metaphysically, God is self-existent, eternal, and unchanging; intellectually, God is omniscient, faithful, and wise; ethically, God is just, merciful, and loving; emotionally, God detests evil, is long-suffering, and is compassionate; existentially, God is free, authentic, and omnipotent; relationally, God is transcendent in being, immanent universally in providential activity, and immanent with his people in redemptive activity.¹

In the crucible of my origin story, a passion for befriending this God as a person was born. With my curious heart and artistic leanings, I prayed God would cultivate a gift within me to inspire the world with beauty and meaning and open timely doorways into His timeless truths. I believe this book is, in part, an answer to this prayer, and it is my hope that within the following chapters the divine reality of the relationship-first God of the Old and New Testaments will encounter you in an unprecedented way to usher you into a deeper friendship with Him than any you've dared to pray for. My prayer for you as you enter the journey of this book is Ephesians 3:14-21 (NKJV):

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and

INTRODUCTION

earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

A FAMILY FOUNDED ON THE IMPOSSIBLE

Trusting in God's Power

The year was 1983. I had not yet started kindergarten, but I remember the vinyl seats in my father's Cordoba and the hot seat belt wrapped around my sensitive skin. I remember days of windows down while the Eurythmics graced the airwaves with "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)." *Return of the Jedi* ruled the box office and Cabbage Patch dolls were the heart's desire of every little girl, including yours truly. This was the year our family moved from Fort Worth, Texas, to start a church in a burgeoning Mexican American immigrant community in Godley, Texas (population: three hundred souls).

In Hebrews 11:8, we read, "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going."

I am struck by this verse every time I read it. Abraham "obeyed and went" even though he did not have the road map. Abraham, originally known as Abram, is our introduction to Israel as a nation. Abraham and his wife Sarah are the unlikely patriarch

and matriarch, respectively, of the family of God. Eventually God would invite Abraham into a life-changing moment to gaze into a sea of stars as He promised to make the impossible possible, but initially Abraham was not given a clear plan as to *how* he and his wife would birth a nation without the physical capability of bearing a child in their old age.

It has always been a wonder to me that God would build His family based on a story that unfolds at the intersection of human impossibility and God's manifest power. Impossibility surfaces when something cannot be realized due to inescapable realities present in the natural world. In other words, we find ourselves in impossible situations when natural laws stand as a barrier to a specific desired outcome. On this side of heaven, we are subject to limitations that hem us in on every side of the human experience—and sometimes we have to wait a long while, expectantly watching for God's power to be made manifest.

In the same way Abraham left his homeland (Ur) for the land the Lord, his God, would give him, my family left the familiar and answered a call to ministry in rural Texas with nothing more than what Abraham held in his heart: the sincerity and security of a real-time friendship with God.

There are several things you should know about the foundation God would build our family's calling upon in Godley, Texas. This was a town where human beings were the minority and dairy cattle the majority. And despite the town's name, this community was anything but godly. This was a small town steeped in discrimination. As a Hispanic family shepherding a community of immigrant workers, we would not be handed a warm welcome. We would not inherit a building with a baptistry, a pulpit, AC, or nice wooden pews. We would be invited to facilitate our first church services in a barn.

Now, this wasn't a barn you might see in a bridal magazine. It wasn't an air-conditioned wedding venue with hardwood floors and chandeliers. This was a hot, hay-filled, musty cattle barn. Like Abraham and Sarah and many of the fathers and mothers in the biblical narrative, we would be asked to cultivate a missional call with nothing more than childlike faith . . . and the presence of God Himself.

By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

HEBREWS 11:9-10

We settled into a new city, like strangers in a foreign land, with a beginning salary of one hundred dollars a week. Our first "church service" took place in record Texas heat. And there I was, dressed in my Sunday best, pigtails and a smile, against the backdrop of meekness. The story you are born into has a way of marking you with the belief that your reality is everyone's reality. I thought this was the way everyone worshiped on a Sunday morning.

But one day, as my father's eyes overflowed with tears, I was awakened to the difference between our reality and that of the rest of the world. His words shot like an arrow through the hearts of everyone in the room. "I'm not going to leave this town, but I'm not coming back here," he said. "This is a barn for cows, not for people."

