A wooden suspension bridge with a railing, stretching across a dense forest. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a dappled light effect on the bridge and the surrounding foliage. The bridge is the central focus, leading the eye from the foreground into the distance.

BETH MOORE

WALKING
with GOD

A FIVE-WEEK JOURNEY
IN STEP WITH THE SAVIOR

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WALKING *with* GOD

A FIVE-WEEK JOURNEY
IN STEP WITH THE SAVIOR



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INTRODUCTION

The Walk Ahead

My co-laborers and I at Living Proof Ministries work in a marvelous and inviting three-story home refurbished into an office building. Chalk it up to thin walls, creaky floors, wide air-conditioning vents, a good set of ears, or a combination of the four, but from a certain spot on the top floor where I study and write, I can hear what's happening all over the building.

"Isn't that a tad distracting?" you might ask. Well, yes, sometimes, especially if my coworkers are laughing, because I hate to miss anything funny. *Why don't you sit somewhere else?* you'd understandably wonder. Because I like it. I'm an extroverted writer, which is nearly an oxymoron. I spend copious hours alone. I love hearing them nearby.

Fact is, I not only recognize my coworkers' voices and distinctive laughs, I also know their footfalls. Without hearing a single word from their mouths, I could tell you with a strong measure of accuracy which of my eleven staff members is walking across the fake hardwoods of our second story. I know from the rhythm, the sound of the gait, the pace (usually a matter of short or long legs), and the kind of shoes they're wearing.

That's Kimberly, I'll say to myself with a smile as her heels *click, click, click*, quick, quick, quick down the hall, her being short-legged and all. Or *That's Dana*, and I think she's walking into Sabrina's office. Dana's also on the shorter side but walks with a very deliberate stride. She doesn't go anywhere she doesn't mean to go. *Ah, first-floor Mary's come up to the second floor*, I'll say to myself. *She's usually heading to Sabrina's office, but I think she just stopped off at Jenn's*. Mary almost always wears flats, but she purposely tries to walk without disturbing anyone—which gives her away, of course. I feel the need to say that Jenn's legs are a good five inches longer than anyone else's on the second floor, so I never miss on her.

Surely you get where I'm going with this. We humans walk differently from one another. To be sure, commonalities exist. We have legs and feet or crutches, wheels, canes, or walkers, for instance—not that walking with God requires physical mobility. We can, and often do, “walk” with God from a chair, desk, couch, or bed, and thankfully, some very close walking with God can take place from a hospital bed or a deathbed. All we need is a willing spirit. We will often draw comparisons to the physical act of walking in this study, however, because they can lend insight into the spiritual act. Beyond a few basic commonalities, the way individuals walk can be quite distinctive, and these distinctions are most recognizable to the ones who know us best.

I have a bit of a limp from tearing my right knee teaching aerobics a thousand years ago. Keith was kind enough to point out its persistence to me after watching me teach not long ago. “I forget how you limp until I'm sitting in an audience watching you onstage.” This explains why I rarely take him to my speaking engagements. A dear friend of mine walks unevenly too, but not over an injury. One leg simply outgrew the other. Another friend is the peaceful sort who is never in a hurry. She walks with all the haste of a tablespoon of molasses rolling toward a biscuit. This explains why I try to meet her wherever we're going, lest I forget why I like her before we arrive.

We're converging in these pages for one supreme reason: We want to walk with God. And if we've already been walking with God, we're likely here because we don't want to quit, don't want to lose interest, and very much do want to walk nearer and more attentively with our Maker. You're also in the right place if you at least wish you wanted to walk with God. If the phrase “walking with God” is even on your radar, welcome! It's on mine too.

What to Expect over the Next Few Weeks

We won't make it past the book of Genesis before we begin to suspect what bears true throughout the biblical canon: No two people described in Scripture as walking with God appear to have done so identically. We'll also find, sometimes to our great frustration, that a walk with God doesn't always look the same from season to season even in an individual's life. Further, walking with God will not always seem like a forward march or an advancement in our faith. A stretch of miles when God seems gloriously obvious can be followed by months of wondering where he's gone. God has his own objectives for each season of our walks, and some of them will remain a mystery until we see his face.

For this reason, different days in the pages that follow may look different over the course of these five weeks. Some require more writing from you, some less. Some include a challenge to take a certain action. In the fourth and fifth weeks, for example, you'll be asked to interview

a person whose walk with God you admire, much like the interviews I've included as part of this study.

God willing, some of these activities will spark an awareness of God's interest and nearness in pleasures that are simpler but deeper than the ones this insatiable, ensnaring world sets before us. Wouldn't it be wonderful, for instance, to hear ourselves think again? And, even better, to hear the thoughts of God again through his living words? What if we could recapture some sanity and stability over these five weeks of walking with God?

This entire study is inviting us into a deeper embrace of what Brother Lawrence, the seventeenth-century Carmelite friar, meant by "the practice of the presence of God"—a way of being he developed in a monastery kitchen.¹

The accompanying video sessions and workbook chapters will take us into five eras of the biblical storyline to help us catch glimpses of what a walk with God looks like.

- Our first week will have us primarily in Genesis.
- Our second week will direct us to the other Books of the Law.
- Our third will plant us in the Psalms and a few other selections of biblical poetry.
- Our fourth, the Gospels.
- Our fifth, the Epistles.

An Invitation to Keep Company with Jesus

A couple of years ago in preparation for a Bible lesson, I happened on some phraseology put to paper by Eugene Peterson that would not let me go. It's a description the pastor-scholar included in his commentary on the books of 1 and 2 Samuel to capture the approach of early Christian writers and teachers to Old Testament readings. You'll find it at the end of this excerpt.

From the very beginning of the church's life, Christians have read the Hebrew scriptures in a way that understood that God's revelation in Jesus was implicit from the outset. Our earliest Christian writers and teachers were fond of using the phrase "before [or "from" or "since"] the foundation of the world" to insist that what God revealed of God's self in Jesus was not an afterthought, something tacked on, but was in place and operative from the beginning. . . . And so our Christian ancestors read these Samuel narratives while keeping conscious company with Jesus."²

While keeping conscious company with Jesus. These words arrested me upon the first reading and have etched themselves into the way I now think. Imagine this becoming the way we

read Scripture: *keeping conscious company with Jesus*. Imagine this becoming how we perform our jobs, our duties at home, and our menial tasks: *keeping conscious company with Jesus*. Imagine this becoming the current for how we conduct our relationships and overlook offenses and love our neighbors and enemies alike: *keeping conscious company with Jesus*. Imagine this becoming the way we gaze at a country landscape, a piece of art, a flowering tree, an ocean tide, or a cooing infant: *keeping conscious company with Jesus*. What if we started seeing the marginalized, oppressed, harassed, and poor while *keeping conscious company with Jesus*?

What Brother Lawrence meant by practicing the presence of God is, in my estimation, similar in concept to Peterson's idea of keeping conscious company with Jesus. Both communicate the concept of living intentionally—to the degree a human is able—in God's good company. Our aim is similar throughout these five weeks. We're not seeking to master a spiritual discipline. If such were attainable, the purpose would be defeated. We're not trying to get good at something over these five weeks.

We're after what John called fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit (1 John 1:3). We're after the practice of divine communion that is to be savored when discernible and to be counted on when not. Here we are pursuing a life confident that God's promises are true even when we, like our forefathers and foremothers of faith described in Hebrews 11, will see some of them only on the distant horizon.

If you've done one of my earlier Bible studies, expect parts of this one to read a little less like my standard curriculum. In previous studies, I wished I had the space here and there to depart from the format and elaborate from a personal standpoint like I would in a regular book. Because our walk with God is the hub of every spoke in the life of faith and because I believe nothing on earth to be more stabilizing, I took the liberty this time, writing with a more blended approach. You'll still read and respond to Scripture in every lesson. You'll also find commentary excerpts and meanings of Hebrew and Greek words where they add richness to our understanding. But I've placed deliberate emphasis on spiritual formation and mentoring (meaning not just "what" but "how") and, for the reader who could use some nurturing in Christ, a sliver of spiritual mothering.

How to Use This Study

So, as you turn these pages, think *Bible study meets book*. Use the chapters ahead, the corresponding video sessions, and the bonus interviews any way you find helpful.*

*



[Bonus interviews available to watch here.](#)

If the intensity is part of what you like about a study like this one, seek to finish it in five weeks. If you'd rather slow down and take extra time to absorb the material, by all means, set your own pace! It's yours to use any way you see fit, but try to keep up the momentum. That's without a doubt the way to get the most out of it.

At the beginning of each week, you'll find a listening guide with blanks that corresponds with a video lesson I've taught to launch the week. If you're not able to view or listen to the message, skip the listening guide and proceed to day 1.

Every exercise included in this study—in the Scripture passages, in the questions to answer, in the spaces provided for journaling, and then on the pavement putting it into practice—is meant to enrich our walk with God. If we are in Christ, we are in a relationship with a God who can be known intellectually and spiritually, who can be sought and studied, but also a God who can, on his own terms in his own time, be *experienced*.

