

OUR FATHER IN
HEAVEN
YOUR NAME BE HONORED
AS HOLY
YOUR KINGDOM COME
YOUR WILL BE DONE
ON EARTH AS IT IS
IN HEAVEN

INSURGENCY

JOINING GOD'S UPRISING THROUGH PRAYER

GIVE US TODAY OUR
DAILY BREAD
AND FORGIVE US OUR
DEBTS
AS WE ALSO HAVE
FORGIVEN OUR
DEBTORS
AND DO NOT BRING US
INTO TEMPTATION
BUT DELIVER US
FROM THE EVIL ONE



Insurgency

Joining God's Uprising Through Prayer

by

Dr. Derwin L. Gray

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Introduction

Waiting For the One

Imagine you are a devout Jew living in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. You and your people are in the Promised Land, but the pain, oppression, and heartbreak you experience don't seem so promising.

The atmosphere is filled with anticipation, anxiety, and anger. You are anticipating that the Jewish Messiah, as promised in the book of Daniel, soon will invade the Promised Land and rid it of the pagan, brutal Romans (Gentiles), who conquered Israel and ruled the Jewish people with a cruel fist of oppression and injustice. As a Jew living at that time, you are familiar with the gruesome sight of men hanging on Roman crosses, lining the Judean highways.

The Roman cross was designed to intimidate and humiliate the Jews. The cross said to them, "Step out of line and you'll be next." The Roman cross was a political statement, but it was also a theological statement. The cross was a display intended to communicate that the power of the Roman gods was greater than Israel's God.

Many of the Jews living in Israel were filled with anxiety. How long would they suffer at the hands of the Romans? How long would God's people be oppressed? How

long would the Jewish religious leaders collude with the evil Gentiles and corrupt God's temple?

Many of the Jews were angry because they believed that God had not fulfilled His covenant with Abraham, thus failing to make them a great nation as promised (Gen. 12:1-3). How could Israel be the great nation God promised, yet be oppressed and occupied by Gentiles? The apostle Peter reflects Jewish attitudes towards Gentiles in the first century when he said, "You know it's forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner (Gentile), but God has shown me that I must not call any person impure or unclean" (Acts 10:28).

Israel was under the thumb of the Roman Empire, similar to how their ancestors had been slaves in Egypt under another powerful, pagan nation. The Jews were waiting for the Messiah to deliver them and to inaugurate a New Exodus, which would rid the Promised Land of the Roman Empire.

The New Exodus

This is a glimpse into the first-century, Second-Temple Jewish world into which Jesus of Nazareth was born and where he ministered. Jesus was indeed God's promised Messiah, who came to bring about a new exodus. But this New Exodus was designed to rid the world of something more oppressive than the Roman Empire or the corrupt Jewish religious establishment.

Jesus was sent on a mission to liberate both Jews and Romans (Gentiles) from slavery to the dark power of sin, death, and evil.

This redeeming act was accomplished through His sinless life, His sacrificial, substitutionary death on the cross, and His resurrection. Through faith in Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles would become the blood-bought, reconciled new people of God of the New Exodus, journeying toward the new Promised Land called the New Heavens and New Earth. This new multiethnic people would be comprised of Jews and Gentiles; poor, middle class, rich; and females and males who would become the hands and feet of Jesus, partnering in Jesus' ministry and mission of bringing heaven to earth (1 Cor. 12:27).

This heaven-on-earth people would be a different kind of community. In the first century—as in the twenty-first century—sin had caused ethnocentrism, classism, and sexism. The sin of ethnocentrism caused many Jews to believe they were superior to Gentiles. Likewise, many Gentiles believed they were superior to Jews. The sin of classism in the Jewish and Gentile world caused the upper class to take advantage of the lower class, and it caused the lower class to loathe the upper class. The sin of sexism caused men to look down on and oppress women. During this darkness, Jesus ushers in a new, beautiful way of being human. In Christ, the sins of ethnocentrism, classism, and sexism that oppress humanity are crucified in God's multiethnic heaven-on-earth community called the Church.

The new people of God in the Messiah participate in God's insurgency by pushing back the darkness through lighting up the world with a new way to be human. This new, beautifully diverse family that is clothed in Christ (Gal. 3:26) manifests heaven on earth by living out Colossians 3:12-15:

Put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts.

Jesus Started an Insurgency

This book is about learning how to pray according to the pattern that Jesus taught His earliest Jewish disciples. When He taught them to pray what is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer, He was initiating an insurgency—a revolt or uprising. When Jesus came to earth, His kingdom of light initiated a victorious revolt against the kingdom of darkness. When Jesus taught His earliest disciples—and us—to pray the Lord's Prayer, He was arming them (and us) with God's power, presence, and purpose:

Therefore, you should pray like this:
Our Father in heaven,
your name be honored as holy.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

(Matt. 6:9-13)

The Lord's Prayer Tells the Story of Jesus

The Lord's Prayer reflects exactly what Jesus did in His life. Jesus walked from place to place, telling Jews and Gentiles that God loved the world and that it was time to honor and worship Him because His kingdom had come to earth just as it was in heaven. Jesus fed the hungry crowds in the desert; Jesus even said He was the bread of life. Jesus acted as the new Passover Lamb who forgives the world's sins and empowers us to forgive those who have sinned against us. Through God the Holy Spirit's power, Jesus defeated the three temptations of Satan in the wilderness. And King Jesus, through His sinless life, His substitutionary atoning death on the cross, and His resurrection, triumphed over sin, death, and the works of the devil. The Lord's Prayer tells the story of Jesus and invites us to join His story and walk in His victory over the dark powers that enslave us. Jesus liberated us to become liberators. Jesus has won the war we could never win.

The What, The Why, The How

What is prayer? Prayer is loving, personal communication with God, through Jesus, by the Spirit's power. Our Father deeply desires to commune with and communicate with us.

Why do we pray? We pray because prayer beckons us to come close to our Lord to hear His whisper of love and to experience His power, presence, and purpose for our lives. Prayer is God giving us a gift that leads to intimacy (“into me you see”). The Lord's Prayer allows us to see how Jesus lived and how Jesus set us free from the prison cell of sin, death, and the dark demonic powers. We pray so we can know, “If God is for us, who is against us? He did not even spare his own Son but offered him up for us all. How will he not also with him grant us everything?” (Rom. 8:31-33). We pray so we can know that through “all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:37-39).

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are asking Jesus if we can join him in his Kingdom-of-God insurgency. When we pray we are asking Jesus to live his God-glorifying life in us and

through us (Gal. 2:20). When we pray, we are asking to become conduits through which heaven is unleashed on earth.