A tiny heart and a tiny brain could not fully process the entire weight of this sentence, but tears happen to be a universal language. Tears do not require interpretation. To be human is to know heartbreak when you see it. There was an understanding among us

that required very few words. As image bearers of God, we—and our dignity—lived in the tension of all that could not be said.

We left the barn while the local Baptist church was dismissing from their own air-conditioned church services. They caught a glimpse of my dad soaked in sweat. He seized the moment to say, “You’re not serious about having us here. I’m willing to meet, but not in a cow barn. It’s wrong. These people are not cows—they’re human beings.”

With this statement the missions committee who had invited us to town accepted the unsustainability of our circumstances and the inhumanity of an animal barn as a hospitable venue. We were transitioned to a tiny room in the local civic center. This is when the fires of persecution began to burn with increasing heat.

The room was free to everyone but us. We were forced to pay rent for use of the facilities. As word about our new venue traveled, the townspeople began to spread false narratives about our cleanliness as a community, even though we made sure to leave the venue better than we found it. Then one day, during one of our regularly scheduled meeting times, we went to use the civic center . . . only to find that the locks had been changed. On this day we had church service out in the parking lot with forty people in the blazing Texas sun. Women and children were given shade under the trees. Dad preached that day without protection from the heat, both literally and metaphorically. Once again there was an understanding among us that required very few words.

The civic center tripled our rent, and we paid triple until the townspeople made it so difficult for us to continue meeting there that the local Baptist church offered us a side room as a reprieve. Then came the complaints from the members of this church. The fires of discrimination followed us wherever we met.

But instead of consuming us, these fires stoked the embers of a

hunger for God present within our community. God blessed our little congregation with His presence and a solidarity that unified, connected, and comforted us. We didn't have much, but we had God and each other, and somehow, this seemed like more than enough. As our numbers grew, a kindhearted farmer offered two acres of land, right outside the city limits, for us to build our own church. As you can imagine, news like this traveled faster than lightning in the small town of Godley, Texas. Before we knew it, rumors of the townspeople not being in favor of a Mexican American church anywhere near them boomeranged back to us. We breathed the air of impossibility daily. Our lungs had become heavy from the pollution of contempt, hatred, and vitriol. How would we move forward surrounded by such animosity? Frequently, God speaks a call before He reveals the blueprint. We lived in the tension of this reality. We needed oxygen, and it was given to us.

The land for our proposed new church was donated, which gave us hope that we'd have a suitable place to worship without being persecuted. But our encouragement changed to dismay when the phone rang in the wee hours of the morning one night. We had finally raised five thousand dollars to build a fence on the property, and it had been destroyed—intentionally. Impossibility had never felt more final. But word of this vandalism spread, and major media news outlets began to flock to our small town to document the story. One of their featured interviews included a woman who was one of several at the helm of the persecution. She was filmed saying, “Mexicans are like the cows they milk; they don't have souls.” The media also interviewed my dad, who explained that the church was a mission sponsored by the Anglo church in town. He explained that the building would further our evangelism and discipleship efforts. When asked how we would build it, my dad answered, “I don't know, but God does.” Upon the destruction of

the fence—an act the FBI called a terroristic threat—we were faced with raising funds to rebuild it. Major media outlets continued to cover the story, and the events that followed were a divinely inspired surprise in which God began to write possibility into a seemingly impossible situation.

People from the greater Dallas–Fort Worth metroplex began to call to offer support. The news headlines read along the lines of “Pastor Godsey Has Faith That God Will Supply to Build This Church.” One major article was published in the *Baptist Standard*. Soon thereafter the pastor of the local Baptist church called to say, “You’ve got some mail, Pastor Godsey. It’s from East Texas.”

A retired Baptist woman had written: “Young man, I was reading the *Baptist Standard*. Apparently they’re not that godly in Godley, Texas. I want to encourage you not to leave. God will supply your needs. I live on Social Security and this is all I have, but the gates of hell will not prevail.” A one-dollar bill was enclosed. This was the sign we had prayed for. Even though we did not know where we were going, there was one star shining in our pitch-black sky.