At his own sovereign will and pleasure, God makes his nearness more obvious at times. He might cause us to perceive a divine enablement of some kind. He may fill us with an otherworldly joy or cause tears of gratitude to stream down our faces over something we can't even articulate. He may delight us with the beauty of a phrase in Scripture or give us a sudden knowledge of what direction we should take. He may flood our anxious soul with an alien peace. He may send someone our way to confirm to us how much we are loved and seen by him.

God is no less present, his promises no less true, when he is utterly imperceptible. On the same note, God's "silence" never means absence. I'll reiterate these truths to you as we go. The fact is, I believe God is willing to reveal himself more often than we, in this overstimulated culture, have the attention span to notice. One of our objectives is to become more attentive and God-aware so that, if and when Jesus has a mind to make us particularly aware of his activity or his answers to prayer, we won't miss him.

I'm so glad you've picked up this book. Writing it has been deeply meaningful to me. I suspect God held this theme back from me until I'd hobbled near him long enough to hold little back from you. I have much more to learn in my walk with him, but whatever I have to give is yours, whether I learned it from praying and studying Scripture in times of delight, desperation, or daily grind; whether I learned it from walking through failures or successes with God; or whether I learned it from the observations of others or personal experience. At my age, you come to appreciate them all as graces, and as always, God's graces are abundant enough to both keep in full measure and share generously.

I believe to the marrow of my bones that the good life is the God-life. Those who make it their chief aim to walk with God through their brief earthly tenure will end up—sometimes accidentally—fulfilling divine purpose, doing good works, and receiving consolation in their

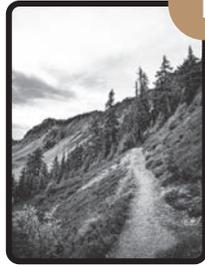
God's "silence" never
means absence.

suffering, *even if they don't recognize them as such until they see the face of Christ*. That which is to the glory of God is, by his sovereign plan and endless mercy, also for the good of people. The deep conviction I write from is that what is best for us—Christ Jesus over all, in all, and through all—is also the most satisfying and joy-giving life, and one well worth living.

Let's go ahead and muster up the faith that what we hope for—a closer, more discerning, more perceptible, more obedient, and fruitful walk with God—is on the divine agenda for us.

*In Christ Jesus,
Beth*

Our first week will have us primarily in Genesis.



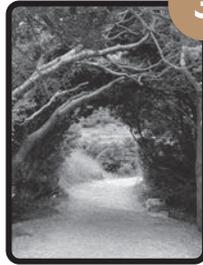
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Our second week will direct us to the other Books of the Law.



2

Our third will plant us in the Psalms and a few other selections of biblical poetry.



3

Our fourth, the Gospels.



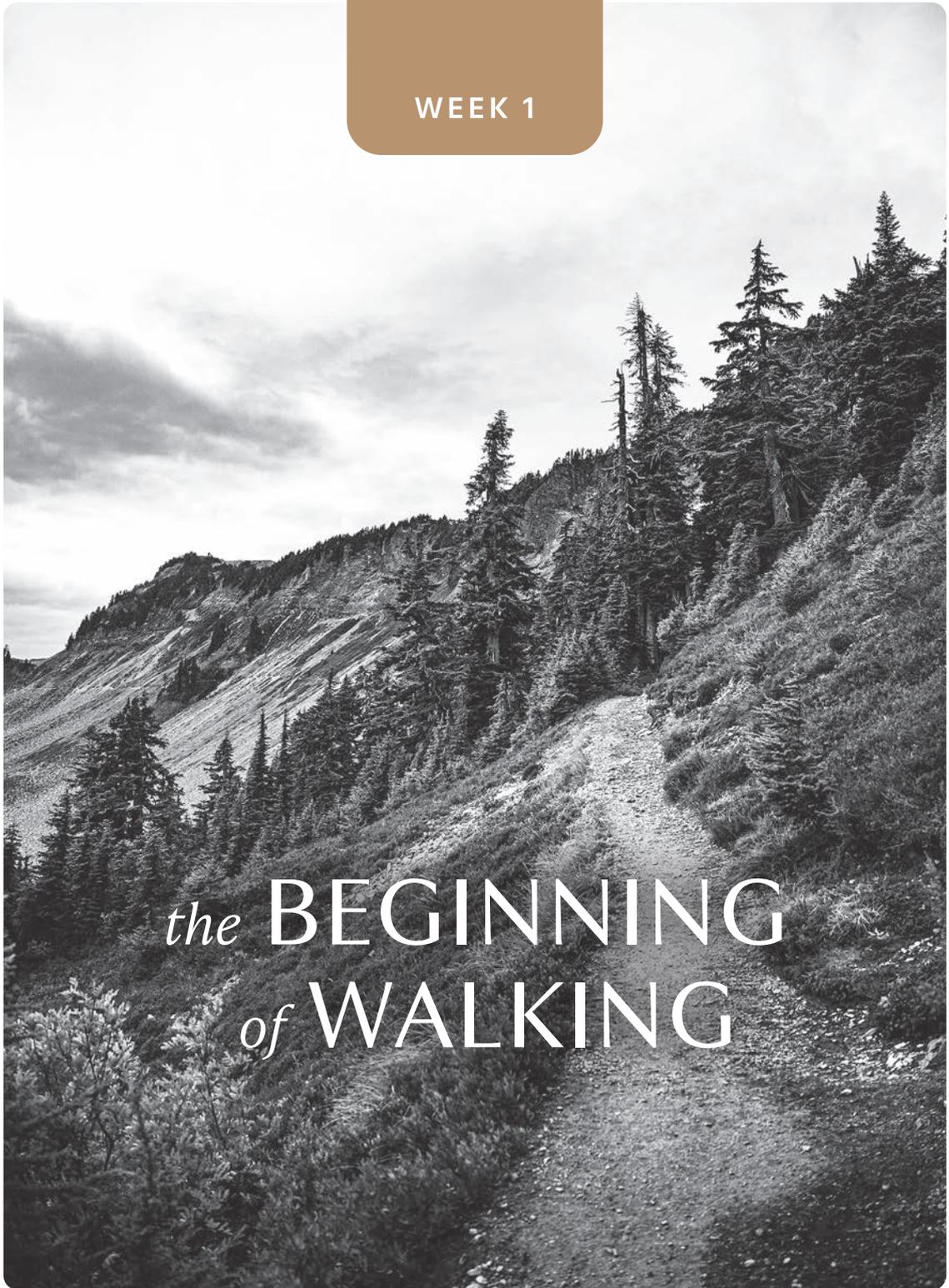
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Our fifth, the Epistles.



5

WEEK 1



the BEGINNING
of WALKING



SESSION 1

The Beginning of Walking

You can fill in these blanks as you watch the video for session 1.

_____ : In each of our five weeks together, our goal will be to gain insight into what walking with God looked like in a particular era of biblical history in order to enrich our understanding and appreciation of walking with God in our own.

1. The _____ of walking is _____. Glance at the first several chapters of Scripture as they move toward Genesis 3:8. Walking with God _____ as the _____ of _____ God.

Read Genesis 5:1-24.

2. The mention of _____ means to stop careful readers in their tracks. (Compare Hebrews 11:5-6.)

See Genesis 13:14-18 and Genesis 17:1 for the third figure we find walking.

3. Note the CSB translation *live* rather than *walk*. The two words are also used somewhat interchangeably in translations of the New Testament. They aren't, however, entirely synonymous. _____ lends itself more readily to the notion of _____.

הלך (*hālāk*): v. (qal) go, travel, i.e., _____ to another place, with any form of transportation (2 Ki 7:14); (piel) travel (Ps 104:26) . . . (hitp) go about (Zec 1:10) . . . (qal) walk, i.e., make linear motion on foot or pod (Lev 11:20); (piel) go about (1 Ki 21:27); (hif) cause to walk (Lev 26:13); (hitp) walk about, . . . (qal) follow, i.e., make linear motion behind another object or collection (Ge 32:20); . . . behave, conduct, _____, formally, walk, i.e., go about doing certain actions in a regular, more or less consistent manner, so possibly _____ or lifestyle, as an extension of the act of walking as regular and patterned (Lev 20:23).¹

4. One paradox of the gospel's _____ is found in its _____.

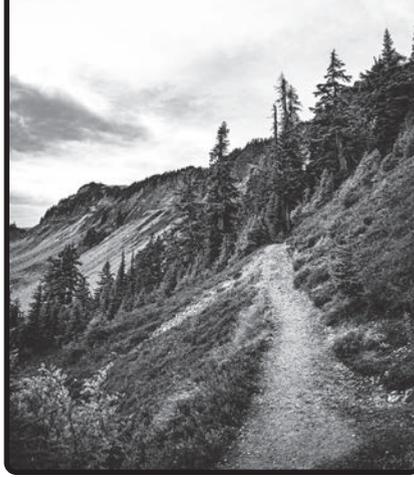


No story is told as big and bold as the one God tells in Scripture. To human eyes, the plot may hide, but it is never lost. Just when you think it so, keep reading and watch it rise from the ashes. It could blow in with the next wind, get picked up by a caravan, float on an ax-head, ride in on a camel, hurl from a slingshot, or burst from a grave. What the story will not do—cannot do—is die. Leave the tome on a shelf to collect an inch of dust, and the pages inside will still teem with the story of life everlasting.