But how do we pray? We learn to pray—or dance to the rhythm of God’s grace—in our own unique way. For example, I don’t pray long, but I do not go long without prayer. I want to live a life of prayer, with the Lord’s Prayer as my guide. Some of us journal our prayers. Some of us have set times of prayer throughout the day. Some sit silently and pray. Some of us pray loudly like we are fans at a college football game. The style in which you pray is not as important as the scripture that influences how you pray.

As we walk through the Lord’s Prayer, we will see that each sentence applies to Jesus’ life and stories that He told. For example, when we pray, “Our Father in heaven,” Christ reflects the story of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15:11-32. It is a story that Jesus told that informs our imagination about the nature and character of God the Father’s love for us. For example, praying “Our Father in heaven” is you, as God’s child, embracing His love for you that is better than life (Psa. 63:3).

Are you ready to join Jesus’ insurgency? I’m so looking forward to taking this journey with you. But more importantly, together we are journeying with Jesus as He teaches us to pray and become insurgents of grace. Let the uprising begin!

Prayer

Father,

We join with Jesus' earliest Jewish disciples as we request, "Lord, teach us to pray." Help us to get unstuck from our culture's desire to turn You into an ATM that spits out whatever we want whenever we ask. Free us from self-centeredness. Free us from superstition. Free us from attempting to use You. Free us from trying to manipulate You. Free us to experience prayer as a gift that blesses us with the privilege of knowing and worshipping You. Free us to see that using the Lord's Prayer as a guide allows us to understand Jesus' redemptive work. Father, through Christ, by the Spirit, free us to be transformed by Jesus and to resemble Him in the world. We pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God. All glory to Him. Amen.

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Based in your reflections, respond to the chapter by writing out 2-3 practical things you plan on implementing in your prayers this week.

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Rejoice in these truths! Write out how this chapter instills joy in your life. Now, thank God for this grace! Remember, nothing can steal the joy that is found in Christ.

Chapter 1

The God Who Runs

“Our Father in heaven”

Some of us had wonderful fathers who were wise, kind, and compassionate. Some of us had fathers who were present to our physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. Sadly, some of us recoil at the word “Father” because our fathers hurt us. Some of us don’t even know our fathers. Regardless of how good or bad our earthly fathers were, we will all suffer from neglect because earthly fathers are just that—men, not God. Only God can love us like God. And it’s God’s love that sustains and nourishes our hearts.

I love being a father. But I know that my greatest gift to my children is to point them to Jesus’ Father. For only in Jesus’ Father will we find—and will our children find—our needs for love, security, significance, and purpose satisfied.

Father in Heaven

When Jesus instructs his disciples to pray, “Our Father in heaven,” He’s letting us know that God the Father wants us to understand that He loves us with an everlasting, life-giving love that firmly connects us in His eternal family. When Jesus tells us to pray “our Father,” he’s saying that God wants to parent us, and we are invited to experience God’s parental grace.

When my children were born, I would sing over them. My heart was bursting with a love that to that point I didn't even know existed. Likewise, when we pray, we can experience God the Father singing and dancing over us. Meditate on this, "The LORD your God is among you, a warrior who saves. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will be quiet in his love. He will delight in you with singing" (Zeph. 3:17).

Sometimes I just stare at my children and delight in them. God the Father does the same with us. He delights in us because He delights in His son Jesus, with whom we share union life. Paul says it this way: "He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace that He lavished on us in the Beloved One" (Eph. 1:5-6). We are in the Beloved One.

United to Jesus

Does it make you uncomfortable to know that God the Father is giddy over you the way parents are over a newborn baby? The reason why we get uncomfortable is because we know the depth of our sin. We know we haven't always been good. We know that we have fractures in our morality. We know we have slandered people. We know we have hurt people. But God the Father knows the depth of our sin and loves us anyway. God only loves imperfect people because only imperfect people

exist. God the Father sent His son Jesus, the Carpenter, to fix our brokenness. Jesus not only forgives, but He shares His eternal life with us. We are born again with the eternal life of Jesus. We are eternally united to him.

The moment we say “yes” to Jesus as our savior and king, a supernatural event takes place that is just as miraculous as His resurrection. We are incorporated into Jesus, so much so that whatever God the Father thinks about Jesus, He thinks about us. Take a moment and marinate on Galatians 3:27: “For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.”

When we pray “Our Father in heaven,” we are affirming that His love for us is the same love enjoyed by Jesus from all eternity. And just as His love for Jesus never wavers, His love for you will never waver. When God the Father announced after Jesus’ baptism, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased” (Matt. 3:17), He was also saying that He is well-pleased with you, because He makes no distinction between you and Jesus. The unshakable love of God the Father in His Son, through the Spirit’s power, is the foundation on which Jesus’ insurgency against the powers of darkness is built.

What is Our Father in Heaven Like?

Jesus told a story to His original Jewish audience that painted a picture of what God the Father is like. In the story,

commonly known as the story of the Prodigal Son, we see a father who runs to embrace his sinful, shame-filled, rebellious son (Luke 15:11-32). We see a God who runs to us, not with clenched fists of retribution but with open arms of grace ready to embrace us.

Here is the basic story: A Jewish Father had two sons. One day the younger son said something that was unthinkable in the ancient Jewish world. He asked his father for his share of his father's estate. This request was like spitting in his daddy's face. It was like saying, "Just die, old man." It was a sign of disrespect and rebellion. According to Scripture, at their father's death, the older brother would get two-thirds of the estate and the younger son would get one-third of the estate (Deut. 21:17). Surprisingly, the father gave the younger son his third of the estate when he asked. The young son promptly sold his share, and to add greater insult to his father and family, he went to live like a fool among the Gentiles: "Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living" (Luke 15:13). We know he went to live among Gentiles because he began working for a pig farmer when he lost everything: "After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs" (Luke 15:14-15).

Time to Wake Up To Love

It's often in deep brokenness caused by our own sinful choices that we hear the whisper of our Father saying, "Come home, precious child. I will always love you. You are made for more than slopping around with pigs. My door is always open." The younger son, groveling with pigs, wakes up and remembers how good his father is: "How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger" (Luke 15:17). In this moment, he comes to his senses, and he changes his mind and the direction of his life. The Bible calls this "repentance."

The wayward son begins his journey back home, head hung low. As he walks home, he rehearses his repentance speech: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers" (Luke 15:18-19). Sin had taken more than his money. It had robbed him of his dignity. It had stripped his soul of his worth, so much so that he didn't think he was worthy to be his daddy's son. Sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you can afford to pay.