The next letter was from a president emeritus of Dallas Baptist University with a five-thousand-dollar check inside. The next day a dentist from Cleburne, Texas, sent in three thousand dollars. We received two hundred dollars here, five hundred dollars there. When all was said and done, fifteen thousand dollars had come in. That was a significant amount of money in 1983. Then the owner of a large cement company called and donated nine truckloads of cement. “It’s wrong, what they’ve done to you,” he explained.

In 1983 hate-filled townspeople destroyed our property. They called our home and left death threats and vile messages. They knifed our vehicles. They cursed our church community, but we had our faces set in the direction of obedience. We believed in a

city whose architect and builder was God Himself, and this sustained us in the heat of the battle.

Then, three years into my family's stay, the tensions came to a head as townspeople created a petition to prevent us from building our church. Members from all the churches in the town signed it. Sometimes obedience has to be its own reward, and we faced this possibility week after week. At our court hearing, the only person who came to support us was Pastor Gordon, lead pastor of the Anglo church that had initially supported our church. He and my father sat on one side. What seemed like the entire town sat on the other. The judge laid the groundwork for respect before the court was in session, then he announced the case: *Citizens of Godley, Texas v. Pastor Godsey and Primera Iglesia Bautista*.

The judge said, "I'm going to make a statement. The last time I looked at the Constitution, there's freedom of speech and religion. And if Hare Krishna wants to buy property in Godley, Texas, to build his church, he can do it. If Sun Myung Moon wants to buy his own property in Godley, Texas, to build his church, he can do it. And if Reverend Godsey and the people of Primera Iglesia Bautista want to build a church on their land in Godley, Texas, the gates of hell will not prevail against them."

Dad later told me that he wanted to shout and cry in response, but he had been advised to remain silent. The judge gave the file to the court clerk and said, "Go file this in file 13." He told the townspeople, "Not one curse word, or I will arrest you, and I better not hear about you threatening this family again."

The FBI was present in the room but God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit were the true guests of honor. God Himself, who had been a witness to every tear, every fear, and every moment between our yes to Him and the finality of this closure. He was there in the beginning, when we did not know where we were

going, and had faithfully led us by the hand to this moment in time. The architect and builder of our faith made the impossible possible.

As God would have it, our church—a beautiful brick-and-mortar building—was built, and it still stands to this day. Amid impossible persecution and impossible circumstances, God invited our family into the evidence of things we could not see (Hebrews 11:1). He invited us to believe beyond the reality of sustained oppression and weekly death threats and into a place where we would receive reprieve from our “enemies” and the gospel would prosper to the glory of God.

We learned many things through this season of impossibility. Two of these lessons I’d like to highlight are

1. impossible situations position us for intimacy with God and
2. we must rely on internal resources from God.

Impossible Situations Position Us for Intimacy with God

Many planks were laid on the foundation of my faith during this season of persecution as God proved His dominion over the natural limitations of His people. I learned that impossibility positions us for intimacy. It suffocates self-sufficiency and oxygenates our reliance on God’s sufficiency. It invites us into humility, the gift that’s also a doorway to all blessing. Ultimately impossibility reminds us we cannot save ourselves. We are a people who have always needed and will always need a Rescuer.

We draw closer to God as a personal source of supernatural endurance in the crucible of patience. We align ourselves with His vision as we accept our own limitations and follow the current of God’s activity with heightened expectancy and availability.

When we are faced with impossible situations, we are invited to take risks and say yes to invitations . . . without knowing exactly where we are going. This kind of childlike faith often leads to forward movement fueled by the activity of God.

We Must Rely on Internal Resources from God

Impossible situations also teach us to rely on internal resources given by God, not external resources mined from human reasoning or strategy. I learned early on that access to external resources such as money and power do not make the impossible possible in a way that ripples into eternity. External resources are always subject to post-Eden realities and the unrighteous dispensation of little-*g* gods present in this post-Eden world. But the God of Abraham and Sarah, the God of Isaac, the Great I AM, the One who was and is and is to come lavishly dispenses the needed internal resources from His Spirit and His Word to bring His Kingdom here, through His people, on earth as it is in heaven. As our faith community faced significant persecution in a small Texas town, God was rewriting the story of impossibility over our lives, for our good and His glory.