Open the cover of your Bible without turning to any particular page. Simply let it lie open for a moment, and give thought to the wonder there at arm's length. That's no ordinary book, you know. And you do. That's why you're here. And why I'm here. But how unordinary is it? Whether you're just beginning to crack the spine of a Bible or you've spent years inside the pages, no time is the wrong time to ruminate on its uniqueness. How we read what we read frequently determines where it leads. We'll devote this opening lesson, therefore, to exploring that deep, existential question shrugging the shoulders of preoccupied humans:

Why bother?

Specific to the task at hand, why bother with Bible study? I'm serious. Who among us needs one more time-consuming thing to do? Not one of us. Who among us needs divine help to juggle responsibilities, navigate relationships, sort out problems, deal with health issues, love prickly people, resist bitterness, forgive wrongs, be forgiven for wrongs, get back up, start all over, and tumble once again into transcendent joy that somehow makes all the trouble of living worth it? I do. You too?



DAY 1

.....

Your instructions are a doorway through which light shines.

PSALM 119:130, NET

*You know you're alive. You take huge steps, trying to
feel the planet's roundness arc between your feet.*

ANNIE DILLARD, *PILGRIM AT TINKER CREEK*

There's nothing better than an open heart before God with an open Bible in our hands. Scripture shows us what a walk with God looks like and plants the road signs that direct our course. So let's stir up some fresh appreciation.

Let's start with the remarkable patience of God eternal in the gradual transmission of the Scriptures. Psalm 90:2 reads,

Before the mountains were born,
before you gave birth to the earth and the world,
from eternity to eternity, you are God.

God has always been, is presently being, and ever more shall be. Long before God, in the poetic language of Moses, "gave birth to the earth and the world," he knew to the minutest detail how he would reveal himself and his redemptive plan to humanity. All things are at his command, so he can use whatever he pleases, but in the Bible's unfolding, we find God revealing himself and communicating his presence and desires to humanity through a variety of means. He uses divine speech ("and God said . . ."), creation and the created order, prophetic speech ("the word of the Lord came to . . ."), natural and supernatural events, signs, wonders,

**There's nothing better
than an open heart
before God with an open
Bible in our hands.**

miracles, dreams, visions, divine and angelic visitations, sounds (thunder, trumpets, etc.), unusual sights, fire, clouds, a donkey, rain, absence of rain, silence, messages through prophets, and, most importantly to us, written words inspired by the Holy Spirit (Scripture) and the coming of Jesus, the Son.

Since Christ—the Word (Greek *logos*), or full expression, personified logic, exact representation, and perfect revelation of God, himself fully God—is eternal in both being and knowing, the words of God can be understood as eternal. In the diction

of Psalm 119:89, “LORD, your word is forever; it is firmly fixed in heaven.” Isaiah 40:8 reads, “The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God remains forever.” Christ himself said in Matthew 24:35 (NIV), “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

The eternal words of the Eternal Word.

We don't deify the Bible, of course. A pious form of idolatry is still every atom idolatry. Christ, *the Word*, is God, but the Scriptures are not. Their inestimable worth, authority, and reliability are in their divine inspiration and intention. Reflect on the thought that God would communicate to his image-bearing creatures through the sacred pages before ever fashioning a human body and breathing life into it. He knew the artful means of how—a stylus in mortal fingers moved by the Holy Spirit—and the schedule of when. God felt no urgency to blurt all he had to say in one breath. The one who is timeless owns time and, therefore, took his sweet time inspiring the Scriptures. Divine revelation is many things, but God in a rush isn't one of them.

Up for a little history? The Protestant Bible, comprised of the Old Testament and the New, is a progressively revealed library of sixty-six books written over some 1,500 years through the inspired pens of more than forty human authors, then ultimately bound into one volume with one overarching message: a self-disclosing holy God seeking and saving fallen humans at the highest personal cost.

Even after the final word of Scripture was inscribed on a scroll (possibly but not definitely the book of Revelation), God apparently wasn't stressed by a publication deadline. The canon as we know it, with thirty-nine Old Testament books and twenty-seven New Testament books, was not fully recognized by the church as such until around AD 400, after substantial deliberations and debates over authenticity and standards for acceptance.

In the centuries following, copies of the Scriptures were carefully guarded rarities, hand-written by scribes in Latin and placed primarily in the hands of educated clergy and elites. Translations into other languages like English awaited the invention of reusable type-printing in the fifteenth century and the courage of individuals so determined for the Bible to be in the hands of common people and congregations, they were willing to die for it. William Tyndale, the

linguist, scholar, and relentless reformer first to translate the Hebrew and Greek biblical texts into English, was strangled and burned at the stake as a heretic in 1536 around age forty-two. As is often the case, his driving passion was born from the birth pangs of great frustration. His issue with the religious machinations of his day is evident in the following words attributed to him:

In the universities they have ordained that no man shall look on the Scripture until he be nozzled in heathen learning eight or nine years, and armed with false principles with which he is clean shut out of the understanding of the Scripture.²

Perhaps the most quoted statement of William Tyndale is one he aimed like an arrow straight toward the tip of the ecclesiastical ladder: “If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy who drives a plough to know more of the scriptures than you do.”³

Ultimately, God did call Tyndale to give his life for the cause, but not until the type was set for plough boys—and girls—to hold the Book in their callous hands and read it. The Bible is a marvel, you see, and from this perspective, with a side helping of imagination, you might conclude the cover you just opened is no run-of-the-mill book cover. Picture a door swinging open—not to a fairy tale nor a Narnian land beyond a wardrobe, nor a shadowland of ghostlike spirits, but to the world of the Scriptures, infinitely larger and more fascinating than the earth spinning beneath our feet of clay and the atmosphere over our heads.

God begins the story with the creation of the material world. **Turn now to the opening chapter of Genesis and read verses 1-31. Record the material elements created on each “day.” Feel free to generalize on the lengthier sections.**

<p>DAY ONE</p> <hr/>	<p>DAY FOUR</p> <hr/>
<p>DAY TWO</p> <hr/>	<p>DAY FIVE</p> <hr/>
<p>DAY THREE</p> <hr/>	<p>DAY SIX</p> <hr/>

Beginnings are meant to be remembered, rehearsed, told and retold. God seemed intent from the start to introduce himself as the one who created all things out of no things in order that, among other things, the clay on its most coherent day might see the absurdity of telling the Potter how to spin his own wheel. Turn to chapters 38 and 39 of the book of Job for a clear example. Job is believed by numerous biblical scholars to be one of the oldest books in the Bible, if not the very oldest. If they are accurate, think how apropos a beginning: God, in effect, saying, "Let there be light" on the existential crisis of suffering.

Note the format of the words in Job and how it differs from the predominant paragraph structure of Genesis 1. Though whispers of poetry are there all along in Genesis 1 and some scholars believe that it, too, was intended to be read lyrically, here in this section of Job we behold the Lord blatantly as poet. **Slide your index finger slowly down the lines of Job 38 and 39, and pick several portions you find arresting. Then read them aloud. (Try to always read poetry aloud.) Which ones did you choose?**

.....

.....

.....

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16), but some portions of the Bible are sheer art, meant to hold the gazer's gaze, not just sharpen the student's mind. Job appears among the former, no less than a masterpiece. In these chapters, we feel the emotion, see the fireworks,

hear the morning stars singing, and sense our heads swimming to the whirling of planets. The chart of Genesis 1 gives way to the art of Job 38–39. Job's verses aren't looking to be diagrammed, charted, and parsed so much as they are begging to be heard. Wrestled with. Rehearsed. Imagined. Experienced. Wept over. Dreaded. Rejoiced over. Treasured. Tossed and regathered.

**Lord, how am I
to read this?**

Which expression of the Creator's work is better, Genesis 1 or Job 38–39? Both are essential. Both are God-breathed. In this case, the prose and the poetry are both beautiful, but they approach the reader from different angles and carry varied rhythms. Commands don't read like proverbs. Narratives don't read like epistles. Again, how we read what we read frequently determines where it leads. Sometimes the best question is "Holy Spirit, how am I to read this?"