Love Makes You Run

Jesus goes on to say, "But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He

ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). The father was watching and waiting for his son to come home. When he saw his boy, he sprinted to him, then hugged and kissed him. Why would the father show this kind of love towards a son who was so disrespectful and rebellious? He ran to him because he felt compassion for him. Compassion means “to suffer with.” The father knew his son’s pain just as Jesus knows our pain caused by sin. The cross of Christ is our Father in heaven saying, “This is what love and compassion look like: a bloody disfigured man on a cross.”

The father runs to his son because, according to a Jewish custom, if a son disgraced his father and brought shame on the family, village elders would stop the son before he reached his father’s home. They would then smash a pot at his feet to symbolize his banishment from that community. The father was hurrying to outrun the village elders, so he could cover his son with his own body. By hugging his son, the father is saying, “If you smash the pot, it will be on me, not my son.” God the Father is saying, “All your sin, guilt, condemnation and shame is nailed to Jesus on the cross.” The cross of Christ is God the Father running towards us with love, compassion, and forgiveness. The God who runs is the God who is our Father in heaven.

Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank You for loving us when we did not love ourselves. When we pray to You, we are praying to our Father who is forever running towards us with compassion. Even during our rebellion, You constantly call us home to receive the embrace of Your grace. Thank You for running towards us. You cover our shame. You remove our guilt. You forgive our sins. You restore our relationship with You. May we fall deeper in love with You, because You first loved us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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Based in your reflections, respond to the chapter by writing out 2-3 practical things you plan on implementing in your prayers this week.

3. Rejoice:

Rejoice in these truths! Write out how this chapter instills joy in your life. Now, thank God for this grace! Remember, nothing can steal the joy that is found in Christ.

Chapter 2

The God Who Throws Parties

“Our Father in Heaven”

Our Father in heaven loves to throw parties for His children when they return home from the far country, as in the story of the Prodigal Son. After the father embraces his son, he immediately says to his servants, “Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let’s celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” So they began to celebrate” (Luke 15:22-24). When God the Father loves His children, He also restores them by celebrating their return home.

When the father gives his son the best robe, he covers his son’s dirty clothes. Through faith in Jesus, God the Father clothes His children with Christ Himself, and our sin and unrighteousness is covered over by Jesus’ righteousness. On the cross, Jesus literally **became** our sin, and we became His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). The apostle Paul says, “For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ” (Gal. 3:27). When we are in Christ, we wear the righteous robe of Jesus. Every morning, by faith, see yourself robed in the righteousness of Jesus. How you see yourself will

determine how you treat yourself and how you treat others. As you recognize that God has been gracious to you, you will grow in graciousness towards yourself and others.

When the father puts his signet ring on his son, he is restoring his son's authority as his heir. In Christ, we are seated in heavenly places with Jesus (Eph 2:6), we are royal priests (1 Pet. 2:9) and we are His ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). As His children, we have a new identity, and our authority has been restored. We are co-heirs with Christ. This status in life cannot be achieved; it is gift that can only be received by faith in Christ. In Christ Jesus, you are a child of royalty, and His resurrection life is in you. You are somebody because you are part of the Body of Christ.

In the ancient Jewish world, slaves in the Roman Empire did not wear shoes. When the father gives his son shoes, he's telling his son that he is not a hired servant (slave) but his son always. Through faith in Christ, we are children of a gracious and good father. Your Father will never throw you away, and He will never abandon or forsake you. You are forever His child.

When the father requests a fattened lamb, he's throwing a party! The father is ready to celebrate his lost son coming home! Our Father is a smiling, joyful daddy who loves when His lost kids come home! When we receive Jesus by faith, all heaven celebrates our homecoming. Our Heavenly Father loves to throw

parties. But please never forget: God's parties are expensive. The price to celebrate and throw a party for you was the slaughtering of Jesus, the Lamb of God.

The Older Brother

A character often lost in this story of grace is the older brother, who stayed home but was also far from his father's heart. The older son refused to celebrate his little brother's return home. Perhaps he was upset that his little brother may cut into his two-thirds of the inheritance; his brother's return home meant less money for him. Did he care more about money than his brother's life? Maybe he was jealous that his little brother was getting all the attention. Or maybe he wanted his brother to suffer more for his reckless, disrespectful actions?

Here's what the older brother said to the father, "Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him" (Luke 15:29-30).

In the older brother's response, we get a glimpse into his heart. First, even though he was his daddy's son, he viewed serving his father as slavery. Even though he was near his father in proximity, his heart was far away from his father's love. Second, he says he's never disobeyed his father. This reaction is

based in pride, narcissism, and self-deception. Third, he calls his brother “this son of yours.” There is no love in his voice or compassion in his heart. Fourth, instead of learning from his father’s example of lavish love, he reminds his father of how his brother hurt the father and squandered his inheritance on immoral things. Those who do not understand grace or have not experienced grace can be graceless. Fifth, instead of seeing how compassionate and loving his father is, he only sees a party being thrown for someone that does not deserve to be celebrated.

But then again, who among us, including the older brother, deserves grace? Ultimately, the older brother is a picture of the Pharisees. Jesus said, “But don’t do what they do, because they don’t practice what they teach. They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves aren’t willing to lift a finger to move them.” The Pharisees are those who “shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces” (Matt. 23:3-4,13).

The older brother is also a picture of a person who is so spiritually blind he or she does not see, nor experience the grace of God in his or her life. Listen to the father speak words of love to the oldest son, “[You were] always with me, and everything I have is yours. ‘But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found’” (Luke 15:31-32). What an irony! The little brother is spiritually alive, is no longer lost, and is being celebrated, while

the older brother is the one who is spiritually dead, is lost, and is standing outside missing the celebration.

Prayer

Father,

Not only do You run to us with compassion, You celebrate our return home by throwing an epic party! You give us new robes of righteousness, reconciling and restoring us to You. You give us new shoes letting us know we will always be Your beloved child. You give us a new ring signifying that we are co-heirs with grace, guaranteeing our eternal inheritance. And You kill a calf for us calling to our remembrance that Jesus, the Lamb of God, was “slaughtered and You purchased people for God by Your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9- 10).

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Chapter 3

The God Who Breaks Our Chains

*“Your name be honored as holy, Your kingdom come.
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*

Our Father in heaven is good. Goodness is not merely something He does; goodness is who He is (Psa 119:68). Not only is our Father good, He is also love (1 John 4:8). Because God is a good and loving Father, He wants to set us free from sin. Just as God used Moses to deliver the children of Israel from Pharaoh in Egypt, He now uses a new and greater Moses named Jesus of Nazareth to rescue humanity from the new and greater pharaoh—sin, death, and evil.

The Church is a freed people journeying on the New Exodus towards the New Heavens and New Earth. God’s gracious and great act of liberation on humanity’s behalf is called redemption. The blood of a sacrificial lamb is no longer over the doorpost of our homes as in the original exodus event, but the blood of the Lamb is now over us. The unblemished, sacrificial Lamb’s blood breaks the power of sin, kills death, and triumphs over evil. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). The apostle Paul reiterates what Jesus said when he wrote,

“You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him” (Col. 2:12-15).