Like Abraham and Sarah, who stood on the precipice of a promise without the means to bring it to pass, Godley taught us that in the absence of external resources God would provide an inner sanctum where we could receive the internal resources needed from Him. But—also like Abraham and Sarah—this process occurred within the fallibility of our own humanity. We endured sleepless nights. We wrestled with discouragement and fear. We longed for comforts of the past. We felt the ache of our own humanity in it all. Yet when God invites us into faith, He has every intention of overshadowing our weaknesses with His supernatural strength.

By faith, even though Sarah herself was barren and [Abraham] was too old, he received the ability to procreate, because he regarded the one who had given the promise to be trustworthy. So in fact children were fathered by one man—and this one as good as dead—like the number of stars in the sky and like the innumerable grains of sand on the seashore.

HEBREWS 11:11-12, NET

Sarah and Abraham were not able to produce the desired results through the external resources of physical ability or human strategy. Like many who are faced with impossible circumstances, Abraham and Sarah wrestled with control only to be humbled into dependence, the doorway to the internal resource of faith.

In the flames of persecution, my church community could not produce our own desired outcomes through institutional favor, man's approval, or a "do more, try harder" mentality.

Like Abraham and Sarah, we had to go through a process of spiritual transformation to learn how to yield to God's shepherding hand. Only then did we learn how to simply receive what was being given . . . in His timing and His way.

We learned to look for God's unforced gifts, gifts drawn from the sacred reservoir of deep waters that flowed from the ocean of a life deeply connected with Him. External resources often failed, but internal resources flowed from the minutes and hours and days and years in our history with God in a holy confluence where springs, rivers, and tributaries joined through the power of the Spirit to nourish the dry land of our souls in wilderness seasons. In this sacred space we were given the supernatural faith to believe that what is impossible for man is possible with God. Millennia after Abraham and Sarah, I

believe with all my heart that the faith of our fathers and mothers is one that still holds true.

In impossible situations—

We receive faith imparted through God's Word and accumulated through the halls of our history with Him.

We receive the fruit of God's Spirit cultivated through a quantity of quality time with Him in the sanctum of prayer.

We are given the gifts of the Holy Spirit as spiritual empowerment for the good works God has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Such gifts (prophecy, teaching, leadership, and mercy, to name a few) are imparted by God. When we employ these spiritual gifts, God's supernatural power supersedes our natural abilities.

Though Abraham and Sarah were too old for a son, God spoke impossible provision into impossible neediness. He is the same God today.

Though Abraham and Sarah's flawed human intervention created the complex plot twist of Hagar giving birth to Ishmael, God wrote impossible redemption into inevitable failure because He is both providential *and* He responds to real-time situations. He is the same God today.

Despite his error, Abraham remained tethered to his infallible Source in a world of fallible resources, and God received him. He is still the same God today.

Abraham and Sarah's spiritual formation happened in the same place ours does: in the epicenter of our inner world as it quakes with the force of our own sinful nature and the tension of living in a homesick world. Ultimately Abraham and Sarah knew what

we are invited to believe now, that the love of God is greater than these tensions because God Himself is the Reality of all realities.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He had received the promises, yet he was ready to offer up his only son. God had told him, “Through Isaac descendants will carry on your name,” and he reasoned that God could even raise him from the dead, and in a sense he received him back from there.

HEBREWS 11:17-19, NET

When Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son, the very son he had been asked to trust God to miraculously provide, by faith he believed and trusted in God’s heart so much that he was certain God could raise Isaac from the dead. Abraham’s external resources were not enough in a moment like this. Human reasoning was irrelevant. Systems of control failed. But in this moment God gave Abraham what he truly needed: the internal resources to enter what author and speaker Brennan Manning has called “ruthless trust.”¹

Impossibility is a gift that ushers us away from conceptual faith and into relational trust. Impossible timing, impossible circumstances, an impossible call . . . in moments like these, we must make an appeal to a very personal God and ask for His supernatural intervention. Often the question isn’t whether God is capable of this level of miraculous intervention. Often the question is whether we are willing to surrender our grown-up strategies, to retrace our steps back to a posture of childlike faith. This childlikeness stands in contrast to our culture’s current, which leads us to plan our way out of the possibility of God’s surprises, out of the flow of the level of intimacy available to us when we face the impossible with Him, side by side.