Walking with God is attempting, however awkwardly and certainly imperfectly, to keep in step to some degree with God's rhythm and reason on any given day and in any season. One

way we may do this is in Bible reading. You may set out to read two or three chapters and find yourself instead absorbed by a single passage or fixated on a phrase. Other times, you may plan to take it nice and slow and instead get swept up in a fast-moving narrative and keep reading for the next half hour. In either case, was the goal unmet? The answer depends on whether the goal was checking the box on an exact length of Scripture reading or engaging with God in the reading. Yielding to the Spirit's pace isn't always obvious, but it is the most satisfying.

Our walks with God don't happen on a preprogrammed treadmill. They happen in the real living, where next week's calendar is maddeningly theoretical. This tandem walk is comprised of communion meant to move at God's discretion, which the human is tasked to discern by faith and not by sight. And thus, the ebb and flow. Keep in mind the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:17:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit
of the Lord is, there is freedom.

Walking with God assumes certain practices like prayer and Bible reading, but if we slip into automatic, where the method and pace become strictly routine, we can walk on for miles and months without any real involvement with God. In these pages, engagement exceeds regimen. Perhaps the simple phrase "walked with God" in Genesis, used in reference to Enoch and Noah, holds two keys that help unlock the pace.

See it for now not only as a phrase but as three separate words that comprise the phrase.
Record something each word indicates to you.

WALKED

.....

.....

.....

WITH

.....

.....

.....

GOD

Walking speaks to consistency. (Pick up the feet, put them down. Do it again.) *With* reminds us that we're not alone in this—that Immanuel is with us. *God* in the opening of Genesis is the title associated most with the majestic Creator. Then, might we be helped by thinking along these lines?

Walking with God blends consistency and creativity.

It is a consistent walk with an immeasurably creative God.

In closing, turn your attention back to the first chapter of Genesis. This time, we'll read Robert Alter's translation of the first four verses:

When God began to create heaven and earth, and the earth then was welter and waste and darkness over the deep and God's breath hovering over the waters, God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good, and God divided the light from the darkness.⁴

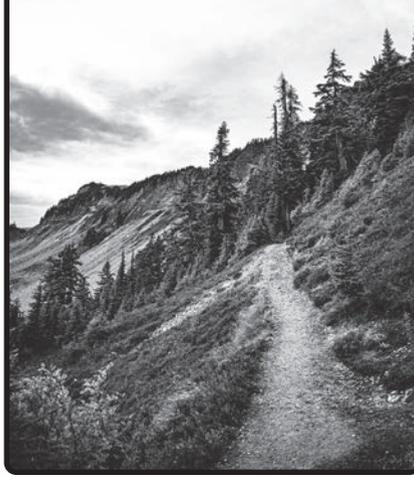
Welter and waste and darkness. God breathes over the deep, then order—creative, kaleidoscopic, and spectacular—starts taking form out of chaos. I love to imagine that his breath still hovers over the words he breathed on the sacred page in the expanse of time. I like to ask him to make the words warm with his breath as I read and to bring them to life inside my bones and marrow. My way of talking to God may not and need not be yours, but do dare to ask him in your own words to work supernaturally in your life through the Scriptures. Do ask God to open your eyes so you can see the wonders in his teachings (Psalm 119:18) and open your mind to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). The God with whom you're invited to walk is no small God. Nothing is too difficult for him.

Whatever you do, keep the words of God near the heart of God, where they belong. We can read the print and miss the point. Jesus confronted a group of deeply devoted students of the Holy Scriptures in John 5:39-40, 42 with these unsettling words: "You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me. But you are

not willing to come to me . . . I know you—that you have no love for God within you.” Let that sink in not as condemnation but as caution not to miss the heart of God in the words of God.

The books bound together within this sacred library we call the Bible far exceed a collection of ancient scrolls for display in glass cabinets of museums. Pull a Bible from a box in the attic of a ramshackle house, and it may appear a relic of a bygone era, with long-gone relevance and the vitality of a corpse. Should the discoverer blow the dust off the flaking bonded leather, open its thin pages with frayed edges to the middle, and dare to read a psalm or two, however, she might well find wording for something that needed saying that very morning. The Scriptures are living, breathing words, given by the Holy Spirit and kept alive and vivified by the self-same Spirit in the hearts of humans with a fleck of faith.

The door to the world of the Bible is wide open to you. Come on in.



DAY 2

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*The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east,
and there he placed the man he had formed.*

GENESIS 2:8

*Dear Lord, grant me the grace of wonder. Surprise me, amaze me,
awe me in every crevice of your universe. Each day enrapture me
with your marvelous things without number. . . . I do not ask to
see the reason for it all: I ask only to share the wonder of it all.*

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

What if, over the coming weeks in this study, we read our Bibles with an even higher objective than learning scriptural principles and developing godlier behaviors? To be sure, both ends are important. A disciple is a learner. We can't grow if we don't learn, and we can't walk with God with a hint of consistency if we don't learn how he walks. As for godliness, only a person out of touch with the God of the Bible can kid herself into thinking how she lives makes no difference to God. But my hope is for someone to discover that both objectives—growing in the knowledge of Scripture and in godliness—more often than not end up naturally accompanying an authentic and deliberate walk with God.

You are my hope, Lord **GOD**,
my confidence from my youth.
I have leaned on you from birth;
you took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is always about you.

PSALM 71:5-6

One of our high hopes here is to learn to lean and, in doing so, realize that in leaning we learn. Think of the young shepherd David penning the words to his God: “thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” in the twenty-third psalm (κλν). The shepherd’s staff had multiple features, but certainly among them was a sturdy bend and break-resistant cane, or shillelagh, on which the weary, the overworked, and the weak could lean. Think also of the beloved disciple, who leaned against Jesus at the supper table that last evening before Jesus’ crucifixion (John 13:21-28). What if we also saw our Scripture reading and Bible studying as dining with Christ on the feast of his words and, rather than only sitting classroom style (a good thing), we often sat supper-style and scooted in (an even better thing)?

The benefits of reading Scripture are boundless. No need to choose a few. The supreme purpose of the sacred words, however, is to reveal to us the saving Word who is Christ the Lord. Above all else, the highest, most crucial aim of every spiritual discipline—indeed, every life practice in a journey of faith—is to know Christ, to be drawn by the Spirit into deeper, more satisfying, sanctifying communion with him, to be fed and led by him. In a nutshell: to walk with God. This is something Cece Winans has experienced, as you’ll see in our interview this week.*

I’m proposing that, throughout these five weeks, every time we open our Bibles, we pause and ask the Holy Spirit to quicken those words and bring them to life in a way that is enlightening and transforming—perhaps at times even transfixing and mesmerizing—to us. Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to teach us, inform us, convict us, show us, direct us, thrill us. When it comes to the work of the Holy Spirit, the words of James 4:2 could hardly be more applicable:

You do not have because you do not ask.

To make the connection, read Luke 11:9-13. What is Jesus encouraging his followers to do?

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Fill in the remainder of Luke 11:13. “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father _____
_____?”

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Find Beth's interview with Cece Winans here.

Ask for all of it these next five weeks. Ask for every good thing the Lord is willing to show you and work in you. I'm talking about the things of real value. Of eternal value. Not the eroding things of this world. Ask him for the filling and satisfaction of his Spirit. For the riches of understanding and insight. For wisdom and creativity. For love and joy and faith. For more fruitfulness in your calling. Start asking him to fill the empty places in you with himself, to the full measure. Ask him to cause the seeds of the Word he'll implant in your soul to have a profound yield, "a hundred times what was sown" (Luke 8:8). Why not ask?

Isaiah 7 records a most intriguing dialogue between the Lord and King Ahaz. The Lord says to Ahaz:

"Ask for a sign from the **LORD** your God—it can be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven."

ISAIAH 7:11

Can you imagine God encouraging you to ask for a sign from him and making it virtually limitless? How would you respond? Well, this is the way Ahaz responded:

"I will not ask. I will not test the **LORD**."

ISAIAH 7:12

"But, Ahaz," we'd protest, "the Lord just told you to!" According to the prophet Isaiah, the refusal of Ahaz greatly tried the patience of the Lord. He'd send a sign anyway, but with no pleasure in the king. In Luke 11, Jesus does not tell us to seek signs, but he does indeed exhort us fervently to ask of, seek from, and knock on the door of our gracious heavenly Father for the good and lasting things of the Holy Spirit and of the Kingdom of God. **So, with an asking, seeking, and knocking frame of mind, turn to the third chapter of Genesis and read verses 1-13. After you've completed your reading, meditate on verse 8.**

The man and his wife heard the sound of the **LORD** God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze.

God walking. Since we've been invited into this anthropomorphism, let's go with it. Here we're invited to imagine a God who has legs, and two legs as opposed to four, mind you. God did not create the beasts of the field, the fish of the sea, or the birds of the air in his image. God is wooing us in this scene to picture him with feet. The Lord alone knows to what extent we can stretch the anthropomorphism without it snapping, but questions blow the dust off stale imaginations, even if they have no answers.