Our Father breaks the chains of slavery so His people—the Church—can be free. But what does being free mean? Does being free mean we get to do what we want to do?

Grace Isn't New

Our Father has always been gracious. Grace is not a new concept that was introduced with the arrival of Jesus on earth. When God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt, it was by grace. Grace is God himself stepping into our shoes and taking us where we could never take ourselves. Grace is God Himself doing for us what we could never do for ourselves. We don't earn grace; it's God's gift to us. We can't achieve it. We can only receive it.

Listen to what God tells Israel after He rescues them from slavery in Egypt, “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself” (Ex. 19:4). Notice the language that our Father

uses to convey His gracious redemptive actions on behalf of His people,

“You have seen what I did.”

“I carried you on eagles’ wings.”

“I brought you to myself.”

This is grace! Israel’s rescue from slavery in Egypt was an act of God’s grace, just as God the Father rescues His people from slavery to sin, death, and evil through the redemptive achievements of His Eternal Son (Eph. 2:8-9). After God reminds Israel of His chain-breaking grace, He establishes them as His holy people or family. To be holy means that Israel existed for Him alone; Israel’s allegiance was to God alone. Israel was set apart to God as His means of rescuing the world (Isa. 49:6). It’s as if God was Israel’s husband (Jer. 3:14). God says, “‘Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.’ These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites” (Ex. 19:5-6).

When God sets Israel free, He also gives His people a new identity that forms their vocation in the world. As God’s people, Israel was a kingdom of priests who were summoned by His grace to partner with Him to bring His kingdom to earth. In the New Testament, the apostle Peter says to the multiethnic

(Jew/Gentile) churches in the Greco-Roman world, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). God sets us free from slavery so that we, as His royal priests, can reflect His love, wisdom, and justice in the world.

Honor God’s Name As Holy

When we pray, “Your name be honored as holy,” we are affirming our allegiance to God because He has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of His marvelous light (Col. 1:13). To honor or worship God is to have no other gods before Him. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, everyone who trusts in Jesus has access to our Father in heaven (Eph. 2:17-18). When Jesus’ original first-century, Second-Temple Jewish audience heard Him say, “Your name be honored as holy,” the words of Exodus 20:1-17 would most likely have been on their minds.

In Exodus 20, God lays out a rhythm of living life for Israel that would honor God by displaying His kingdom on earth and bring about human flourishing. Follow the logic of God’s grace: “Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery” (Ex. 20:1-2). God reminds His people of His grace in bringing them out of slavery. Freed people honor God’s name as

holy by reflecting His glory through their lives. God lays out what a Kingdom-of-God kind of life looks like:

Do not have other gods besides me.

Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers' iniquity, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.

Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God, because the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses his name.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: You are to labor six days and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the resident alien who is within your city gates. For the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.

Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Do not murder.

Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal.

Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.

Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

(Ex. 20:3-17)

In response to God, the first rhythm of grace is to worship God alone. We are to have eyes for Him and for Him alone. The human heart is created for worship. If we don't worship the uncreated Creator, we will worship created things. Whatever we worship we become like. God created us in His image, and it brings Him great delight to see His children worship Him. The apostle Paul builds on this by saying, "Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2).

God is jealous for us, but not like human jealousy. God is jealous for us in the sense that He wants us to flourish. He doesn't want us to fail to achieve the potential He has created in us, so He jealously offers to protect us from all that would keep us from flourishing. Our flourishing is rooted in our worship of God. Idolatry—worshiping something other than God—diminishes our humanity; thus, sin erodes our capacity to

flourish (Ex. 20:1-11). Worship is simply finding love, identity, and significance and purpose in someone or something.

Human flourishing happens as we:

- treat our parents with dignity with respect (Ex. 20:12).
- seek to show compassion, forgiveness, and kindness towards others, rather than being vengeful and violent or taking of a life unlawfully (Ex. 20:13).
- honor our spouses through sexual faithfulness, emotional faithfulness, and spiritual companionship (Ex. 20:14; Eph. 5:25-33).
- refuse to live sexually immoral lives (Ex. 20:14; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).
- have integrity in dealing with others, rather than steal from them (Ex. 20:15).
- are honest about people, rather than gossiping about and slandering them (Ex. 20:16).
- do not covet and desire what other people have (Ex. 20:17).

The Lord freed Israel from slavery in Egypt, and He welcomes them to live a life of human flourishing and freedom. Human flourishing and freedom bring heaven to earth.

Kingdom Come to Earth

Jesus reaffirmed God's rhythm of living that produces human flourishing when He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind," and "love your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27). Jesus, like the master artist He is, paints a masterpiece of grace and shares a story of how people love their neighbors as themselves in His parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:28-37. Human flourishing and the Kingdom of God come to earth when we love people the way the Good Samaritan loved the man left for dead on the side of the road.

In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus intentionally crosses and smashes through the ugly barrier of racism. At that time, Jews and Samaritans had a several hundred-year-old feud that was based on different worship practices and ethnicity. Samaritans were considered "half-breeds" because they were mixed blooded Jews and Gentiles. Also, the Jews focused their worship at Mount Moriah while the Samaritans focused their worship at Mount Gerizim. In this story, it is the despised Samaritan who promotes human flourishing by doing what the priest and Levite, or the Jewish holy men, did not do. The Jewish holy men avoided the injured man, but the Samaritan had compassion on the man who had been robbed and beaten (Luke 10:33). His compassion moved him to bandage the man's wounds and to pay for him to stay at an inn and recover (Luke

10:33-35). He gave his heart, his time, and his money. This generosity is the way of human flourishing. This behavior is being merciful and neighborly. Ultimately, this is worship and the way of Christ.

In Exodus 20, the first four commands are about loving God, and the next six commands are about loving your neighbor as yourself. This is what God's kingdom coming to earth looks like. God's kingdom looks like love. He invites us to let Him live His Kingdom-of-God kind of life through us as we abide in Him (John 15:5-8). Meditate on this: "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

God's kingdom has always been initiated, sustained, and advanced by grace. The God who broke the chains that enslaved us is the God who lives in us so we can live like a freed people. With Jesus' resurrection, the new age to come has broken into the old, and as people who are indwelt by the resurrected Christ, we give glimpses of the future. Until that future day, let's live like people whose chains have been broken.