At face value, money, power, beauty, achievement, education, influence, and intellectual capability are not inherently evil. These variables can be stewarded in health and are not destructive until they become little-*g* gods we place our confidence in instead of God Himself. Fear is at the root of our reach for anything that captivates our hearts more than the Great I AM, and we live in a culture that perpetuates fear. Fear of rejection. Fear of failure. Fear of loss. The spectrum of human fears is vast and wide.

So we reach for control. We prefer systems that guarantee outcomes and formulas that offer foolproof results. We prefer to choose the most likely path to success and have a propensity to avoid the least likely at all costs, even if divinely prompted to do so. But biblical faith is less math and more mystery. Equations leave little room for what Mother Teresa referred to as “the hand of a writing God.”² Who is the real captain of the ship when our systems of control are on a cultural form of autopilot? The biblical narrative proves that the fiery furnace of the impossible brings us to a level of intimacy in which we are accompanied by a Divine Power who will walk through the flames with us. Our hearts are molded by the heat of impossibility, and the ultimate result is that we are increasingly formed into the likeness of Christ.

For reasons known only within the confines of God’s divine sovereignty, Abraham and Sarah were the first two people written into the lines of Jesus’ family tree. These two obscure individuals, well past their prime and unlikely to conceive, were chosen to become the first mother and father in the family of God’s people of faith. Why would God begin the story of His covenant relationship with us through two people the world would dismiss? The biblical narrative is teeming with reminders that God’s choice is frequently not man’s choice. God’s Kingdom is an upside-down Kingdom where the last is first and the first is last. God’s choice

will be accompanied by God's provision, and His choice will result in His glory, not man's.

Like each one of us, Abraham and Sarah were written into a story they didn't choose. They were invited into an untimely call and a dream they couldn't understand. Yet they were recipients of a promise: "In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice" (Genesis 22:18, *ESV*). God's rescue plan for humanity took place through two unlikely people plucked out of obscurity.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (*NKJV*). Much like our call to Godley, Texas, God's invitation would mark the end of Abraham and Sarah's understanding and signal the beginning of a very personal undoing. The undoing—this happens to be where God does some of His best work.

Perhaps the time is right for a biblically informed undoing. While cultural Christianity in the West may statistically be on the decline in numbers, there's never been more of a palpable longing among God's people for the God of the Old and New Testaments to reveal Himself, in real time, in a profoundly personal, intimate, and unmistakably divine way. We want encounter. We want relationship. We want to *know* God, and we want to be known by Him. We want to stand under Abraham's sky with the same twinkle of promise in our eyes, called and connected to the God of the impossible. But first we must unknow what the world has taught us about faith. We must retrace our steps back to the Garden, where the purity of relationship was its own reward.

This homesick world may be in exile, but God is inviting us into a great returning. A return to the purity of His presence, on earth as it is in heaven. He is inviting our prodigal hearts to return to childlike faith. Here, amid our skyscrapers and bottom lines

. . . here, among our crowded news feeds and anxious hearts . . . here, as we mine the meaning within the mysteries of a homesick world, the Father waits for us to return to Him with our whole hearts. God's invitation will always and eventually be to pray our way back, to trust our way back, to risk our way back to childlike hearts. God's prompting will always and eventually be to become more like children, who posture their hearts for curiosity and discovery instead of control and conformity. Impossible seasons have a way of helping us return to the hearts we once had as children. This is the gift in the wound.

Reflection Questions

1. God chose to lay the foundation of His covenantal relationship with Israel on Abraham and Sarah, two unlikely individuals. What does God's choice reveal about His character? What does it reveal about the difference between His Kingdom values and the ways of the world?
2. Hebrews 11:8 tells us that Abraham obeyed God "even though he did not know where he was going." This pivotal moment of radical faith rooted in relational trust changed the course of biblical history. When you are faced with an invitation from God that defies human understanding, what are some personal barriers you may have to trust God with?
3. How do God-given, internal resources differ from external resources in their ability to sustain us through seasons of prolonged perseverance and radical trust?

BEFRIENDING GOD

4. Have you faced an impossible situation in which your own strength or strategies were irrelevant? How did you experience God's presence and provision?