Here are a few. In the time prior to the fall in the garden, can we confidently assume that the man and his wife had seen their Creator's actual form? Did God in the nascent era take on the likeness of humanity with a body that could be touched? Did his feet leave prints in the dirt? We don't actually know, but don't you wish we did? Sometimes the attribute most asleep in our Bible study is curiosity, and if we're to appreciate what is meant by walking with God, it needs waking up.

What we do know is that God walked among them in the garden in a way that could be *heard*. "The man and his wife heard the sound . . ."

Sometimes the attribute most asleep in our Bible study is curiosity.

This singular detail suggests a tangibly impactful form that, if applied to anything else, assumes some measure of weight. If you walk through a stretch of woods often enough, you'll likely learn to distinguish the sound of a rabbit or a raccoon, a deer, a dog, or a person, only the last of which, if you're like me, raises any real caution.

The point to be drawn is that hooves sound different from paws, and both sound different from feet. Large sounds different from small. The whistling of a human is distinct from the whistling of the wind through the trees. In the narrative of Genesis 3, the man and woman crouching in an effort to be unseen recognized God's approach purely from sound.

The messianic passages of Isaiah 53 lead us to picture Jesus as rather unremarkable in size and appearance. How God chose to reveal his presence "in the beginning" is less clear. To be sure, Adam and Eve recognized the Lord God moving among them was not their peer . . . except, perhaps, for one enticing moment when the serpent suggested he was. That fateful day, the couple didn't hide from a being they could take on. They knew more vividly than ever that the one they were dealing with was wholly other.

The Hebrew word for "glory" in the Old Testament is *kavod*. The term conveys weightiness. Think in terms of market trade in antiquity and how the value of a particular item—be it fruit, grain, liquid, stone, or precious metal—was ordinarily estimated by weight. When we use the idiom "worth their weight in gold," we're calculating according to this ancient measure. We don't know precisely how God revealed himself to the man and woman in the garden, but this much we can count on from the expanse of divine revelation: God's glory is immeasurable. His full weightiness cannot be weighed.

The man and woman bought what the deceiving serpent was selling at an incalculable cost. These were people who, before that fateful day, got to live out of their truest identity and fullest security and highest satisfaction. They fellowshiped with their Maker and with each other in a paradise designed for exactly such a purpose.

Let me ask you this: Have you ever gazed at a magnificent piece of art while standing

next to the artist? If so, when and what was the experience like? If not, what do you imagine that experience would be like?

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I've had the privilege of standing inches away from contemporary artist and Jesus-follower Makoto Fujimura and looking at one of his paintings with him.* I'd seen it just minutes before he walked in the room. Next to him, however, the interpretation became clearer, and the colors and textures took on entirely new extravagance. I've heard poems read so powerfully and poignantly by the poets who wrote them that I wept. I've heard excerpts from books read aloud by their authors in such a way as to change the way I read their work from then on. The ones who write the words know every intended pause and the precise pace. They know the interpretation. They know the schematics. How much more, then, does God know his own work? Imagine beholding the masterpieces of the universe while standing in the presence and company of the Master. Come near with the faith of a child.

Master, why did you choose to make the horse neigh, the cow moo, and the donkey bray?

What were you thinking when you made a porpoise twirl and a whale frolic and a seal clap?

Master, why did you design a mango to taste this way and a papaya to taste that way?

What did you do out of necessity for creation, and what did you do for the pure fun of it?

I hope one day to ask God some of these questions and endless others. Consider also how he will answer what we didn't know to ask and show us what we didn't know could be seen. Imagine gazing at a mountain in his good company and God saying something like this: "What you see before you isn't all there is. Come with me." Now, imagine he takes you by the hand and leads you into a cave. You bend your body and make your way through a narrow tunnel

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Find Beth's interview with Makoto Fujimura here.

and into an open space where you can stand upright, and suddenly the light of your escort's presence dances on the surfaces of a thousand icicle-like stalactites.

Just think of the conversations we have coming when we're finally in God's perceptible presence. Now, imagine being Adam and Eve and, instead of having such unspeakable privileges of presence *coming*, you're seeing it *going*. The loss would be a living death.

What specific reason is given in Isaiah 45:18-19 for God's creation of planet Earth?

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Consider the particularity of our planet in comparison to others in our solar system. **What are a few of the conditions that make the earth more inhabitable than say, for instance, Venus or Mars?**

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Might it be fair to say that God formed the earth to be inhabitable most exquisitely by humans in order to enjoy them, bless them, and fellowship with them? Would we be going too far to suggest that God designed humans intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and physically distinct from all other creatures so he could walk with them rather than simply watch them walk? By his sovereign wisdom, God also fashioned mortals with freedom of choice, refusing to force them to enjoy his presence or plug their ears to seductive voices threatening to lead them astray. This is no God of oppression. The arms of this God stretch wide open with invitation.



DAY 3

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Though the mountains move and the hills shake, my love will not be removed from you and my covenant of peace will not be shaken.

ISAIAH 54:10

Fear is just courage's preamble. When we practice remembering that the Spirit of Christ is our companion, fear simply becomes one more prompt to pay attention to the voice ... of Love. Fear doesn't have to be an enemy to conquer. It can be a place to be companioned by Love.

K. J. RAMSEY

I've been on the same journey as countless others among us in recent years, disoriented over the burgeoning hate, wrath, extremism, racism, depravity, irrationality, brutalization, and polarization overtaking what seems every conceivable realm in our society. **Did I overlook a social ill you've found particularly bewildering? If so, add to the list:**

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Ours is a social, political, and religious world we humans have managed to fashion in our own image and, I believe, inadvertently under the influence and authority of "the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient" (Ephesians 2:2). Faced with such an escalation, we naturally become solution oriented.

- What do we need to do to fix this?
- In this ever-widening fracture, how can we find our way back together?
- What should be the first response of the church?

So we start trying to come up with ideas.

- We need revival!
- No, we need an awakening!
- No, we need better discipleship!
- No, we need to preach the gospel more clearly!
- No, we need a sermon series on unity!
- We need to disfellowship!
- No, we need to re-fellowship!

And on and on we go, trying to solve the problems as if we truly know what is causing them. We are right to pray for, plead for, seek after, and work toward resolutions to solvable problems, but we're mistaken to think we can stop this fallen world from falling. The burgeoning problems we see haven't materialized ex nihilo. They are the outgrowth of deeply entrenched troubles ignored—whether accidentally, conveniently, or out of a feeling of helplessness—until they've gained momentum that's hard to miss.

How do we navigate a virtually unrecognizable world? How do we find a path through a dense forest of poisonous trees with branches enough to eclipse the sun? And how do we keep from eating their low-hanging fruit when our taste buds are acclimated to it? First, we must recognize that not all poisonous fruit tastes like poison. A time comes when we're forced to face how we like the way some poison tastes. We realize we're not just the affected. We're the infected. With this realization comes good news. When we begin to face the true condition of our culture, our own disordered affections, worldly absorptions, and personal contributions to the madness, and resolve to look to God and the Scriptures for a better way to live, we're already pivoting northward.

Today we'll peruse the life of an individual who was surrounded by a world woefully harder to navigate than ours. First, the context. **Read Genesis 6:5-7. Flip back to Genesis 1:26-31 and review the wording. Note the stark contrast between the two segments. In what ways do you see a reversal of sorts in Genesis 6:5-7?**

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According to Genesis 6:5, “human wickedness was widespread on the earth” and “every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time.” Endeavor to grasp such an invasive darkness engulfing us today. We wouldn’t have the luxury of combing through movie or series titles to find remotely decent entertainment, because such a thing would be impossible to find. Imagine the cruelty and public depravity of a society populated by people at their worst. Covering our children’s eyes from sights they lacked the maturity to process would be impossible. Anyway, unless we were Noahs among our godless contemporaries, our own inclinations would be so evil we wouldn’t care what kind of exposure our children had. Imagine never being astonished to learn what has been happening behind closed doors because there are no closed doors.

Take a quick look at Galatians 1:4. How does the apostle Paul refer to the era in which they lived (and we also live)?

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In the same letter, however, Paul spoke eloquently about concurrent realities in this present age, like the transforming power of the gospel, fellowship with other believers, the fruit of the Holy Spirit in frail human beings, and the ability to bear one another’s burdens. Though this is a “present evil age,” we can’t accurately claim that every human inclination and motivation is only evil. Yes, we see cruelty, injustice, rampant deception, and depravity, but in the lamplight of God, we can also behold goodness and beauty in this present darkness.