Prayer

Father,

It was by grace that You set us free from slavery. It is by grace that we can now live as free, flourishing people who are in love with You. May the remembrance of rescue always call us to worship You and You alone, and may the overflow of that love embody Your kingdom of love. Help us learn to love You completely (Upward), ourselves correctly (Inward), and our neighbors compassionately (Outward). In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Reflect, Respond, Rejoice

1. Reflect:

Take a few moments to reflect and write out three aspects of the chapter that:

- A. Remind you of God's faithfulness
- B. Fuel your faith in Jesus
- C. Connect to your today and tomorrow

2. Respond:

Based in your reflections, respond to the chapter by writing out 2-3 practical things you plan on implementing in your prayers this week.

3. Rejoice:

Rejoice in these truths! Write out how this chapter instills joy in your life. Now, thank God for this grace! Remember, nothing can steal the joy that is found in Christ.

Chapter 4

The God Who Feeds Us

“Give us this day our daily bread”

We are a lot like the children of Israel. Our minds are often slow to remember how God has set us free by the blood of Jesus. Perhaps our circumstances become unfavorable or we experience failure; maybe we journey through a season of suffering. But just like Israel, we forget the story into which we have been *born again*. In Exodus 16, God’s people—the same ones who had just witnessed God Himself defeat Pharaoh through a miraculous redemptive act of grace—began to grumble and complain against Moses and Aaron:

The entire Israelite community departed from Elim and came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left the land of Egypt. The entire Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger!” (Ex. 16:1-3)

Think about it for a moment. Sadly, God’s people, who had tasted His redeeming grace, basically said that it would have been better to continue as slaves in Egypt, where they had meat and all the bread they wanted. God’s people forgot why they

existed. Israel existed to worship God and to extend His glory to all the earth in fulfillment of what God commanded Adam to do (Gen. 1:28; Ex. 4:23). They were willing to give up their birthright for bread and meat. They preferred to eat bread and meat as slaves than to fulfill their calling. Israel sounds like Esau, who gave up his birthright for bread and a bowl of soup (Gen. 25:29-34).

When Egypt calls us, it's tempting to walk back into slavery. The same God who freed us is the same God who will feed us. Just as God fed Israel with bread from heaven, He will feed you, too. Never forget, he set you free from slavery to become a spiritual abolitionist. This is the essence of being on mission with Jesus. We are a freed people looking to set others free. Marinate on these words from Exodus and the Gospel of John:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. This way I will test them to see whether or not they will follow my instructions." (Ex. 16:4)

"I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." (John. 6:35, 38)

Jesus is the Bread From Heaven

We have been born again into a story: *His-story*. God's story is one in which He desires for His image-bearers to bring

His kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. God is generous with His love, and He wants to share His love with His creation. He's a good, loving father who frees us by and through the blood of His Son Jesus (Rev. 1:5-6). Our Father frees us *from* something *for* something: to extend His rule and reign on the earth. Freed people are a Kingdom-of-God people.

But even for us as redeemed, freed people, the seductive, alluring whisper of sin is forever present, calling us back to slavery in Egypt. As a result, we are compelled at times, just like Israel, to grumble and complain to God. But God our Father is good to us. He feeds us, nourishes us, and satisfies us (John 6:35). This doesn't mean Jesus is our "Sugar Daddy"; it means He will keep His promises to feed us as we journey to the New Heavens and New Earth. God knows what our physical needs are, so we do not have to grovel like pagans who think they can manipulate their gods by appeasing them (Matt. 6:25-33). When we seek God's kingdom first, our needs—not our greeds—are met. Our daily bread is not about physical food; it's about Jesus being our spiritual nourishment.

In John 6:41-42, the Jews knew exactly what Jesus was saying about Himself. There was no confusion. It was like history was repeating itself: the Jews complained once again in God's presence. Jesus tells them to stop complaining (John 6:43). Then He says:

Truly I tell you, anyone who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that anyone may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:47-51)

God Feeds Us Eternal Life

Like the Jews of Jesus’ time, we too want physical bread to eat because we think it will satisfy us. But Jesus says, “Only I, the True Bread from heaven, can satisfy you. Egypt will call to you and make promises that it can never deliver. The only thing Egypt has to offer is bondage, death, and unmet destiny.” Jesus offers freedom, eternal life, and mission with God: “This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the manna your ancestors ate—and they died. The one who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:57-58).

Prayer

Father

You freed us to feed us. In Christ, the One who won our freedom with His death and resurrection, We have the strength to set others free from bondage, death, and the dark powers. Lord Jesus, the One who is the Bread of Life, who came down from heaven, when Egypt calls us to return to slavery, may we remember your promise, “Truly I tell you, anyone who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life” (John 6:47-48). Amen.

Reflect, Respond, Rejoice

1. Reflect:

Take a few moments to reflect and write out three aspects of the chapter that:

- A. Remind you of God's faithfulness
- B. Fuel your faith in Jesus
- C. Connect to your today and tomorrow

2. Respond:

Based in your reflections, respond to the chapter by writing out 2-3 practical things you plan on implementing in your prayers this week.

3. Rejoice:

Rejoice in these truths! Write out how this chapter instills joy in your life. Now, thank God for this grace! Remember, nothing can steal the joy that is found in Christ.

Chapter 5

The God Who Bleeds

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

The First Exodus and the New Exodus

When Jesus instructs His disciples to pray, “Forgive us our debts (sins), as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt. 6:12), the Messiah is placing His disciples in the heart of God’s story of redeeming love—the Passover and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Both of these holy days for Israel are about sacrificial blood. In the First Exodus, which is celebrated in the Passover, and on the Day of Atonement, it was about the blood of slaughtered animals. However, in the New Exodus, God Himself in Christ is slaughtered. We have a God who bleeds for us. John the Apostle, Jesus’ closest friend on earth, while imprisoned on the island of Patmos, wrote, “And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered, and you purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:8-10).

In the First Exodus, the one true God defeated the false gods of Egypt through a series of plagues. The final plague took the life of all the firstborn sons in Egypt whose household did

not have the blood of a sacrificed lamb over their door. Despite every single god of Egypt being soundly defeated by the living and true Creator God, Pharaoh dug his heels in and increasingly stiffened his neck in rebellion. He refused to emancipate God's people (Ex. 12:12).

God had a sacred vocation for Israel that they could not fulfill by being slaves any longer. God's people were to be a light to lead those in darkness. They were to be a missionary people. Slavery prevented them from fulfilling this sacred vocation. So, God called Moses to set them free so they could be a kingdom of priests, administering the wisdom and love of God to all the earth (Ex. 3:1-15; 19:5-6).

Marinate on this: "The blood on the houses where you are staying will be a distinguishing mark for you; when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No plague will be among you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt" (Ex. 12:13). In the First Exodus, the blood over the door was the distinguishing mark on God's people. In the New Exodus, the blood of Jesus is our distinguishing mark of grace. The blood of Jesus won our freedom. We are freed by the blood. Our chains are broken. We are free to be a kingdom of priests to our God and king, the Lord Jesus (Rev. 5:8-10; 1 Pet. 2:9). This is the Church's sacred vocation.