As a reminder that the world hasn’t entirely been swallowed up by a dark, gaping abyss, offer two or three examples of oppositional good often on display in your personal sphere of living. I’ll mention a few to get you started:

- Our children’s choir at church and the way they search the sanctuary for a parent or grandparent the moment they’re on stage and how they wave
- The toothy smile and unbridled enthusiasm of a teenage sacker at our grocery store who has Down syndrome
- A friend who hosts baby showers for single moms in crisis

Your turn:

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To deepen our appreciation of the details when Scripture offers them and to widen our landscape for walking with God, let's take a moment to backtrack. In our opening session, we dropped into the fifth chapter of Genesis to catch a glimpse of the life of Enoch, a man who presents a remarkable case study in walking with God. Enoch and Noah appear in subsequent chapters in Genesis and in subsequent verses in Hebrews. Let's follow suit and view them, one after the other. Take Enoch first. **Read or review both Scripture segments—one from the Old Testament and the other from the New—and extrapolate every detail you can find about Enoch. Record them under the coinciding references.**

ENOCH	
Genesis 5:18-24	Hebrews 11:5-6
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Draw lines between any details offered in the Old and New Testaments that either blatantly or subtly lend insight to the other. Now take the same initiative regarding Noah in the next chapter of Genesis and the next verse of Hebrews. Read both portions, then comprise your lists and draw lines between links.

NOAH

Genesis 6:5-14

Hebrews 11:7

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The case studies in the Bible of mortals walking with God come in a refreshing array of conditions and characters. Keep this in mind when you're tempted to think your walk with God should perfectly replicate your mentor's or peer's. He didn't weave our DNA, design our frames, mold our minds, shade our skin, and distinguish us from all others by the print of our thumbs because he is most glorified by duplicates.

In an early summer Sunday-morning sermon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in Newington, Charles Spurgeon's voice shook the room in his iconic Spurgeon style. His text? Genesis 5 and 6, and a segment of Hebrews 11. His emphasis? The distinctions between two men who walked with God: Enoch and Noah.

We may take pleasure in thinking of Noah as a kind of contrast to Enoch. Enoch was taken away from the evil to come, he did not see the flood, nor hear the wailing of those who were swept away by the water-floods. His was a delightful deliverance from the harvest of wrath which followed the universal godlessness of the race. It was not his to fight the battle of righteousness to the bitter end, but by a secret rapture he avoided death, and escaped those evil days in which his grandson's lot was cast.

Noah is the picture of one who is the Lord's witness during evil days, and lives through them faithfully, enduring unto the end. It was his to be delivered from death by death. The ark was, so to speak, a coffin to him, he entered it, and became a dead man to the old world, and within its enclosure he was floated into a new world, to become the founder and father of a new race. As in the figure of baptism we see life

by burial, so was it with this chosen patriarch, he passed by burial in the ark into a new life.

In Enoch we see a type of those of God's people who will go home peacefully before the last closing struggle. Ere the first clash of swords at Armageddon, such Enochs will be taken from the evil to come. But in Noah we see those who will engage in the conflict, and bear themselves bravely amid backsliding and apostasy, until they shall see the powers of evil trodden under their feet as straw is trodden for the dunghill.⁵

What part of Spurgeon's excerpt is a new thought for you?

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A few common denominators in the lives of the two individuals would almost certainly exist, whether they are specified in Scripture or assumed. **What do you think a few of those would be?**

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Capture a description of Noah offered in Genesis 6:9 (CSB) by filling in the blanks:

These are the family records of Noah. Noah was a righteous man,

.....;

Noah walked with God.

Noah wasn't superhuman, and to be certain, he wasn't sinless. Scripture teaches that no one is without sin but the triune God. Noah was, however, a righteous person and "blameless among his contemporaries." The adjective *righteous* means much of what you'd expect:

It is nearly always used of persons, either men or God, and often stands in contrast to “wicked,” רשע. Near synonyms include “innocent” and “upright.” In legal contexts, “righteous” means “innocent” or “acquitted” of specific offenses, e.g., Exod 23:7-8; Deut 25:1. More generally, a righteous person is one who keeps the moral law: Ezekiel defines the righteous man as one “who does what is lawful and right” and then goes on to give examples of sins he avoids and good acts he does, e.g., clothing the naked and feeding the hungry, 18:5-9.⁶

The Hebrew word translated “blameless” in Genesis 6:9 includes a meaning we’re less likely to associate with our English word. As Dr. Gordon J. Wenham explains,

“Blameless,” תמים, is a term much more rarely applied to people than “righteous.” The root idea is that of wholeness or completeness.⁷

Noah was wholly God’s. Given over completely to him. He wasn’t perfect, but he withheld nothing of his imperfect human self from his God. His reputation belonged to the Lord. No small thing. People would have thought he’d lost his mind. His labor belonged to the Lord. His family belonged to the Lord. His community belonged to the Lord. His future belonged to the Lord. His well-being and the well-being of everyone and everything he loved—you guessed it—belonged to the Lord. What a beautiful concept of blamelessness: being unable to find a cell in that body or a whit of his soul without “the Lord’s” firmly engraved on it. We’re not hard pressed to imagine what an impact this kind of holistic surrender would have on a human’s walk with God. **Reason briefly in this space how blamelessness would be rarer than righteousness.**

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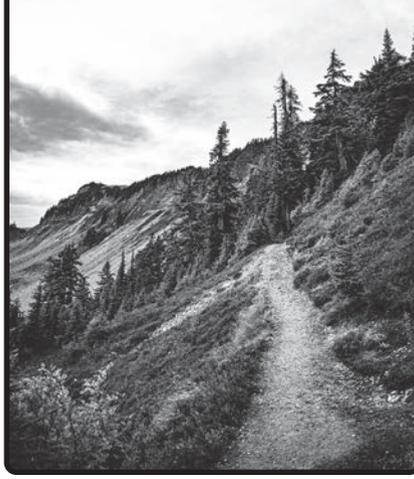
As we draw today’s thoughts to a conclusion, let’s meditate on the phrase from Genesis 6:9, “among his contemporaries.” The prophet Isaiah offers important insight into the Lord’s attentive order in this verse. Read the words carefully.

Who has done this and carried it through,
calling forth the generations from the beginning?
I, the LORD—with the first of them
and with the last—I am he.

ISAIAH 41:4, NIV

The Lord has called forth every generation from the very beginning, and he knows exactly which generation will be present on this earth when Christ returns and his Kingdom comes for every eye to see. Psalm 33:11 assures us, “The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart from generation to generation.” Psalm 145:13 tells us God’s “rule is for all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words and gracious in all his actions.”

Not one generation will slip past God’s notice. This point carries significant weight in our walk with God because we will be tempted at times—as will the next generation, the next, and the next—to think faithfulness is utterly impossible in a world this corrupt. We’ll tend to imagine God lowering the bar in light of our present darkness. Keep ever before you and train up the next generation to be assured that the time will never come when God will be overwhelmed by evil, detached from his throne, no longer watching, no longer faithful, and no longer well able to make his people well able to serve him. Let our contemporaries be what they may. As for us, let us give ourselves wholly to the Lord, withholding nothing, and let us walk with God, wobbly though we may, until he walks us home.



DAY 4

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You yourself have recorded my wanderings. Put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?

PSALM 56:8

Can I invite Jesus in to all of that? And if I do, what will happen?

MALCOLM GUILTE, *THE WORD IN THE WILDERNESS*

Today is set aside to introduce and acclimate you to a record-keeping method for weekly practice that God will make increasingly meaningful to you as you get into the rhythm of it. Nothing about the exercise is arbitrary or a waste of labor. Think of the page as a sketch pad for developing the art of God-awareness. As you become more aware of God, you'll see how intimately he is aware of you. He longs to awaken you to more of what he's doing in and around you, enlarging in you what the apostle Paul prayed for us all: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him . . . that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling" (Ephesians 1:17-18).

You will almost certainly see that he is with you more than you've known, actively engaging with you, desiring you to become more aware of his ways and means as he teaches and reveals himself to you, conveying his love for you. If you actively engage in the practice, your eyes will open wide to what he's showing you in small things we're prone to miss in all our preoccupations. These revelations don't clear up the mysteries, but they become the kinds of things that carry us when we have no explanation for the mayhem happening around us. All we know is that Jesus is right here with us, and that singular truth is the literal difference between day and night.

Written remembrances have been incorporated into lives of faith for centuries and, in fact, from the very beginning. Ours is a record-keeping God. Your Bible is evidence that God does not simply speak. He *records*. He did not leave us to oral tradition alone in matters of highest priority. God equipped us with words on pages. Genesis 2:4 illustrates the connection beautifully: “These are the records of the heavens and the earth, concerning their creation. At the time that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens . . .”

Under the direction of divine inspiration, the book of Genesis also offers a record of family lines with a place of significance in the story of faith. **Circle every appearance of the word *records* and underline who the records pertain to. Draw a star by the name *Abraham* where it appears.**

- “This is the document containing the family records of Adam. On the day that God created man, he made him in the likeness of God” (Genesis 5:1).
- “These are the family records of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among his contemporaries; Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6:9).
- “These are the family records of Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (Genesis 10:1).
- “These are the clans of Noah’s sons, according to their family records, in their nations. The nations on earth spread out from these after the flood” (Genesis 10:32).
- “These are the family records of Shem. Shem lived 100 years and fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood” (Genesis 11:10).
- “These are the family records of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran, and Haran fathered Lot” (Genesis 11:27).
- “These are the family records of Abraham’s son Ishmael, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s slave, bore to Abraham” (Genesis 25:12).
- “These are the names of Ishmael’s sons; their names according to the family records are Nebaioth, Ishmael’s firstborn, then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam” (Genesis 25:13).
- “These are the family records of Isaac son of Abraham. Abraham fathered Isaac” (Genesis 25:19).
- “These are the family records of Esau (that is, Edom)” (Genesis 36:1).
- “These are the family records of Esau, father of the Edomites in the mountains of Seir” (Genesis 36:9).
- “These are the family records of Jacob. At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended sheep with his brothers” (Genesis 37:2).

References to Abraham and his family line are always significant because God chose him as the first of the Hebrew patriarchs. We'll touch on this a bit more in our next lesson. **What is an additional reason Abraham's line should have significance to us, according to Galatians 3:29?**

Scripture itself is evidence of the value God places on recording elements, experiences, and events relevant to faith in him. Mind you, because of his great mercy ultimately displayed on the cross of Christ, God keeps no record of wrongs, for . . .

If you, **LORD**, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

PSALM 130:3-4, **NIV**

One of the most mesmerizing sections of Scripture conveying God's penchant for record-keeping is found in Malachi 3:13-16. **What had some of the people spoken against the Lord?**

Do their complaints have any relevance in our current culture? If your answer is yes, how so?

We know the Lord knows all things, but what we're meant to not miss in this segment of Scripture is that he overhears people talking about him. There's simply no talking behind an omniscient God's back. On the flip side, we see in the same section this marvelous reference to a heavenly amanuensis sitting before the Lord keeping records in a volume called "a book of remembrance." **What is being recorded?**

Let that sink in for a moment. Every time we boast in the Lord and speak to another person or to other people about his love, goodness, grace, kindness, and power, God inclines his ear, listens, and has it recorded in a book. The thought of such divine attentiveness is astonishing.

Needless to say, a universe of difference stretches between God's infinite, inspired, and accurate recordkeeping and ours. The suggestion is that written remembrances are part of our faith tradition and still of great value. Now, let's get to the tutorial. Once you get the hang of the exercise, I think you'll savor it.

Turn to the chart at the end of week 1. You'll find seven labeled spaces. This chart appears at the end of each of our five weeks. What and how much you'll record in the boxes each week will naturally differ. Let's familiarize ourselves with the categories to heighten our awareness concerning what kinds of things we want to write down. Any time throughout the course of each week that you have something to record under one of the categories, do so while it is fresh on your mind. Leave room for other entries in the remaining part of the week.

You need not fill in every category every week. This is not a test where you make a lesser grade if you leave a blank. The aim is to keep a record of moments that capture your attention so you can reflect with God on them at the close of each week.

Staying in the present is one of the most important parts of the exercise. A mindset attentive to the "now" tends to be the weakest for most of us. We are often, understandably, more preoccupied with the past and the future than the present. Incalculable value comes from looking back at our history with God and seeing how faithful he has been to us. We will certainly have occasion to do that in these five weeks. Equally, trusting God with the concerns about the future is crucial to our faith walk. We will likewise have occasions to do that. But this weekly recordkeeping is intended to help us become more oriented to our present, daily, and weekly walk with God. This is the muscle that often needs strengthening most.

Remember in the introduction, where I wrote about Brother Lawrence practicing God's presence and Eugene Peterson commending the early Christians for keeping conscious company with Christ even in texts of the Bible where he is not specifically mentioned or inferred? I likened the goal of this study to both. But here a disclaimer of sorts is due: We will never, in this lifetime, perfect practicing God's presence or constantly keep conscious company with Christ. Brother Lawrence and Eugene Peterson knew it too. These records, however, give us a chance at the end of each week to reflect on keeping conscious company with Christ, if not in real time, *shortly after*.

Get what I'm saying? We'll reflect with the Lord, thanking him for the blessings, delights, and insights we experienced or encountered and setting before him our sighs and laments, knowing he cares and hears us, and asking him to tend to us. We'll thank him in advance for his faithfulness, sufficient grace, and divine power in the areas of our sorrows and sighs.

The idea is to record each entry as soon as possible after experiencing, noticing, or encountering it so you don't forget. You will continue to make entries throughout the week, then be encouraged to reflect on them at the end of each week. At the conclusion of the study, you will look back at all five charts and record any observations, if you're willing or, at the very least, marvel over God's goodness. I believe you'll find the exercise to be deeply meaningful—for reasons neither you nor I know to anticipate.

Here are the categories and explanations where greater clarity might be needed.

Delights

List things that bring you particular delight as they happen. Anything at all that simply brings happiness and gladness or laughter to you. As you reflect on these week to week, they will produce the marvelous fruit of gratitude.

Here are a few examples to get you started:

- The taste of something delectable
- The discovery of a bird nest with eggs
- A newborn fawn
- Running into an old friend
- A baby's smile
- A breathtaking sunset
- A full-circle moment
- Something or someone making you laugh until your sides hurt

Few things are more delightful to me than sitting under the stars around a fire on a cold night roasting marshmallows with my family. I'm persuaded that all good things are from the Lord, so have no fear of crediting him with more than he actually did.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the
Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

JAMES 1:17

Perplexities

This category could seem awkward at first, but it may turn out to be the one you end up enjoying most. This space is for recording things you find puzzling. Keep in mind, perplexity is not always negative. You may be perplexed by a sight or a conversation, for example, or a Scripture verse or a current event that simply makes you wonder. On the other hand, someone may react strangely to something you said, leaving you perplexed. Whether in negative or positive contexts, you can spot a perplexity by the quick leap to the questions "What was that?" and "What does that mean?" A key reason why we record the most notable of these week to week is that God sometimes brings surprising clarity.

Remember, curiosity is an asset in a walk with God.

They were all astounded and perplexed, saying
to one another, "What does this mean?"

ACTS 2:12

Sighings

A few things you might note under this category:

- A longing (yet again?) unfulfilled
- A hope deferred
- A closed door
- A missed opportunity
- An unresponsive friend
- Intimacy rejected

Lord, my every desire is in front of you;
my sighing is not hidden from you.

PSALM 38:9

Laments

Lament can overlap significantly with sighing, but for our purposes, we'll distinguish between them on our chart using two factors. (1) **Intensity**. For example, think of the difference between what makes you sigh and what makes you sob. Think of sighing primarily in terms of a response to disappointment and bewilderment. On the other hand, consider lament a response to more severe theological disorientation, to disruption of life with the potential to disrupt faith. (2) **Direction**. Lament is voiced (inaudibly or audibly) *to, toward, or about God*, whereas the sighings we bring to God could be about anything. Lament is an earnest complaint to the Lord himself and is made sacred by its honesty and intimacy. Nothing about a lament is faithless. You can hardly complain to a God you don't believe exists or possesses the power to act.

I cry aloud to the **LORD**;
I plead aloud to the **LORD** for mercy.
I pour out my complaint before him;
I reveal my trouble to him.
Although my spirit is weak within me,
you know my way.

PSALM 142:1-3

Divine Consolations/Comforts

This section is for recording moments week to week when you're inclined to think God has tended to you in a way deliberately meant to comfort or console you. A particular verse of Scripture in your reading that day might seem a particular comfort from God in your circumstance, hurt, loss, or disappointment. An unexpected gift, a call, a word of courage, a sublimely beautiful day, a meal dropped off at your house, a spontaneous and warm embrace—all qualify as divine comforts when we yearn for reminders of God's nearness and awareness of our need. The arrival of a friend can be one such comfort. The apostle Paul spoke of such a consolation:

God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the arrival of Titus.

2 CORINTHIANS 7:6

Several friends sent me a butterfly bush after my beloved big brother's sudden death last year, and I planted it by his memorial on our property. It thrived remarkably, shooting from some eighteen inches high to four feet tall and wider still in one year. It blooms prolifically and gives me the strangest comfort in my grief. I've voiced my gratitude and sent pictures to my friends numerous times, but I also thank God who used them to soothe my sorrows.

When I am filled with cares,
your comfort brings me joy.

PSALM 94:19

Perceived Presence

This category is for recording times you believe you particularly sensed the presence of God in your midst. You may be understandably reluctant to record anything under this heading in fear of presumptuousness or in case you are mistaken. Most of us have looked back on a time we thought God was manifesting his presence in some remarkable way only to later conclude the experience was more likely spiritual or emotional manipulation, whether deliberate or well meaning. These experiences can lead us to maturity and deeper discernment, but let's not follow them down the rabbit hole to shame, cynicism, or unbelief. God can do anything he wants. He can show up anywhere and in any way he wants. Let's guard against coming to the fraught conclusion that God never makes his presence known in perceptible ways.