Similarly, while the blood in the first Passover was about freedom from Pharaoh, the sacrifice on Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement—was about freedom from sin. God’s people were still in need of forgiveness from personal sins. They needed cleansing and purification. They needed more blood. God instructed His people to celebrate the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) one time per year. On this day, the high priest would enter a special place in the Temple called the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant, including the Ten Commandments, was kept. He would sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed animal over the top of the ark called the mercy seat, where the tablets with the commandments would be lying. The *shekinah* glory, or presence, of God was above the mercy seat.

When God would look down on this scene, He would see the blood of the slaughtered animal smeared over the Ten Commandments, not the people breaking the commandments. Their sins would be atoned for (Lev. 16:15-20). Moses writes, “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have appointed it to you to make atonement on the altar for your lives, since it is the lifeblood that makes atonement” (Lev. 17:11).

Next, the high priest would “lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the Israelites’ iniquities and rebellious acts—all their sins. He is to put them on the goat’s head and send it away into the wilderness by the man appointed for the task. The goat will carry all their iniquities into

a desolate land, and the man will release it there” (Lev. 16:20-22). This is the “scapegoat.” On the Day of Atonement, God’s people’s sins were not only forgiven, but because of the scapegoat, their sins were forgotten. In the Psalms it is written, “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his faithful love toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him” (Psa. 103:11-13). In the First Exodus, the Passover blood defeated Pharaoh and freed God’s people; and on the Day of Atonement, the sacrificed animal’s blood forgives God’s people with such great effect that their sins were utterly forgotten. God’s people were free and forgiven. A free and forgiven people are tattooed by blood. The blood of Jesus is the Church’s distinguishing mark of grace.

The Beautiful Blood

In the New Exodus, the shed blood of Jesus on the cross became our eternal Passover and eternal Day of Atonement. The God who bleeds won our freedom from sin, death, and darkness through His sacrifice in our place. Jesus became our place of grace (Heb. 4:14-16; Col. 2:13-15). The blood of Jesus makes us alive. We are born again in and through Jesus’ resurrection life. His life is literally our life. We are eternally forgiven. Our sin is nailed to the cross. Our guilt is buried in the tomb of Jesus. The record of our sins has been erased by the beautiful blood of

Jesus. Our sin is nailed to the cross, and Jesus nails forgiveness to us. Because of the blood, Jesus disarms sin, defeats death, and dethrones the evil one. Jesus wins our freedom and forgiveness.

Reconciliation

The God who bleeds reconciles us to Himself through the cross of Jesus. To be reconciled means that we were once God's enemies, but that He has made us friends through Christ's blood. Paul says it this way:

But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. How much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by His blood, will we be saved through Him from wrath. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation. (Rom. 5:8-11)

The blood of Jesus means that we now participate in the friendship Jesus has with His Father (Heb. 9:14). This also means that we now have inherited the ministry of reconciliation, and we are commanded to love both those in the household of God and those outside of God's family who are ethnically and socially different than us.

The Church in the New Heavens and New Earth will be a multiethnic family (Rev. 5:9-12), and the Church on earth is to

be a preview of the eternal Church. The God who bleeds kills our hostility towards each other. Sacred scripture says,

“But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death” (Eph. 2:13-17).

Transformation Church is an intentionally multiethnic Church because of the God who bleeds. God brings us near His heart so we can love both Him and each other. Love is a defining attribute of Jesus’ Kingdom-of-God people (John 13:34).

Righteousness

The God who bleeds is also a righteous God. It is only through the blood of the Righteous One that we can have any hope of ever becoming righteous enough to be in a covenantal relationship with God. Once again, God makes us righteous by covering us with His blood: “How much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath” (Rom. 5:9). Not only are we eternally forgiven, but we are eternally as righteous as Jesus because of His beautiful blood: “He made the one who did not know sin to

be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Because of His blood, we are fully pleasing to God because we are in Christ. Because of the blood, we are saved from final judgment, and we are declared in the future to be righteous because of the past redemptive actions of Jesus on the cross. Because of the beautiful blood, ethnocentrism, classism, and sexism (the treating of women as less than men) have been crucified by the cross of Christ. We are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus: “For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). As God’s people, all of us are clothed equally in the blood of Jesus. There is no favoritism in God, and neither should there be in His family (Rom. 2:10-11).

Forgiven People Forgive People

The blood of Jesus marks us out as a redeemed, forgiven people. We are a people who have experienced the eternal Passover and eternal Day of Atonement in Christ Jesus. Because of the God who bleeds, we are given the power to forgive those who have sinned against us—the hurt no longer has power to haunt us. Scripture says, “And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ” (Eph. 4:32). If only we’d take time to marinate on the

goodness of God toward us in Christ we'd realize that holding on to unforgiveness is spiritual cancer. Think about it: As God's enemies, He still bled for us. He bled to free us, to forgive and forget our sins, to make us His forever friends, to make us as righteous as Jesus. Considering this grace, we don't give in to darkness; instead we give what freed people give: forgiveness.

Forgiveness for us is not forgetting. Forgiveness is releasing the person who hurt us, so they can't continue to rent space in our mind for free and re-injure us. Forgiveness is choosing to extend the mercy that God in Christ extends to us. Forgiveness is not becoming a doormat to be trampled upon by dirty shoes; forgiveness is the way of the cross. Sometimes we must bleed to turn enemies into friends. Forgiveness is not about being taken advantage of, but forgiveness is about living and loving in such a way that our lives become the showcase where others can see Jesus. Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9). We are forgiven to forgive. Forgiveness is an act of worship. Granting forgiveness is what people who have been dipped in the blood do.

Prayer

Father,

May we never forget that we live in the grace of Your eternal Passover and eternal Day of Atonement. May it forever be in our hearts and minds that You are the God who bleeds, and Your beautiful blood becomes the eternal spring of love, forgiveness, righteousness, and mercy. As a freed and forgiven people, may we extend the same mercy and grace You extend to us. May those who have harmed us be forgiven by us just as You forgave us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Reflect, Respond, Rejoice

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Take a few moments to reflect and write out three aspects of the chapter that:

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Rejoice in these truths! Write out how this chapter instills joy in your life. Now, thank God for this grace! Remember, nothing can steal the joy that is found in Christ.

Chapter 6

The God Who Delivers Us

*“And do not bring us into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”*

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” I suspect those are the words of the dark demonic powers. The devil and his minions have used the same schemes since the Garden of Eden. The schemes of the Accuser are so effective that they worked on Adam and Eve and also on Israel in the wilderness. They have worked on you and me, too. Satan was so confident in his diabolical schemes that he even thought they would work on Jesus. But what Satan did not know was that Jesus was the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:22) and where Adam failed and sinned, Jesus did not. Where Israel failed and sinned in the wilderness after the Lord freed them from slavery, Jesus did not. And where you and I failed and sinned, Jesus did not.

Satan did not know that God’s grace is so epic that Jesus became the new and faithful Adam, reversing the curse. Satan did not know that God was so merciful that Jesus became the new and better Israel, reversing the curse. Satan did not know that God so loved the world that Jesus stood in our place and became our grace. He is our representative to reverse the curse (Rom. 5:11-21). What’s true of our representative is true of us, His church. Jesus, the true and faithful One, defeated the

temptations of the devil on our behalf. We just need to learn how to walk in His resounding victory. Before I share what the three specific schemes of the devil are that have enslaved humanity, it is vital that we see the big picture.

Theology Matters

Jesus completes the story of Israel. He is the embodiment of what Israel was meant to be. Before Jesus announces that He is Messiah in His hometown synagogue, He perfectly recapitulates the story of Israel. For example, Hosea writes, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos. 11:1). Matthew applied those words to Jesus, writing, “He stayed there until Herod’s death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: Out of Egypt I called my Son” (Matt. 2:15).

Consider these connections between Israel and Jesus:

Israel

- described as God’s son who was created for worship (Ex. 4:22-23)
- crossed the Red Sea and headed into the wilderness for 40 years (Ex. 15:22; Num. 13:32, Jos. 5:6)
- tempted three times and failed three times in the wilderness (Deut 6:13,16; 8:3)
- called to be a light to the nations (Isa. 49:6)
- called God’s servant (Isa. 49:3; 53)
- had 12 tribes

Jesus

- described as God’s son who was created for worship (John 4:23; Matt. 4:10)
- was baptized in the Jordan River and was led into the wilderness by God the Holy Spirit for 40 days (Matt. 3:13-4:2)
- tempted the same three ways Israel was tempted, yet did not sin (Matt. 4:1-11).
- proclaimed himself to be the “light of the world” (John 8:12)
- called God’s servant who fulfilled the messianic prophecies of Isaiah 49 and 53
- had 12 disciples

Now the Church—that is, you and I—is a continuation of this epic story. We are a new multiethnic people of God—one body, one people, one Lord, recipients of one baptism, on one mission, part of one story.

Performance, Popularity, and Possessions

Satan has been using the same schemes since the Garden of Eden to get us to doubt that God is good. He tries to destroy us by giving us three false identities: to find our worth in our performance, in our popularity, or in our possessions. The first false identity Satan tempts us with is, “What I do determines who I am.” This myth is called performance-based living. The Scripture says, “Then the tempter approached him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread’”

(Matt. 4:3). The tempter was asking Jesus to find His identity in what He did or in His performance instead of in being the beloved Son of His Father. In the face of this temptation, Jesus reaffirms that His identity is found in His Father's love, not in His performance: "He answered, 'It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matt. 4:4). Jesus muted the tempter by remembering that He is His Father's beloved. By faith, we must do likewise.

The Lord has spoken over us through His son's life, death, and resurrection. God our Father says that our identity is found in being His beloved sons and daughters. No feat we ever accomplish can eclipse what God in Christ has accomplished for us. We are the beloved. This is our true self: "and [you] have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator (Col. 3:10).

The second temptation Satan uses is, "What others think of me defines me." This is called the myth of popularity. "Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone'" (Matt. 4:5-6). The evil one tempted Jesus with popularity and fame through using the supernatural to prove His worth. In the face of this temptation, Jesus said, "It is also written: Do not test the Lord

your God” (Matt. 4:7). Jesus knew that His significance was found in being the Father’s beloved. Jesus knew that being known by His father was sufficient. We must remember that if God the Father knowing our name is not enough to satisfy us, then everyone knowing our name will never suffice.

The third temptation that Jesus has defeated for us is, “What I have determines who I am.” This myth is the thinking that our possessions make us successful. Our culture determines a person’s value by what they own. Our success is measured by our possessions. Satan knows that possessions and power intoxicate our souls, leading to delusional power trips of destruction.

Satan tempted Jesus with the glory and magnificence of all the power on earth: “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. And he said to him, ‘I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me’” (Matt. 4:8-9). Jesus is so secure in being the beloved of His Father that He says, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him” (Matt. 4:10).

The allure of power and possessions could not dethrone His Father as king of His heart. Being the beloved of His Father was enough for Jesus. For Jesus, it was not power and possessions that determined who He was. Jesus knew that his all-

powerful Father possessing Him was enough. This faith must be true of us too: “What does it benefit a man to gain the whole world yet lose his life?” (Mark 8:36).

Eventually the devil left Jesus alone because his same old schemes had been defeated. The scripture says, “Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him” (Matt. 4:11). Because we are in Jesus, He’s won our battle.

Jesus Won Because We Could Not

Adam, Eve, and Israel listened to the seductive voice of the Accuser, which leads to disobedience. Jesus listened to the voice of love that leads to obedience: “And a voice from heaven said: ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased’” (Matt. 3:17). Because of our allegiance to Jesus, we are in Him and He is in us; therefore, our Father echoes the same words of love to us: You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased. It’s the pleasure of God that acts as a force field of grace that protects us from falling prey to the temptations of the evil one. Jesus has already won our freedom. As the Father’s beloved, let’s live as free people.

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for sending Jesus into the wilderness to do battle with the devil. Jesus has shown the futility of the three false identities that Satan tries to deceive us into believing. Because Jesus won, we too can win by remembering that we are Your beloved. No matter what we do, what people think of us, or what we possess, it's Your love that builds a fortress around our hearts that the lies of the enemy can never penetrate. We are Your beloved. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Reflect, Respond, Rejoice

1. Reflect:

Take a few moments to reflect and write out three aspects of the chapter that:

- A. Remind you of God's faithfulness
- B. Fuel your faith in Jesus
- C. Connect to your today and tomorrow

2. Respond:

Based in your reflections, respond to the chapter by writing out 2-3 practical things you plan on implementing in your prayers this week.

3. Rejoice:

Rejoice in these truths! Write out how this chapter instills joy in your life. Now, thank God for this grace! Remember, nothing can steal the joy that is found in Christ.