The Bible records copious occasions of manifest presence. God knows our interpretations are not always accurate. He doesn't condemn us for wanting to experience him so badly that we read more into a setting than is there. No doubt we err every bit as often by missing his presence and chalking up anything noteworthy to coincidence or human doing. What you record in this box is your perception, not perfection. It's about possibilities, not just certainties. You're a human with finite understanding, longing to meet with God in a way that you can perceive on a sensory level. You're not getting a grade. Our purpose is to walk more alertly and gratefully and attentively with God.

The one who has my commands and keeps them is the one
who loves me. And the one who loves me will be loved by
my Father. I also will love him and reveal myself to him.

JOHN 14:21

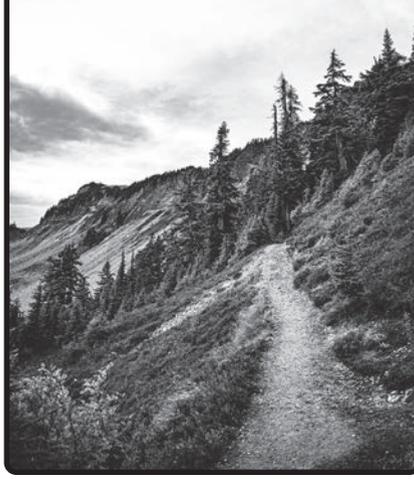
Word Alerts

We'll use this category for recording Scriptures that land on us with particular significance to our season or to a matter at hand, whether that seems to be a direction from the Holy Spirit, a confirmation of some kind, a warning, or simply a sense that we're to take note of it and trust God to bring understanding later. Jot down the scriptural reference with a short note beside it to remind you why it seemed significant. This section is set aside entirely for insights from Scripture. Words from other resources and people can be greatly encouraging, but record those in one of the other sections. Here we want to distinguish between the words from within Scripture and words outside Scripture that are often rich and insightful but not God-breathed.

The revelation of your words brings light
and gives understanding to the inexperienced.

PSALM 119:130

As we near the end of our time together in this first week, go ahead and record anything fresh on your mind that fits one of the categories, and do likewise on day 5. In weeks 2–5, you'll have the entire week to make entries. This recordkeeping will have residual blessings, as it will not only help you mark the Lord's intervention now but will also serve as a stone of remembrance in the future.



DAY 5

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*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day;
he saw it and was glad.*

JOHN 8:56

*This is my Father's world
He shines in all that's fair
In the rustling grass I hear him pass
He speaks to me everywhere.*

MALTBIE D. BABCOCK

We'll finish our week on "The Beginning of Walking" and our readings in Genesis with one of the most astounding examples of walking with God in the Old Testament. The scenes involve Abram (later Abraham), the man God called to leave the house of his father, Terah, in the Mesopotamian city of Ur and set out to a land that would be shown to him. "I will make you into a great nation," God promised Abram. "I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing . . . and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:2-3).

He'd have offspring, God said, in numbers rivaling the stars. The problem was, Abram and Sarai couldn't even come up with one measly child. They took matters into their own hands, as we humans are wont to do, and Abram conceived a child with Sarai's servant, Hagar.

The results were disastrous, of course. The women turned on each other. An innocent child was trapped in the middle of a triangle of adults acting like children. Thirteen years later, Abraham was ninety-nine when the Lord appeared to him and said,

I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.

GENESIS 17:1-2, NIV

Circle the phrase “I am God Almighty,” and underline “walk before me faithfully and be blameless.” We looked briefly at Genesis 17:1 in our opening session. Today we’ll follow the narrative a bit further to make a most memorable walk connection.

In Genesis 17, God commands Abraham and his offspring to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant and reassures the old patriarch that the promise remains despite their best human efforts to thwart it. Abraham pleads for Ishmael to be the accepted heir and, though God denies the patriarch’s request, he promises to bless Ishmael and make him into a great nation.

The events recorded in Genesis 18—the segment meant to draw our focus today—occur shortly afterward. This chapter in the book of beginnings circles us back to the concept of walking in the second scene, but let’s not miss the offerings of the first scene. Read Genesis 18:1-8.

Who “appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre”?

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According to 18:2, what did Abraham see when he looked up?

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Genesis 18:9-15 records a conversation more delicious than the meal. **First, record a significant shift from a plural reference to the inquirers in 18:9 to a singular reference in 18:10.**

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Who in her right mind wouldn't have eavesdropped on this conversation? I'd have tripped all over Abraham's ancient feet bringing in a tray of tea . . . then sugar cubes . . . then scones . . . then, "Silly me, I forgot napkins!" After all that, I'd drag in the vacuum and head straight to the floor beneath the Lord's legs. Anything to hear what he had to say. Or was it "they" who had something to say? We'll get back to that quandary in a moment. Sarah, the paragon of self-control, however, stayed hidden at the entrance to the tent. She'd have gotten away with it, too, had the visitor not said something she found so absurd.

I will certainly come back to you in about a year's time, and your wife Sarah will have a son!

GENESIS 18:10

That did it. She burst out laughing. The Lord called her on it, then made one of the most glorious, consequential statements in holy writ—one that echoed throughout. **Write the question the Lord asks in Genesis 18:14:**

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Is it, my friend? Anything at all? Do you need to be reminded of this in the worst way for any reason? Or, on the other hand, does it almost make you mad because you've been let down before and you don't want to hope, only to be disappointed once more? **Expound on your reaction, if you're willing.**

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Now, how about we get to the part where we see the walk connection? **Read Genesis 18:16-22. Succinctly record what happens in this scene.**

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**God is better than
he has to be.**

I'm sure you caught the usage of our key word *walk*. Notice that God told Abraham in Genesis 17:1 to walk before him faithfully. In this scene, however, he is not just walking *before* him. He's walking *with* him. God's call to walk before him faithfully finds ample significance in our journey of faith. To walk before

God is to journey onward, ever mindful of being in the divine presence, sought out, seen, and fully known by our Maker. But no greater privilege exists on this rocky soil than to walk *with* God.

If you've ever taken a child to a park and watched him play with other children and seen him glance in your direction from time to time to reassure himself of your nearness, you can relate to having a loved one play before you. But you'll agree that the engagement level increases if, instead of having you watching from a nearby bench, the child requests that you push him on the swing. In this case, the child is no longer in your watchful care only but actively moving in response to your push. The child has gone from playing before you to playing with you. The same is true in the act of faith walking.

Now, pick back up at Genesis 18:22. How many of the visitors are left with Abraham at this point?

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This scene in Scripture is among those meant for beholding with wonder more than exegeting with dogma. I'll tell you what I wonder, however. Three visitors showing up at Abraham and Sarah's tent amid references to "the LORD" would, at first blush, make me think they could represent the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three in one. However, in verse 22, two of them leave the scene, and we're told Abraham is left standing before "the LORD." This detail leaves me to wonder, since the one who remains with Abraham is identified as the Lord, if the two others are cherubim disguised as men. See if you think the idea has merit based on the following verses. **Look up each one, then record any pertinent information:**

Isaiah 37:16

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Exodus 25:22 (To increase your wonder, see John 20:11-12 in view of Exodus 25:22.)

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Hebrews 13:2

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Don't you love seeing those kinds of connections? **Our final reading today is Genesis 18:23-33. Briefly describe what is happening in these verses.**

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The seemingly inexhaustible capacity for sin possessed by the conscience-seared people in Sodom and Gomorrah was by no means limited to sexual exploits. **In what other ways had they heaped sin upon sin, according to Ezekiel 16:49-50?**

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Does God's inclusion of Abraham's inquiry bring you comfort, like it does me? I'm convinced of this to the marrow of my bones: We will not trust who we cannot question. We can admire, esteem, and enjoy individuals we can't question, but we won't fully trust them and we certainly won't want to entrust ourselves to them. We may have a boss at work or a leader we revere in a church or faith community, but if questions are off-limits or concerns are met with offense or withdrawn favor, trust will flee, distrust will seed, and suspicion will grow.

In one of the most fascinating dialogues in the biblical canon, the mortal Abraham's part of the conversation is built entirely on inquiry. **His question in Genesis 18:25 is worthy of recording in this space:**

The answer to the question is yes. The Bible conveys God's unwavering wisdom and righteousness from cover to cover. The fact is, however, hundreds of other questions will go unanswered over the course of our mortal lives. But the fact that we have the God-given right to ask will prove essential to our trust. To be allowed to fall to the floor upon learning of a tragedy and cry out with bitter tears, "How could you let that happen?" without fear of being struck dead by our Creator is no small right.

Questions are allowed in a walk with God. Encouraged, for the love of all things holy. Necessary for intimacy. Trying to swallow them down when they need to come up is like gulping unbelief. Your thoughts are read by God like an unrolled scroll, and not one word, doubt, or question makes you a whit less loved. "Perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

RECORDKEEPER FOR YOUR WALK

Laments

Lined writing area for Laments.

Word Alerts

Lined writing area for Word Alerts.

Divine Consolations/Comforts

Lined writing area for Divine Consolations/Comforts.

Perceived Presence

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