Chapter 7

The God Who Is Our Armor

*“And do not bring us into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”*

Jesus won our victory with His blood. Just as Jesus defeated Satan in the battlefield called the wilderness, he ensures our victory by giving us armor to wear as we live in the battlefield of life. The “armor of God” provides strength, protects from the defeated powers of darkness, and propels us to stand firm as we are attacked. The apostle Paul instructs the multiethnic churches of Ephesus (modern Turkey) about the armor of God:

Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. In every situation take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all

perseverance and intercession for all the saints.
(Eph. 6:10-18)

God's Armor

A prayerless life is a powerless life. God is our strength, and prayer enables us to tap into His indwelling strength that resides within us. Our suit of armor is empowered by the Lord Himself (Eph. 6:10). Putting on the full armor of God is an act of faith. As we enter the battle, we ask the Spirit of God to dress us in our battle armor. Because we are in Him, we are already more than conquerors (Rom. 8:31-39). The armor of God protects us from the same old schemes of the defeated deceiver that we learned about in the last chapter (Matt. 4:1-11; Eph. 6:11): we are not what we do (performance-based living), we are not what others think of us (popularity), and we are not what we have (possessions).

Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we are the beloved of God. Our identity is found in Christ alone. Through faith in him, Jesus' past, present, and future is ours. Because we are in Jesus and are receivers of lavish grace, what is true of Him is true of us (Eph. 1:3-6). This act of grace is unalterable because nothing can snatch us out of Jesus' nail-pierced hands of mercy (John. 10:30; Rom. 8:31-39). God the Father did this for "the praise of His glorious grace that He lavished on us in the Beloved One" (Eph. 1:7). Because Jesus is the Beloved One, we share in His belovedness.

The apostle Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and with the burden of pastoring churches, reminds us that our battle is not against people. Our true battle is with the forces of darkness that use, abuse, and manipulate people to do the devil's bidding (Eph. 6:12). Therefore, we must love our enemies. It's the mercy of God that breaks the chains of darkness (Rom. 2:4). We should treat people like they are hostages of the evil one. It is imperative that we learn how to negotiate their freedom through the grace and kindness of God.

Belt of Truth

The first piece of armor that God issues to us is the *belt of truth* (Eph. 6:14). It's impossible to go into battle with our pants falling down. The belt of truth is designed to keep us standing firm. It is the gospel. The more we marinate on and comprehend the work of Jesus, the more He works in us. As I've tried to explain through this short book, the gospel is this: King Jesus has created a redeemed, regenerated, righteous, reconciled, Spirit-indwelt, multiethnic family who is now His body on earth, equipped to continue His ministry and mission through His life, death, and resurrection. Ask the Holy Spirit to make you into a gospel man or woman. Be so into the gospel that the truth of it bears weight on everything you do and say.

Breastplate of Righteousness

God is so gracious that He shares His righteousness with us in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). Therefore, as God's beloved, we are not only eternally forgiven, but we are eternally pleasing to God the Father because we share the righteousness of Jesus. As a result, we are enabled to live righteous lives through the righteousness of Christ. This is called sanctification. This process is not static, but dynamic. Knowing that we are as righteous as Christ protects our hearts and minds from the guilt, shame, and accusation of the dark powers. The *breastplate of righteousness* reminds us that there is no condemnation for us who are in Christ. We are free, forgiven, and righteous (Rom. 8:2); therefore, we can embody the righteousness of God in an unrighteous world.

Sandals of Peace

The sandals of a Roman soldier were like football cleats. The studs on the bottom of the shoes enabled the soldier to stand firm while in battle. God gives us *sandals of peace* that keep us rooted and strong in the face of the enemy's assault. The peace of God rests upon us because the blood of Jesus brought us near to God (Eph. 2:13-14). We are forever beloved of the Father, reconciled to Him through His son (Rom. 5:10-11).

Therefore, circumstances no longer determine our peace, but the Prince of Peace does. Our peace is not situational; our

peace is a person. His name is Jesus. We now become farmers who sow seeds of peace wherever we go. *The sandals of peace* allow us to walk with Jesus as missionaries. Just as He reconciled us to His father, now He has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). We become peacemakers in a hostile world (Matt. 5:8), attempting to live peaceably with others (Rom. 12:18).

Shield of Faith

Our faith in Jesus and his Kingdom-of-God redemptive work is our shield. Dark powers will shoot arrows of deception and discouragement, but God has given us faith as a shield to protect us. The scene of the crime is our mind, but our faith in Jesus guards our heart and mind (Phil 4:6-9). We are to set our mind on the One who can sustain us in battle. We set our mind on Him who is our vast strength.

Helmet of Salvation

We have the “mind of Christ” declares the apostle Paul (Phil. 2:5). This is our *helmet of salvation*. The more we marinate on the unsearchable riches of Christ, the more we love Jesus; and, the more we love Jesus, the more we become like Jesus. As the beloved of God, our ears are attuned to our Shepherd-Father, not to the thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. We learn to hear God’s voice by spending time with Him in prayer, marinating in sacred scripture, worshipping

together with others through a weekend service or TC House Group, serving, giving, and sharing Christ with those who have yet to call him Lord. We learn to hear His voice in all of life because He is always speaking to us.

Sword of the Spirit

When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he pulled out the *sword of the spirit*, which is the Word of God. Three times, when the deceiver tried to sway him, Jesus said, “It is written,” and used scripture to defend against Satan (Matt. 4:1-11). The Word of God is an offensive weapon that we thrust towards the enemy. Just like a swordsman, the more we practice using our sword, the more skillful we become. The more time we spend in the Word of God, the more we too will learn to say, “It is written,” and thus we can resist the devil.

Please remember that all of scripture is about Jesus. Jesus himself said, “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 so that you may have life” (John 5:39-40). By age twelve a Pharisee could recite the Old Testament. How sad is it to know scripture but not know personally whom scripture points to? The Old Testament is the womb that carried Christ so that we can see Him in the New Testament. The Bible is about Jesus and how He won our freedom from sin, death, and evil so that we can be the new

people of God on mission with Him, displaying His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Prayer

Father,

The battle has been won. Jesus, the Christ, You're the Beloved One who defeated the dark powers. We are more than a conqueror in You who love us. Daily, empower us by faith to put on the full armor of God so we can stand firm as part of a freed, redeemed people. May we remember the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the sandals of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit. It is Your vast strength that we live in and live from. May we, by grace, live as Your freed people of the New Exodus, as You gather Your lost children so we can join Your family. Amen.

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Let's Pray

Prayer is not about getting. Prayer is about becoming the new people of God who are journeying to the New Heavens and New Earth. The Lord's Prayer deepens our understanding of God's story, Jesus' redemptive actions, and our role as His hands and His feet. Prayer transforms us into a community of Jesus Christ lookalikes. I hope as we pray together as one, we collectively will reflect the Beloved One, the Lord Jesus Christ, the leader of the insurgency.

In His Grace,

Dr. Derwin L. Gray